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## Foster care in Russia: problems and prospects

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**Abstract.** This paper discusses the process of development and functioning of foster families, one of the priority interventions for children without parental care in Russia. The author analyzes the main barriers to the development of foster care in Russia on the basis of national surveys; identifies obstacles to the development of foster care in the country and the necessity of its active implementation in domestic social practices. The study found that foster care has been successful in areas where accepted legal basis allowed the recruiting, selecting prospective foster parents, and where foster care maintenance are carried out by social services. In addition, in order to reduce risk factors such as the secondary abandonment of foster children it is necessarily to increase assistance from the state, social guardianship bodies and professionals.

**Keywords:** orphanhood, children without parental care; foster family; social policy

### Introduction

There are an increasing number of orphans and children without parental care worldwide according to national monitoring as well as individual scientific studies. In Russia, the problem of orphanhood is serious and urgent given the negative natural growth rate, high mortality, limited number of children in Russian families, and the upward trend in orphans and children left without parental care placed in institutions for full government support. However, solving the problem is difficult due to many obstacles and in particular with the absence of an established mechanism of the orphans' de-institutionalization recommended by the state as well as ineffective prevention services for needed families. Typically children left without parental care are removed from dysfunctional families as a result of alcoholism, drug abuse, immoral and anti-social behavior of their biological parents, which ultimately lead to the formation of certain negative personality traits shift of values, a distorted view about socially acceptable, moral and ethical behavior.

According to official data there are about four million homeless children today in Russia. Approximately 760,000 are orphans and 95% of them are social orphans. The Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation reports that there are 100,000 children without parental care annually and of those 70% are transferred to family-based care and 30% to residential children's homes [1].

The experience of many countries shows that traditional measures such as the creation of children's homes, boarding schools, orphans, shelters do not bring the expected result. Research has largely demonstrated that institutional care is harmful for all individuals but in particular for young children [2, p.

6]. Children growing up in institutions are deprived of the possibility to develop a continuous attachment to a primary caretaker [3, p. 9-17], due to the rigidity and impersonality typical of this form of care, the insufficient children-staff ratio, the limited availability of qualified professionals and the inherent nature of shift work [4, p. 5-6]. Under-stimulation can cause long-lasting deficiencies in terms of motor skills and physical growth, while absence of interaction and other unresponsive care-giving practices result in poor cognitive performance and lower IQ scores, particularly when institutionalization takes place at an early age [5]. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child considers that institutions are particular settings "where children with disabilities are more vulnerable to mental, physical, sexual and other forms of abuse as well as neglect and negligent treatment" [6]. That is why now the foster family tends to be the most viable form of family care for orphans and children left without parental care in Russia.

### Methods and materials

The methodological approach consists of the analysis of Russian foster care system. Academic sources include national legislation, descriptive statistics and official policy documents, empirical data which are used to illustrate and support certain arguments in the paper. In order to clear understand the current forming of foster care system in Russia, the authors pay attention to main barriers of the deinstitutionalization process in modern Russian society. A selection of both academic and policy literature is used as a particularly valuable source. The advantage of the theoretical and policy-oriented approach of the paper provides insight on the problem

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of foster care from perspective of academic and professional circles simultaneously.

### **The main part**

Currently, many regions of Russia adopted laws establishing foster care. The most widely foster families spread in Samara, Perm, Kemerovo, Belgorod regions. Foster family as a form of family care has a number of advantages compared with the institutional care, based on the government support. Among them: the economy, openness to monitoring and expert assistance, cooperation, favorable conditions for the development and socialization of foster children. Despite the fact that the foster family officially proclaimed as the preferred form of childcare for orphans and children left without parental care, in practice its development is constrained by a number of socio-economic, political and cultural factors.

First, for more than ninety years Russia had a system of boarding-based care for orphans and children left without parental care, in which produced a steady, well-oiled machine of its funding through various ministries and departments. The emergence of foster families, and created the need for a new mechanism of financing, which entails additional difficulties and challenges. On the one hand, according to the Federal Law "On the guardianship and custody", the economic support of foster children is delegated to the subjects of the Russian Federation [7]. On the other hand, the funding of foster children and those living in residential care, carried out from the regional budget, while funding for children in foster care from the local budget. In this context, these costs unduly burden on the municipal budget, already deficient, and prevent the active development of foster care.

However, the efficiency of foster care over institutional system is obvious, because the cost of maintaining a child in institutions is about 120,000 rubles a year, while the foster parents are paid an average of 72,000 rubles [8]. Actual costs per child per year in institutions are about 90,000 rubles or 248 rubles a day. Thus, the development of foster care is a provision of the constitutional right of any child to live and grow up in a family environment.

According to the research conducted in the UK in 2008, the average cost for maintaining a child for a week in a residential placement is 4.5 times that of an independent living arrangement, 8 times that of the cost for foster care, 9.5 times that of a placement with family and friends, and more than 12.5 times that of a placement with own parents. 8 children could be placed in foster care for every child placed in a residential unit [9, p.13].

The Department of Health in England funds research every year into the unit costs of all aspects of

social care (capital and revenue costs). The publication indicates that the average cost of residential care is £2,689 per child per week, as compared with foster care which is £676 [10, pp. 106-108].

A report from the Estonian National Audit Office showed that the state pays between 10,000 and 16,000 kroons per month for each child raised in a substitute home, compared to 3000 kroons per month for each child in foster care [11].

