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**THE EXPERIENCE OF MENTAL STATES OF ADOLESCENTS  
ORPHANS**

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***Abstract***

The article describes the issue of development of mental states of orphaned children being brought up in institutionalized institutions. The purpose of the article is to study the specifics of the course of mental states in adolescents living in family deprivation conditions. The relevance of this problem is caused by the fact that the experience of mental states plays significant role in the process of adaptation and socialization of children, in development of communication and interaction skills in society, in personal development and the formation of an emotional-volitional sphere. In this regard, this article is aimed at revealing the content of subjective experience of such mental states as joy and sadness. The leading method in the study of this problem is the method of content analysis of subjects' self-reports. The study investigated adolescents raised in orphanages. The study was conducted in two stages (description of mental states in the past, and then in the future). The article reveals the content of experience of mental states of joy and sadness, which includes the manifestations of the mental (expression, emotional processes, behavioral manifestations, value-semantic sphere), as well as external factors (events, situations, actions of significant adults). It is shown that the experience is characterized by poverty and a small coverage of used mental states characteristics and by the stinginess of the content.

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**Keywords:** Subjective experience, experience, social deprivation, mental states, orphans.



## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Family deprivation**

The lack of warm, caring relationship between the child and the adult in the early years of life, the lack of attachment in the subsequent development can lead to indiscriminate behavior (Buttner, 1991).

The attachment theory (an early experience of warm, sensitive relationships with adults) determines that positive emotional support from parents contributes to the child's social and mental abilities in the future. The importance of early social and emotional experience in the development and long-term mental health of a child was confirmed by a number of studies by classic researchers (Brushlinsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1984; Sroufe, Carlson, Levy, & Egeland, 1999). The institutionalized care, i.e. being in a state of family deprivation, destroys the attachment while the emotional life of a child acquires its own nuances – certain negative features appear in the interpersonal relations and emotional development of children (Chuprova, 2007). Family deprivation in childhood acts as a determinant of person's self-attitude in late adolescence (Rubchenko, 2007).

Long-term deprivation leads to a deviation in mental and physical development, thus forming mental states that have negative nature: emotional discomfort, irritation, aggression, frustration, anxiety, etc. Negative mental states which result from deprivation, in their turn, lead to abnormal behavior, to the use of mechanisms of psychological defense, to the formation of learned helplessness, to the deterioration of the quality of life; they contribute to passivity, apathy, pessimism, the desire to live in a virtual world (Prokhorov, 2011; Naydenova, 2012; Artishcheva, 2017a; Kryzhanovskaya, 1997; Kulagina, 1987).

### **1.2. Mental states**

Mental state is always experienced by a person. The memory of each person contains information about mental states, which is why a person can identify the state at any time, and can also identify the state of another person. Mental states determine the intensity of the processes, the manifestation of personal characteristics, the response to the situation; they regulate behavior and change their quality during self-regulation.

At each age, people experience the same mental states differently. 6-10 year old children are characterized by a more vivid experience of positive states of a high level of activity (vivacity, joy, etc.), while negative states of low level of mental activity (sadness, sorrow) are more deeply experienced during adolescence at the age of 11-13 years, when all experiences are exacerbated due to puberty, in contrast to more mature ages (Prokhorov, 2011; Artishcheva, 2009, 2017b). These specifics determine the behavioral reactions of children and adolescents, which determine the level of socialization and adaptation.

#### **1.3. Subjective experience of mental states**

Past reactions, events, situations, states are stored in person's memory, making up the content of the subjective experience. The experience of mental states allows us to identify our states and the states of others (Artishcheva, 2017b). The knowledge about mental states, about emotions, recognition and identification of states allow children to build their social interaction with others and create personal contacts. The subjective experience is the link between mental phenomena (states, consciousness, prediction), it is the repository of information necessary for constructing goals, setting tasks and finding

ways to implement and solve them, a repository that determines the process and result of the actions of an individual through thought processes (analysis, synthesis, comparison, generalization). Emotional reaction to present event is conditioned by previous experience.

