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Current State of Orphanhood Issue in Russia: Regional Context

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Abstract: The study presents the analysis of the theoretical and practical experience of Belgorod, Saratov regions and Trans-Baikal region to address the issue of child abandonment on the basis of statistical data for the 5 year period (2011-2015). This study was prepared in the framework of the research "Life trajectories of children and their biological parents, restored their parental rights".

Key words: Family, orphans, children without parental care, termination of parental rights, social services for families and children

INTRODUCTION

Orphanage is one of the most urgent problems of modern society. According to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, the number of children left without parental care in 2015 were 481,921, which is 2.3% less than in 2014 (2014-493,071). About 83% of them were in various forms of family foster care. Despite the fact that over the past 5 year, the number of newly diagnosed children left without parental care is gradually reduced the problem of child abandonment remains alarming in Russian society.

Literature review: In domestic and foreign researcher's works, on the one hand, it is noted that adysfunctional family has a negative impact on physical and psychological health of children (Gilbert *et al*., 2015); provokes the formation of their deviant behavior (Finkelhor *et al*., 2009; Sharma and Sacco, 2015); leads to abuse and neglect (Lane *et al*., 2016).

On the other hand, the removal of children from biological families, placing them in out-of-home care, restriction or termination of their parental rights are measures to protect the best interests of children from their parents or caregivers who are unable totake care of the children adequately. In order to reduce the number of children in need, it is necessarily to develop the social policy mechanisms, including an effective system of living arrangement, maintenance, rehabilitation and social adaptation of children left without parental care in every region.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to study the causes of social orphanhood and evaluate the social policy responses to them in different parts of Russian Federation in 2016 the survey "life trajectories of children and their biological parents, restored their parental rights" has been conductedin Belgorod, Saratov regions and the Trans-Baikal region. The survey was made with the financial support of Russian Foundation for Humanities, project No. 16-03-00057. The main method of research is semi-formalized expert interviews (N = 25) which included the representatives of guardianship authorities, social services, commissions on juvenile affairs, judges, attorneys, who are involved in solving problems of children left without parental care in these regions. The experts were met the following criteria:

- The experience of work with families at risk is not <5 years
- Higher professional education (master's degree
- The presence of the highest category (or its equivalent)
- Age at least 30 year

The average experience of working with families and children experts have was 13.7 year.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to trace the solution of the orphanhood problem in Russia, we were taken three regions in different

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part of Russia: Belgorod region (Central Federal District), Saratov region (Volga Federal District) and the Trans-Baikal region (Siberian Federal District). The choice of the regions was based on the following criteria:

- Region's geographical position (Belgorod region borders with Ukraine, Saratov region has a border with the Republic of Kazakhstan, Trans-Baikal region borders with Mongolia)
- Socio-economic developmental level
- The distance from the capital

In this regard, it is important to examine regional specific issues and identify the most effective social policies to reduce the number of needed children in the country.

According to official statistics there were 8848 orphans and children left without parental care in Saratov region in 2015 (2014-9118 children), 7 820 (88.4%) from them lived in foster families.

In Trans-Baikal region during the same period, there were 7692 children (or 2.9% of the total child region's population 264950 children), 5368 from them were in foster families; 1 916 lived in different institutions; 408 children studied in primary or secondary vocational education settings.

In Belgorod region in 2014 there were 2191 children left without parental care, it is 10% less compared to the previous year. There is a positive tendency in reducing the number of newly identified orphans and children left without parental care: in 2014-296 children; in 2013-329. Unfortunately, almost one third of them (119) were removed from biological families due to termination of parental rights. Most of children were placed in foster families 330 children (or 85.5%); 22 children were adopted; 219 were placed under guardianship; 47 were put into institutional care; 42 were returned to biological parents. In Saratov region 22 and 38 children returned to their birth parents in 2014 and 2015, respectively. It is clear that the number of children, returning to their birth parents is extremely small and this is the most vulnerable issue of the whole Russian social welfare system.

