

SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL PORTRAIT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES GETTING ASSISTANCE AT RAILWAY STATIONS

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The relevance of the study is conditioned by the fact that Moscow railway stations have a considerable number of families with children that got into socially dangerous situation on their way home and need help. Efficiency of this help depends on the understanding of socio-psychological characteristics of such families. Therefore, this article is aimed at the disclosure of social and psychological portrait of those receiving urgent social assistance of a new type. In contrast to the state approach the family gets help as a single unit without temporary separation of family members. The guiding principle of the study is the integrated approach allowing to consider a family as a united interdependent community. Standardized interview, documentary analysis and frequency analysis were among key research methods. The main groups of people receiving emergency social assistance were distinguished and described in the article, the criteria characterizing a child being in a socially dangerous situation at the railway station were defined. It was determined that children are at risk when their parents or other legal representatives are not able to meet their security needs (physical and psychological), i.e. basic needs while at the railway station. The main socio-psychological characteristics of such children and their families are represented. The materials of the article may be of practical value for social workers, psychologists and those researching disadvantaged families.

Keywords: Social risk situation, railway station, urgent social assistance, socio-psychological characteristics, parents, children, families at risk.

INTRODUCTION

Frequent situations at railway stations in Moscow occur when families with minor children, due to a number of objective and subjective reasons get into socially dangerous situations and need help.

Typical socially dangerous situations for children i.e. vagrancy, begging, etc., can be attributed to their unsupervised stay at the station later in the day.

Families with underage children are at risk on the territory of the station, due to the lack of documents and/or money required for the return of families to their homes. This loss is due to their own fault or due to illegal actions of the third

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parties, or incompetent planning of their own costs and/or actions. As a result of the adults' fault, a child finds himself/herself in a situation depriving him/her of shelter, proper nutrition, basic necessities, and often warm clothes in the cold season.

In this situation, the state provides aid which involves the separation of the family. The child is placed into a medical or social institution, and adults need to solve their problems on their own. The resolution of the situation might be delayed for indefinite time, and separation from his/her family, even temporarily, becomes a huge stress for a child. In contrast to the state approach, the Charitable Fund of Social Assistance to Children, "Spread Your Wings!" is providing emergency social assistance to the family as a whole, without temporary separation.

The project "A Road to Home", implemented by the Fund in assistance with Moscow regional directorate of railway stations – (a branch of public limited corporation "Russian Railways") has established a system allowing to provide emergency social assistance to children and families with children who are at risk on the territory of railway stations on the way to their destination. The main objective of the work is to help families with children to get safely to their destination. The authors participated in the design and implementation of the project.

There are currently two locations of social care for children set up at railway stations –Kazan railway station (beginning October 15, 2012), and Belarus railway station (beginning September 1, 2013) – that cover the territory of nine Moscow railway stations.

Provision of social emergency care for children includes:

- 1) hot meals or wholefood kits;
- 2) opportunity to contact their friends and relatives at their place of residency (telecommunication services);
- 3) accommodation at recreation rooms;
- 4) assistance in obtaining state social service care;
- 5) assistance in purchasing tickets to the place of residency, including financial aid provision;
- 6) urgent psychological aid or assistance in obtaining aid;
- 7) assistance in legal aid;
- 8) advice or information;
- 9) reunion of the minor with his/her legal representative.

Since the start of this work of social care for children until January 1, 2016, help has been provided to 848 families with children. The number of children receiving help is 1488.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The profession of social worker was introduced in 1991 (Russian encyclopedia of social work, 2016). From the very beginning, social work in Russia developed as

an integrative, synthetic, interdepartmental profession (Day, 1988; Tregoubova, 2000). Now social worker's functions include being diagnostic, organizational, prognostic, preventive and socio-therapeutic, communicative and protective (Collins, 2007). Clients of social services are a family with one or more problems that are in difficult life situation (Matos & Sousa, 2010; Soloveva & Vergasova, 2015). Characteristic of difficult life situation determines the type of intervention and types of assistance (Bobyleva, 2015; Tugarov & Dudkin, 2012; Veeran, 2004).