The subjective experience of mental states has a certain structure, which is determined by different conditions: age, gender, social conditions, personal and specific characteristics, etc. The orphans, who do not have the experience of living in the family, acquire qualitative features in emotional development. Such children have negative mental states: emotional discomfort, irritation, aggression, frustration, anxiety, etc., which have stable nature and are being fixed in the structures of experience.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The specifics of the subjective experience of mental states of orphaned children have not been studied, but it plays a significant role in the process of adaptation and socialization of children, it is important for the development of communication and interaction skills in society, for personal development and the formation of an emotional-volitional sphere – all of it determines the problem of research.

## **3. Research Questions**

The study of the specifics of the subjective experience of mental states of different levels of mental activity in orphans, the identification of substantive components of experience.

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

The study of the specifics of the subjective experience of mental states of different levels of mental activity in orphans, the identification of substantive components of experience.

## **5. Research Methods**

### **5.1. Methods and techniques of the research**

Studying the features of the experience of mental states involved the method of self-report. Teenagers described mental states of joy (positive state of high level of mental activity) and sadness (negative state of low level of mental activity) experienced in the past, and also anticipated their experiences in the future. The expert group conducted a content analysis of self-reports.

### **5.2. The experimental base of the research**

The study involved teenagers brought up in an orphanage, aged 14-16 (16 individuals).

### **5.3. Stages of the research**

The study was conducted in two stages. At the first stage, the subjects described mental states they experienced in the past. At the second stage, they described the anticipation of the experiences of mental

states in the future. At each stage, mental states were revealed in the context of events that determine these states..

## 6. Findings

### 6.1. Substantive components of mental state subjective experience

The analysis of the research data obtained allowed to reveal the substantive components of subjective experience of joy and sadness mental states (Table 1).

**Table 01.** Empirical indicators of the characteristics of subjective experience of mental states

N <sup>o</sup>	Characteristics	Empirical indicators of the characteristics
1	Emotions / mood / feelings	"It was a pity", "sadness attacked me", "when I miss", "anger", "I'm depressed", "fun", "joy", "happiness", "pleasant feeling", etc.
2	Expression	"Tears", "then I cried", "very sad", "I cry", "laughter", etc.
3	Events / Situations / Circumstances	"They hit a cat", "when something bad happens," "my grandmother died", "when my parents leave me," "I became an aunt," "my nephew was born," "I'll cure my sister," "to let her take me," "I will become an economist ", "Holidays ", "new year ", "when he is near ", etc.
4	Activity / Behavior	"I'm lying on the bed," "to kill it," "I want to be alone," "I want to sleep," "to walk," "to play," "I'll give part of the money ...", "I study," "I love to embroider," "I jumped" etc.
5	Expectations / Evaluation	"you hope", "it turns out not to be done", "everything will be fine", etc.
6	Feelings and behavior of others / Significant others	"my grandmother died," "when my parents leave me," "they refuse to do something," "they hurt me," "my grandmother wrote a statement to the orphanage," "my nephew was born," "live with granny," "to let her take me away," "the beloved and the closest person," "friends who support me," "so that my mother and family took me away," etc.
7	Values	"to give a part of the money to sick children", "... to the orphanages", "there will be a house", "... sports", "... work", "many friends", "to have my own baby," "family", etc.

These characteristics in the descriptions of the subjects refer to various manifestations of the mental (expression, emotional processes, behavioral manifestations, value-semantic sphere), as well as to external factors (events, situations, actions of significant adults). That is, the experience of mental states of orphans contains not only internal indicators of human states, but also events that cause this state.

### 6.2. The frequency of characteristics of mental states in subjective experience

Next, we determined the percentage of use of the identified factors (Table 2). For this purpose, we calculated the percentage of the number of subjects applying each indicator in the descriptions of their states – separately in the past and in the future (all 16 respondents were taken as 100%).

**Table 02.** Percentage of total number of subjects using each characteristic in self-reports

Characteristics of experience of mental states	Joy (past)	Joy (future)	Sadness (past)
Emotions / mood / feelings	50	13	43
Expression	6	---	21
Events / situations / circumstances	75	69	50
Activity / Behavior	25	25	29
Expectations / Evaluation	25	13	7
Feelings and behavior of others / significant others	44	38	50
Values	6	38	---

Note: the numbers in the table are given in percentages

In describing the states experienced in the past, regardless of the level of mental activity and state modality, most subjects use the factors "Emotions / mood / feelings", "Events / situations / circumstances", "Feelings and behavior of others / significant others". The states in the future are described through the description of the upcoming (expected) events. We should also note that in the description of the joy in the future, no subject has indicated expressive manifestations, and in the descriptions of sadness in the past there is no indication of value.