Over the past 5 year in Russia the de-institutionalization process can be observed which includes gradually reforming and re-organizations of children's homes, boarding-schools and other establishments for orphans and children left without parental care, as well as increasing the number of different family forms of care for these categories of children. Since, 2012, most children's homes have been reorganized in training and support centers for foster families, services for care leavers, etc (Table 1).

Statistics allows concluding the preservation of positive dynamics of families wanting to take children left without parental care in Saratov and Belgorod regions, while in Trans-Baikal region there is almost a three-fold reduction in their numbers (Table 2).

Table 1: Number of residential institutions in 2011-2015

		Years				
Variables	Regions	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Children's homes	Saratov	13	12	9	8	7
Children's homes	Belgorod	7	7	7	7	7
Children's homes	Trans-Baikal	29	29	28	27	25

Table 2: The number of candidates for foster parents in 2011-2015

Regions	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Saratov	92.8	117.5	112.9	114.0	125.3
Belgorod	67.5	105.9	167.1	153.8	159.6
Trans-Baikal	114.3	85.0	303.2	117.0	134.2

Table 3: The number of children placed in family-based forms of care in 2013-2015

Regions	2013	2014	2015
Saratov region			
Family forms of them	1.126	1.058	1.105
Guardianship/custody	965	918	992
Adoption	161	140	113
Foster family	166	221	282
Belgorod region			
Family forms of them	312	288	289
Guardianship/custody	272	266	279
Adoption	40	22	10
Foster family	64	47	-
Trans-Baikal region			
Family forms of them	991	996	1.111
Guardianship/custody	929	897	935
Adoption	62	75	126
Foster family	149	189	259

There is substantial evidence that there is an increase number of foster families for the last several years (Table 3). The most numerous and effective forms of child care are custody/guardianship/kinship care and foster care, unfortunately the percentage of adopted children remains extremely low compared to other figures. One of the barriers is poverty that prevents people from adoption because there is no special state social support for adoptive parents and adopted children as, for example, for foster parents and foster children. Positive dynamics of adoptions in Belgorod region and the Trans-Baikal region is due to the social support of adoptive parents. Regional authorities provide monthly payment for the maintenance of the adopted child (8000 rub.) until the child reach the age of 18 or in a case he/she is studying in secondary or higher professional education establishments full-time up to 23 year.

An analysis of official statistics (the Ombudsman for Children of the President of the Russian Federation, the Investigative Committee of Russia, the Federal Service of State Statistics), shows a marked increase in the number of crimes committed against minors, both by biological and foster parents, in particular crimes against their sexual integrity.

In Saratov region in 2014 were recorded 1058 crimes against minors. Victims of sexual crimes became 197 children. In the same period in Trans-Baikal region 2206 crimes were made that 16.7% higher than last year (2014-1 890). In addition, 663 crimes against minors were committed by their parents, which was 20.5 % higher than previous year. In Belgorod region there were 145 criminal cases involving offenses committed against minors.

Analysis of misconduct against minors shows the growth of violent crimes that harm the physical and mental health of children, the prevalence of crimes of a sexual nature in all regions studied.

Failure to comply with the obligation to maintain, education of children, abuse of parental rights, child abuse and neglect are grounds for termination of parental rights as a legal action to protect the best interests of children from criminal encroachments of parents or caretakers (Table 4).

Since 2012, there has been an increase of number of parents whose rights were limited instead of decreasing number of parents whose rights were terminated (Table 5).

According to the Russian Federal Law, termination of parental rights can be initiated by the guardianship authorities in case of evasion of parental responsibilities for the upbringing and maintenance of children; abuse of parental rights; maltreatment; alcoholism or drug addiction; committing an intentional crime against the family member (other child, spouse, partner, etc).

The representatives of the expert community from employees of educational institutions and social welfare system note the weakening of repressive measures against parents who are unable to take care for their children properly. According to the question: "How often parents are deprived of parental rights", experts give the following answers: "Now it is less. Now everything is aimed at children to return to the family but rather, the state policy on family strengthening" (Vice-Director of residential care, Saratov region). "Already, in exceptional cases, only if is already evident that the parents are unable to educate their children, only to deprive go" (Legal counsel of the Center of social assistance to families and children, Belgorod region).