Russian Federal Law defines the basic concepts to create a system for providing emergency social assistance to children and families with children who are at risk.

Federal Law "On the Principles of Prevention of Neglect and Juvenile Delinquency", defines the concepts of "a minor who is at risk", "family in a socially dangerous situation", "unsupervised", and "homeless" (Federal Law ¹ 120-FZ, 1999).

A minor at risk is a person under the age of eighteen, who is in a situation that presents a risk to his life or health as a result of neglect or homelessness, does not meet the requirements for education and alimentation, or commits an offense or antisocial act.

A family in a socially dangerous situation is a family with minor children who are at risk, as well as a family where the parents or legal representatives of minors do not fulfill their responsibilities for the children's education, training and/or content, and/or negatively impact their behavior or abuse them.

A homeless is a minor who is not controlled by anyone due to improper performance of duties by parents or other legal representatives or officials.

An unsupervised is the one without residency or a place to stay.

Federal Law of Russian Federation "On the basis of social services for citizens in the Russian Federation" defines the concepts of "emergency social assistance", and "emergency social service" (Federal Law of the Russian Federation ¹ 442-FZ, 2013).

Emergency social assistance is a set of urgent social services, contributing to the elimination of the circumstances that have put the juvenile or family at social risk.

Emergency social service is emergency one-time help for minors and families in a socially dangerous situation.

Socio-psychological characteristics of families with children belonging to social risk groups are represented in the works, revealing their behavior, age and gender characteristics, the impact of socio-cultural factors on them, kinship and social ties (Rikus & Hughes, 2008; Gogoleva, 2004; Shulga, 2003).

Very little research has been dedicated to children or families with children who are in socially-dangerous situations needing help. It is known only about two studies.

The first one was conducted in 2005 by the Russian Charity Fund "No to Alcoholism and Drug Addiction" with the assistance of "Railway Children" (Great

Britain) (Zykov, 2006). Neglected children at railway stations were the subject of this research. Specifics of social alienation and socio-psychological characteristics of homeless children at the railway stations in Moscow were revealed, and the unique nature of working with them was determined.

The research showed that the majority of the homeless choose life in streets as an alternative to a constant lack of attention from parents, relatives, teachers and society in general. Some had to leave their families due to abuse (Council of Europe, 2002).

Homeless need help of a different nature directed at “re-socialization” or seeking their own place in the society (Lietz, Lacasse & Cacciato, 2011). Success of this work is connected with the creation of rehabilitation spaces which suggest cooperation between different structures and establishments (street work, low-threshold club, hostel, shelter, employment offices, school for foster parents and socio-psychological work with biological families) (Davies, Webber & Briskman, 2015).

It was suggested that the main clients of our locations of social assistance would be children.

In October 2012, research was conducted at three Moscow railway-stations. The purpose of the research was to see the interaction between railway-station personnel and families with minors who find themselves in a socially-dangerous situation (Bochaver, 2014).

The research has shown that quite often abandoned by parents, children and families with minors being at risk in a socially-dangerous situation are seen at the railway-station. The personnel of the railway station does not have constructive directions on clarifying situations and helping such families.

Legislation orders the railway personnel to contact parents or legal representatives of such children, or to place them in a hospital or with social services. This provides a clear algorithm of handling minors, but it doesn't either clear the situation or provide help. Children (especially teenagers) who received such help will try to avoid contacting adults next time they are in similar situations (Garashkina & Druzhinina, 2014; Muratkina, 2014).

There is no algorithm in working with families who find themselves in a dangerous situation at railway-stations. It is based only on the spontaneous goodwill of railway-station personnel. Thus, on the one hand, this help is adequate and well-directed based on the dialogue, and shows the true picture. On the other hand, it is highly selective and is provided to those who elicit sympathy. Alcoholics, beggars, or homeless families who cause fear, anger or disgust do not receive any assistance (Ruzova & Kalinina, 2013).