Another equally important factor hindering the implementation of foster family is the unwillingness of the authorities to take active steps in this direction, as it is associated with corruption, non-transparency of the allocation of financial resources for orphans and children without parental care; making psychiatric diagnosis – mental retardation, schizophrenia, autism – to children living in residential care that makes impossible for them to be fostered or adopted. In order to effectively implement foster care in the country it is necessarily to introduce additional measures to recruit and train foster parents, to monitor their activities, and to provide different kinds of social support to families and children.

In addition, in accordance with Article 149 of the Family Code "Rights of children without parental care and those living in institutions, hospitals, specialized social centers", orphans and children left without parental care are guaranteed maintenance and training on the basis of full government support [12].

These costs for the implementation of measures to provide additional safeguards for the social protection of orphans and children without parental care, in accordance with Article 5 of the Federal Law № 159-FZ, made at the expense of the federal regional budgets, and through state funds and other sources are not prohibited by law [13].

However, a number of researchers from different countries who have studied the life of young people ageing out of care claim that care leavers are more likely than other young people to experience psychological problems and difficulties with communication; drop school and less likely to graduate high school or enter university; lose social and economic security after leaving care; have difficulties finding and maintaining housing; are more frequently unemployed or dependent on the social system than their peers who were not in care [14,15].

In addition to that, the specifics of Russian orphans' behavior includes such factors as renting their own apartment and live together with friends and acquaintances in one flat; in order to preserve benefits for full government support orphans enter another educational institution without a strong motivation to get an education or professional skills; instead of getting a job they go to the unemployment office.

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where they receive unemployment benefits, the amount of which exceeds the possible earnings. These facts point to the low efficiency of the measures taken by the state, with enormous financial investments that neither contribute to human capital, nor solve the social, economic, moral, and ethical issues in the future, requiring new social and financial resources for the development and implementation of treatment programs, additional medical care, career guidance, job placement, etc.

Second, the socio-economic level of regions' development is vary inside the country, which can be ranked from affluent to subsidized with different social structure, the level and quality of life, demographic situation, migration, and administration. All that influence on the quality of providing social services for families and children as well as others categories of beneficiaries.

Thirdly, according to the Federal Law № 124 "On basic guarantees of children's rights in the Russian Federation" passed in July 24, 1998, there is a division of competences between the Russian Federation and its subjects [16]. Thus, qualitative and quantitative composition of social services can vary significantly from region to region, depending on where a child left without parental care lives.

Fourth, additional responsibilities placing on the staff guardianship related to the processes of recruitment, licensing, education, monitoring and providing social support to foster families are the obstacles to promotion of family-based care for orphans and children without parental care.

Fifth, the lack of systematic and adequate preventive social work with families of the "risk"; the weakness of its detection in the early stage; poor rank of social sources, providing for families in need, the lack of monitoring and supervision, lead to removal of children from the biological parents, the deprivation of parental rights, and the growth of child abandonment.

In addition to that, it should be noted that the other social causes such as the poverty, inadequate living conditions, unemployment (the inability to get a job at the place of residence); stereotypes of consciousness (orphans are burdened with a heavy inheritance, incurable diseases); weak promotion of family-based care, low legal literacy of people play the main roles in increasing number of children without parental care.

Despite widely publicized in the press about mistreatment of Russian children adopted by foreign citizens, the majority of respondents (48%) did not consider stopping the adoption, arguing that foreign adoptive parents had more comfortable social and material conditions for caring for children. Opponents of the ban said that foreigners usually adopt children with disabilities who will never be adopted by Russian

citizens. Some respondents (6%) believed that the allegations of foreign adopters of cruelty and negligence are groundless, and 4% considered the media as a tool of exaggerating the scale of the problem. The rest 42% found it difficult to explain the reasons of abuse of adopted children. According to 57% of people participating in the survey, the frequency of child abuse and neglect was equal in families of Russian and foreign adopters. In addition, in previous authors' studies it was found, that the most common types of child abuse are psychological, physical, sexual violence, and neglect. In a survey, the significant differences between parents and children's answer have been found regarding types, reasons, frequency of punishment. More than 50% of parents feel the need to punish their own children in order to control their behavior, using psychological or physical violence [17].

Based on the results of a sociological survey, it can be concluded that the majority of Russian citizens poorly motivated to adopt children. Only a minimal percentage of compatriots already adopted a child, and a small portion is in thought about it. The low percentage of adoptions of children from children's homes due to such factors as stigma of adoptive family, attributing them selfish or criminal motives, branding them as "abnormal", "handicapped", "unable to give birth to their own child", the secrecy of adoption (which for many years abolished in western countries and the U.S.); weak promotion of family-based care for orphans; low living standards of families with children; the fear of a bad heredity of foster children; the negative "advertising" of cases of child abuse in adoptive families in the media that have a negative impact on the image of foster care.

## Conclusion

Slow speed of development of foster care in Russia is caused by a number of reasons, among others: low capacity of the child protection system for foster care provision; contradictory legislative framework; complicated application procedures of opening up a new foster family; insufficient public awareness; poor capacity of local service providers. Providing foster care is a complex process that requires additional efforts from all participants and includes training, licensing and counseling of foster parents; preparation of the child for placement; monitoring and providing social services to foster family after placement of a child; developing training programs for social services staff.

The development of foster care in Russia depends on the public authorities in the implementation of social policy; family values; social and economic potential of the region; the availability

of favorable conditions for its existence; the infrastructure for children, family leisure and recreation; specialized services for all categories of family and children as well as for foster families. In this regard, active public awareness on the establishment of foster families, the formation of a positive image in the media, overcoming social and economic barriers, the creation of specialized departments to work with adoptive and foster families, providing them with expert assistance from the social services, will reduce the number of orphans in institutions, improve the efficient implementation of the program of deinstitutionalization orphans in Russia.

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