Interviewed experts give a positive assessment of the social welfare system, preventing of child abandonment, focusing on the following indicators:

- Well coordination and interdepartmental interaction of all its subjects
- The joint decision making process, regarding the family's rehabilitation
- The increasing the number of children living in families

Table 4: Dynamics of children whose parents are deprived of parental rights in 2011-2015

Regions	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Saratov	821	755	622	560	498
Belgorod	174	173	239	188	176
Trans-Baikal	845	830	742	609	591

Table 5: Dynamics of children whose parents have limited of parental rights in 2011-2015

Regions	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Saratov	139	113	103	65	59
Belgorod	58	64	49	46	43
Trans-Baikal	124	134	162	158	154

- The expanding and specifying the legal framework for the protection of rights and interests of children left without parental care
- The reducing the number of parents whose parental rights were terminated or restricted
- Strengthening the role of the preventive work with dysfunctional families

"I access the activity of the system as positive. I can't deliver "five", because we still have parents, whoseparental rights were terminated but now it is much better than it was several years ago" (Head of the Department of social rehabilitation shelter, Trans-Baikal territory). "I think the system works well and its results can be seen. It includes educational institutions, children's hospitals, the police; all subjects make a great contribution to the whole process. Evaluating our work, I can say that it is serious, it is not carried out for a show and it is real" (Director of the Center for Social Assistance to Families and Children, Belgorod Region). "Yes, of course. Now there are much more children are placed into foster care. We are having only one child who will be placed in thechildren's home out of 82 children soon. Earlier we had up to 40" (Employee of the Department of custody and guardianship, Saratov region)

However, it should be noted the absence of social services, which specialize in helping parents whose parental rights were terminated. Despite the fact that the staff of social welfare servicesexpressed willingness to assist this category of parents, however, it is clear that in order to start the process of the family reunification the parent must personally apply to the guardianship authorities which is an essential obstacle for the majority of parents whose parental rights were terminated.

According to the expert's opinion, the lack of parent's motivation, frustrating, the influence of criminalantisocial environment, the lack of support of the extended family appear to be the significant obstacles to restore their parental rights.

"Of course, services are provided but very often such parents do not make any efforts to achieve any results. We can help but we can't do everything for them" (Head of the Department of social rehabilitation shelter for children in need, Trans-Baikal region). "As a rule, this is a great job, so not every parent does it. This (reunification) should really make difference in the family" (Social teacher, Belgorod region). "Parents whose parental rights were terminated must prove that they are capable to take care of their children themselves. Because, living in the family is much better that in any, even in the best children's home" (Head of the Social rehabilitation center, Saratov region)

In this regard, it seems appropriate to create the specialized social services, dealing with parents whose parental rights were terminated or restricted which include:

- The complex training programs for parents, who are eager to reunite with their biological children in order to create a positive attitude towards the children, to form family values and motivation to change the previous lifestyle
- Improving information, psycho-pedagogical and legal parent's competence
- The preparation of the child to be reunited with the biological parents; forming the desire to return to them
- Providing mediation assistance between different specialists, services, parents and children
- Organizing support, supervision, mentoring of foster parents (guardians)
- Developingsocial programs for families and children on the regional and municipal levels
- Preventing child abandonment by addressing the wide range of services for this category of families

CONCLUSION

Thus, it can be concluded that the main cause of child abandonment is a dysfunction of modern Russian family which manifests in low socio-economic support; the annual increase of crimes against minors, especially sexual crimes; in child abuse and neglect; inadequate parenthood that can lead to restriction or termination of parental rights, initiated by social authorities. As a result, it leads to the family's disintegration, the growth of children left without parental care, the appearance of children, enabled to fully adapt to the society.

This study contributes to child welfare research, focusing on the issue of helping parents whose parental rights have been terminated in order to reunite with their biological children.

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