RESEARCH METHODS

A standardized conversation plan was developed by the authors in order to collect the information at the preliminary stage of research (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

The purpose of this conversation was identifying the causes that led to the penetration of a child in a socially dangerous situation, and determining the types of assistance needed to resolve the situation. 848 conversations were led according to that plan. The data was recorded in a specially designed registration form (Arakantseva & Paskova, 2016). The questions were organized according to the following blocks: identifying the child, information about socio-demographic characteristics of the child's family, the causes of the child's presence at the railway station and needs for assistance, information on the services provided, and the results of the work done. For further processing of data, frequency analysis was used.

The research was undertaken in 2013-2015. Final analysis of the results was carried out in 2016.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Groups of clients needing emergency social assistance at railway stations

These groups include:

- children in socially-dangerous situations. The main criterion for this group is the absence of the child's legal guardian near him/her;
- families with children in socially-dangerous situations. These families find themselves in the situations where they cannot provide basic necessities for their children (security, food, rest). These families need help in solving their current situation;
- families with minors who were at risk of possible socially-dangerous situations. Finances were "running low" in these families. These families were in need of preventing circumstances that worsened family life.

External signs of social risk were:

- wrong season/size dirty clothes/shoes;
- tired, confused, indifferent, annoyed, and discontented expressions on faces;
- peculiarities of emotional state: excitement, crying, hysterics; signs of negative emotions (depression, frustration, and others); and inappropriate age behavior of the child;
- prolonged waiting at the station.

The hypothesis about the advantage of street children as the main clients of getting social assistance has not been confirmed. During three years (2013-2015) emergency social help was provided to 30 children without legal guardians and to 848 families (300 families in 2013, 343 families in 2014 and 205 families in 2015) at the Moscow railway-stations (see Table 1).

42% of families, who received assistance at the railway-stations, were in socially-dangerous situations. Accordingly, the proportion of families with the risk

of social insecurity was 58%. This marked an increase in the proportion of families at risk (from 35 % in 2013 to 42% in 2014 to 52 % in 2015) and, accordingly, a decrease in the proportion of families with the risk of social insecurity (65 % in 2013 to 58 % in 2014 to 48 % in 2015).

Socio-psychological portrait of homeless children (street children) who received help in 2013-2015

Children without legal representatives, found at the railway-station at the time of detection, account for only 2% (30 people) of the total number of identified children. The proportion of children, whose legal representatives were outside the railway-station, is 1% (15 people). Due to the small number of this group we will give a portrait of such a child.

As it was expected, the majority of children in this group were teenagers over 14 years-old living in the regions, runaways or those, lost on the road.

At the station minors originally attracted attention of social workers, although they showed no outward signs of trouble. As a rule, these children consider their own families as low-income but happy.

Minors were reunited with the families in the possible shortest periods of time. In some cases, they were waiting for their families in the rooms of emergency social help locations. In other cases, they got home under the supervision of police-officers or social workers. Only 13.3% of children were placed in the care of social services, thus avoiding prolonged quarantine at hospitals and social shelters.

In the process of analyzing the results of the work with these children it was revealed that they have the following socio-psychological characteristics: propensity to risk and deviant behavior, low situational and personal anxiety, absence of effective strategies for coping with stressful situations.

This article is focused on families with children since they make up the majority at social assistance locations (Table 1).

TABLE 1: TOTAL NUMBER OF FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN (ORIGINAL)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Families with children in socially-dangerous situations</i>	<i>Families with children with a risk of social insecurity</i>
2013	105	195
2014	144	199
2015	107	98
Total	353	492

Socio-psychological portrait of families in socially-dangerous situations who received help in 2013-2015

Not all families with children who were in socially-dangerous situations showed external signs. 40% of families had no signs at all.

Every third family at risk (36%) was found in the evening until midnight (6 p.m.-12 a.m.). Every third family at risk (36%) was identified by employees of the railway-station. Obviously, these families were expressively showing signs of being in a socially-dangerous situation.

At the time of detection, the child was with the mother (57%), and with both parents (26%). Every tenth child from these families (10%) was found on the railway-station outside the reach of his/her legal representative, (and in 6% of all cases the legal representative was absent from the territory of the station).