The analysis of the respondents' self-reports on past and future experiences revealed that in one self-report text one characteristic had several empirical indicators, i.e. was used several times in the form of various words or phrases that carry a single content load. As a result, it helped to determine the frequency of use of the components (characteristics) of the experience in subjects' self-reports (Table 3).

**Table 03.** Frequency of characteristics that make up the structure of the experience of mental states of joy, sadness, in a time continuum

Characteristics of experience of mental states	Joy (past)	Joy (future)	Sadness (past)
Emotions / mood / feelings	0,75	0,28	0,43
Expression	0,12	---	0,18
Events / situations / circumstances	1,31	1,14	0,62
Activity / Behavior	0,31	0,62	0,25
Expectations / Evaluation	0,43	0,14	0,12
Feelings and behavior of others / significant others	0,56	0,85	0,68
Values	0,06	0,92	---

It's important to note that children described the sadness experienced in the past, but they refused to project it into the future. In general, self-reports of adolescents living in family deprivation conditions are characterized by poorness and low coverage of used characteristics of mental states, and by scarcity of descriptions.

The experience of mental state of joy contains characteristics of the sensually emotional sphere ("it was a pity", "a pleasant feeling", etc.), and events that determine joy. The characteristic of "value" is extremely rarely seen in experience.

The descriptions of the state of joy in the future reflect the expected events and circumstances that will cause joy, as well as values (friends, home, family, future child, etc.) and significant people, their feelings and behavior. Children living in family deprivation conditions partially project past experience

into their future experiences, in particular, sensory-emotional, evaluative and eventual aspects. At the same time, the description of behavioral manifestations, values, feelings and behavior of significant others increases. Subjects, anticipating joy in the future, place great emphasis on family values, whereas in the past this characteristic has a low impact in the structure of experience. Expressive manifestations of conditions are completely absent. Apparently, this aspect of the experience of the mental state is less predictable.

The experience of the mental state of sadness is more filled with events and situations, as well as feelings of significant people that have caused sad experiences. Self-reports do not use the characteristic of "value". Orphaned children describe sadness through causes that are found in external conditions.

### 6.3. Event-situational aspect of the subjective experience of mental states

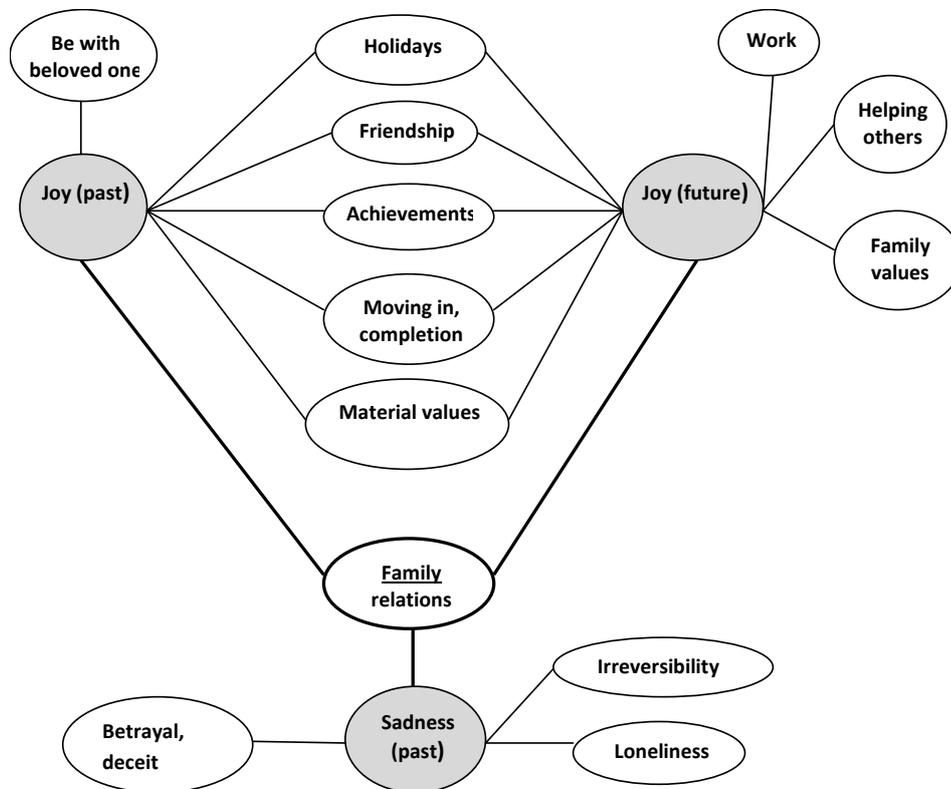
Let us review the specifics of events and situations that act as determinants of mental states of joy, sadness. The terms of situations and events varied from childhood to the recent past (a couple of days ago), the future was also not limited in time (Table 4).

**Table 04.** Events and situations that determine mental states of joy, sadness in time continuum

Joy (past)	Joy (future)	Sadness (past)
Born nephew	I'll cure my little sister	They hit a cat
New Year	To live with my grandmother	A girlfriend died
Be close to your beloved one	I will become an economist	Something bad happened
Trips to another city	To give part of the money to sick children, orphanages, homes for the elderly	Grandmother died
Moments with Dad	To have your own house	Parents leave
Birthday	Job	To abandon something
Moving in	Sport	Hit me with the words
Trip to the grandmother	To graduate	Deceived hopes
Many gifts	To become a barista	Grandfather died
Meeting with friends	To have your own baby	Nobody is here
First place	Mom will take me away	Granny wrote a statement to the orphanage
Transfer to another football team	They will buy a car	
	My own family	
	Become a coach	
	New Year	
	Cooking with Grandma	
	Meeting with friends	
	I'll finish school	
	Become a chef	
	Best team	
	Start working	

Adolescents who are brought up in family deprivation conditions (in orphanages) most often designate the causes of mental states of joy and sadness through family relationships, family values, as well as cardinal changes in life. For further analysis, these life situations and events were divided into semantic

groups. Thus, the event-situational aspect of the subjective experience of mental states of orphans was revealed (Fig.1)



**Figure 01.** Event-situational aspect of the subjective experience of mental states

The biggest number of variations of situations and events refers to the state of joy (the future). The figure shows that the situation related to family ties (born nephew, moments with my father, to live with my grandmother, my grandfather died, etc.), compose the structure of subjective experience of mental states of joy, sadness in each time interval (past, future). We should note that the event-situational aspect of experiencing the state of joy is mostly projected into the future. In the future, young people who were brought up in orphanages, see the cause of joy in situations associated with holidays, friendship, achievements, relocation and changes in life, as well as material values which determined this state in the past. In the same time, there are situations that are not transferred from past experience, but are predicted by the subjects. This concerns the help to others ("I will give a part of money to patients and to retirement homes ..."), work ("to become cook", "to become a barista," etc.), family values ("to have my own family", "my home", "my baby", etc.).

The subjective experience of such mental state as sadness arises from circumstances and events, which have nothing to do with the structure of the experience of joy. These are the situations of betrayal ("parents left", "grandmother wrote a statement in the orphanage and did not tell it to me", etc.), irreversibility ("the cat died", "grandfather died", etc.), loneliness ("I have nobody"). While analyzing the data, we can note that the feeling of sadness is caused by events that can be classified as traumatic, which determine even deeper experiences (grief, despair, hopelessness, etc.). That is, adolescents who find

themselves in a situation of family deprivation have a more difficult experience of having the state of sadness associated with psychological trauma.

## 7. Conclusion

1. The experience of mental states of joy, sadness of adolescents living in family deprivation conditions is characterized by poverty and a small coverage of used mental states characteristics, and by the stinginess of the content.

2. The experience of mental states of adolescents living in family deprivation conditions contains not only internal indicators of human states (emotions, feelings, expectations, values, etc.), but also events that cause this state.

3. The experience of the state of joy is partially projected into the future with the focus on behavioral aspect (oneself and significant others) and family values. The experience of the mental state of sadness is revealed mainly through events and feelings and behavior of significant others.

4. The event-situational aspect of the experience of the mental state of joy is projected more into the future. The study revealed situations that are not transferred from past experience, but are predicted by subjects.

5. The adolescents who experience the situation of family deprivation reveal the event-situational aspect of the experience of the mental state of sadness through situations that can be classified as traumatic.

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