44% of families at risk often had young children (one to three years of age), there were fewer families with schoolchildren (3%). 30% of families had pre-school children (ages 3-7) and 23% of families had infants.

Nearly two-thirds of families at risk (61%) were living in different regions of the Russian Federation. Every fifth family (21%) resided previously in Ukraine. 18% were the residents of the CIS countries and other states.

Among the families at risk, complete and incomplete families are represented almost equally (52% - two-parent families, and 48% - single-parent).

64% of families rated themselves as poor based on their economical status. The same number considered themselves as a secure family. In 70% of families, the mother was a stay-at-home parent.

The reasons for finding themselves at risk at the railway-station are: the lack of short-stay waiting areas (73%), waiting for the train (56%), lack of accommodation in Moscow (32%), other (73%). A high percentage of category "other", without specifying, made it difficult to describe this parameter. As a rule, the family pointed out several reasons.

Social workers pointed out that the families were in socially-dangerous situations due to: the lack of finance (88%), unavailability of information (87.1%), and neglect (9%). The percentage of "other" category was also high – 53%.

Families with children in socially-dangerous situations got diverse and extended social emergency help. On average, each family got nine types of social emergency help. Based on the contents, they got all types of help, and were provided by locations of social care for children.

All the families were located in a safe place (lounges, luxury rooms, social care for children quarters), got psychological support, they were provided with informational, preventive and legal advice.

85% of families in socially-dangerous situations were given hot meals and food products. Every second family wanted communication services (51%). 46% of families needed assistance with boarding their trains. Every third family (35%) required help with purchasing tickets (tickets were obtained for 19% of families). Even though the lack of money was pointed out as the basic need, financial aid was not the leading help provided to the families.

The majority of cases showed that families with children in socially-dangerous situations showed trust towards the personnel of social care locations (97%), positive reaction for provided assistance (94%), and an awareness of the dangers of the situation they were in (92%). Families were willing to provide documents (94%), additional personal information (86%) and emergency contacts (75%). More than half of the families (58%) were able to find the solutions from their problem on their own. 18% of families needed to involve Juvenile Division Service. The majority of families that got help (72%) expressed their gratitude to the personnel of the social care locations. And only 0.4% of families refused.

As a result, 82% of families left railway stations to the place of their destination, and 18% were transferred to the social workers.

In the process of analyzing the results of the work with these families it was found out that family members themselves assess their family relations as psychologically distressed and more often in those cases when children were in a socially dangerous situation. Such families lacked coordinated interaction of parents, they showed psychological immaturity, infantilism, had selfish purposes. Parents in such families were firstly directed toward meeting the needs of their own, did not show the necessary care and supervision for their children. It was expressed, for example, in the situations when parents could drink alcohol and know nothing of their location at that moment.

Socio-psychological portrait of families with the risk of being in socially-dangerous situations who got help in 2013-2015

As a rule, families at risk of being in socially-dangerous situations had no visible signs of social insecurity (92%). Such families were discovered only at night (midnight to 6 a.m.) – 38%.

Often, families at risk of being in socially-dangerous situations were located by the personnel of social care locations (43%).

At the time of the detection of the family 56% of children were with the mother, and in 32% - with both parents.

Based on age, children in families at risk of being in socially-dangerous situations were classified by: 36% - ages four to seven, 35% - ages one to three, 24% - ages eight to ten.

Two-thirds of the families at risk of being in socially-dangerous situations (66%) lived in various regions of the Russian Federation. Every sixth family (16%) originally came from Ukraine. 155 were citizens of the CIS or other countries. In general, these were two-parent families – 74%. There was a working parent in the family: a working father (59%) or a working mother (36%).

Half of the families (51%) at risk of being in socially-dangerous situations evaluated their income as middle-class. 91% of families considered themselves as secure families.

Such families pointed out reasons for staying at the railway-station: waiting for the train (89%), lack of empty space in lounges (83%), absence of registration in Moscow (11%). Every fourth family (26%) named “other” as a reason for their stay at the railway-station. This percentage is much lower compared to families in socially-dangerous situations.

According to employees of points of social care for children, a family with the risk of social insecurity needed help for the lack of information (90%), and lack of funds (69%).

Such families received at least six types of help. All families were provided with information they needed, were placed in secure facilities, received legal assistance (60%) and preventative talks (99%).

Psychological assistance was provided to 81% of families. Two out of five families (38%) were in stressful situations and needed help releasing it.

More than half of the families needed help being escorted to and boarded their trains (55%). Only 13% of families needed hot meals and food products. Fewer families needed communication services (9%). 5% of the families needed help with purchasing tickets (including 1% of the families who only needed financial help in buying tickets).

The absolute majority of these families (96%) showed trust to the employees of points of social care for children, a positive reaction to the help that was offered (92%), and understanding of the situation they were in (87%). These families showed their documents (95%), but they were not eager to provide emergency contact information (54% of these families never did) or any additional information about themselves (33%). Almost a third of families with the risk of social insecurity made an attempt to improve their situation (29%). Social workers needed to be involved in only 2% of situations. The majority of families expressed their gratitude (76%).

As a result, 96% of the families at risk of being in socially-dangerous situations left for their place of destination. Only 3% of families were transferred to different services, and 1% refused any help.

When analyzing the results of the work with these families it was stated that the main socio-psychological characteristic of parents is their low ability to predict the consequences of their actions, particularly in relation to the child.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When providing social assistance to families with children, it is important to take into consideration children’s well-being, ability of parents to meet their needs, and to create the conditions for development. After conducting this research, it was concluded that children become clients receiving social care because their legal representatives are not able to meet their basic needs (physical and psychological), such as providing food, sleep and rest, while children are at the railway-station.

Firstly, these are the children without legal guardians/parents. Their basic needs cannot be met due to the absence of adults.

Secondly, children who are at the station with their parents or persons substituting them, but the last for various reasons cannot meet the basic needs of the child during his/her stay at the station.

These reasons can be related to:

- uncertainty of the end of the period during which the child is at the station;
- length of the waiting period;
- lack of all necessary travel documents (tickets, identification documents, other documents);
- lack of finances to place a child in a secure location for the night and to provide hot meals.

Summarizing all the data, it can be said that those who are at risk in socially-dangerous situations are:

- children younger than 14 without legal guardians;
- children older than 14 without legal guardians and without proper ID/tickets;
- children, whose legal guardians/parents are intoxicated and in the need of hospitalization;
- children with legal guardians who don't have money to purchase tickets;
- children with legal representatives with tickets, but without proper ID and lacking money to place these children in secure locations, that provide hot meals.

There is always a risk of socially-dangerous situations among:

- children with legal representatives with tickets but without proper ID and lacking money to place these children in secure locations, and providing hot meals while waiting for their train for more than 12 hours;
- children with special needs, younger than 5 years old with legal representatives lacking money to place these children in secure locations, providing hot meals while waiting for their train for more than three to twelve hours;
- children with legal guardians who don't have enough money to place these children in secure locations, providing hot meals while waiting for their train during nighttime.

Children get into socially-dangerous situations at the station due to the family using the station facilities as places of temporary residence or sometimes shelter.

Usually, those who are in socially-dangerous situations are:

- preschoolers;

- children who show visible signs of poverty (wrong season clothes/shoes, untidy appearance, etc.);
- children from single-parent families;
- families where one or both parents are unemployed;
- children from low-income families.

Such children draw attention of railway-station employees and police, and are transported to help centers. Then they get help, hot meals, and financial aid for purchasing tickets to the place of their destination, where parents can get social assistance from the state.

Risk of such socially-dangerous situations is connected with the long-term waiting period (more than 12 hours) in an unsafe environment for a little child, usually at nighttime.

These are usually children from two-parent families, where one of the parents has a job with a medium income.

Such children don't have visible signs of adversity and don't draw attention of railway-station employees and police. They are being helped by employees of social care for children. These families are placed in secure locations during the waiting period.

90% of children from both categories got to the places of their destination with the help from the Fund employees.

As a direction for further research the need to study the impact of the psychological characteristics of family members and peculiarities of relations between them on the efficiency of provided assistance may be pointed.

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