

Features of Functioning of SOS Children's Villages in Russia

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Abstract—The paper emphasizes the relevance of functioning of SOS Children's Villages in terms of reduction in the number of orphans in recent years and deinstitutionalization of traditional forms of their living arrangement, and identifies features of their structure in comparison with other forms. Indicators of the main activities of six SOS Children's Villages are analyzed based on the dynamics in 2009–2017, and their transformation from institutions into comprehensive programs and projects is shown. The authors distinguish the most important features of SOS Children's Villages functioning in Russia in conditions of active fundraising under insufficient government funding, reduced income from SOS Children's Villages International and increased donations from partner companies and individuals, implementation of programs and projects in the regions of village location only, duplication of certain activities of state organizations, changed legal status of a child brought up in SOS Children's Villages. It is concluded that despite mixed attitudes of researchers and public figures on activities of SOS Children's Villages in Russia, their most important results are the absence of repeated social orphanhood, reduced financial costs for raising orphans, involvement of SOS Children's Villages in the work of expert groups to develop and discuss various legislative acts for family and childhood protection, strengthening and expanding the concept of professional parenthood in Russia.

Keywords—*SOS Children's Villages, professional parenting, orphanhood, foster families, social support*

I. INTRODUCTION

The research problem is of current relevance since the number of orphans in Russia has decreased about 3–4 fold over the past 5 years according to statistics provided on websites of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, TASS Russian News Agency and other sources. Irkutsk region also shows a positive downward trend in the number of orphans: in 2012 there were 21,340 children, in 2013 – 20,877 children, in 2014 – 20,128 children, in 2015 – 1,606 children, in 2016 – 18,523 children, and in 2017 year – 17,343 children [1]. Many researchers and public figures claim that these figures show a

great deal of work done to enhance the family structure, though they still do not reflect the reality. Resolution of the Government of the Russian Federation of May 24, 2014 N 481 on the Activity of Organizations for Orphan Children and Children without Parental Care and on Placement of Children without Parental Care in them [2] guaranteed some improvements in the system of orphanages. Improved social support measures for foster parents ensured an increase in the number of orphans adopted by families, though these positive trends cannot be assessed unambiguously.

It is important that the government do not perceive orphanages as the only solution to the problems of social orphanhood. However, a quantitative approach and the vector of the insight into the problem towards family problems in Russia has not changed. Along with the analysis of the existing forms of social work with orphans, the models and technologies of work that offer a fundamentally new, high-quality solution to the problems of social orphanhood become relevant. Sustainable development of SOS Children's Villages is a current alternative [3].

To date, there are 572 SOS Children's Villages worldwide [4]. The analysis of their functioning, performance, and values for optimizing human relations is considered in various foreign scientific and journalistic sources. For example, the researcher Tatek Abebe emphasizes that “The care and protection of children experiencing orphanhood presents a major child-care policy challenge.” Madieha Akram, Faiza Anjum and Nida Akram aim to justify the key role of the environment in upbringing and development of orphans and determination of their success [5]. The study by Kwabena Frimpong-Manso shows the sources, types, problems related to social support and preparing young people for independent living in the SOS Children's Villages in Ghana (West Africa) [6, 7]. The relationship of siblings and the development of practical recommendations for effective pedagogical work with them (through the example of Austria) are the subject of the study by Stephan Sting [8]. A brief overview of foreign scientific works

makes it possible to note the relevance of this problem throughout the world, and in the study of SOS Children's Villages, various aspects of their life activity are considered [9–15].

In Russia, SOS Children's Villages have been actively developed since 1994, when the Russian Committee became a full member of the SOS Children's Villages international family. There are six villages in Russia – in the village of Tomilino, Moscow Region (1996), in the village of Lavrovo, Oryol Region (1998), in the city of Pushkin located in the federal city of St. Petersburg (2000), in the city of Kandalaksha, Murmansk Region (2003), in the village of Borisovich, Pskov region (2010), and in the village of Maurino, Vologda region (2011). In addition to the SOS Children's Villages in Russia, there are three SOS Youth Homes in Murmansk (2013), Orel (2001) and St. Petersburg (2004). Programs and projects are currently implemented in seven regions, and the last region to join in 2017 was Tatarstan, where the only functioning program is concerned with prevention of social orphanhood.

II. METHODOLOGY

The research methods employed in the study were the system analysis method, the comparative analysis method, and socio-institutional and structural-functional approaches. The system analysis method helped to understand common grounds in the activities of the six SOS Children's Villages in Russia. The method of comparative analysis was used to determine the characteristics of the organization of SOS Children's Villages in comparison with other forms of living arrangement of orphans, and to analyze the dynamics of the most important indicators of their activities since 2009. The socio-institutional approach used in the study revealed the emergence and sustainable development of SOS Children's Villages as a necessary alternative against the background of the deinstitutionalization of traditional family forms of children's living arrangements. Structural and functional approach contributed to the concept that irrelative of the ambiguity of assessments and opinions of researchers and public figures, SOS Children's Villages project plays a significant role in social practice of Russia and performs significant functions to solve not only the problem of social orphanhood, but generally to optimize social relations.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study of SOS Children's Villages versus other forms of living arrangements of orphans identified the following features:

- a *long-term family model of upbringing* aimed at development of social competence skills, education, involvement in public life, preparation for independent living and smooth integration into the system of social relations outside of children's villages;

- *living in family houses on the principle of a solo-parent family with many children*, where SOS mother is engaged in raising 5–7 children. 10–15 such families live in SOS Children's Villages. In 2009, 47 SOS families raised 272 children in four SOS Children's Villages built at that time. At the beginning of

2018, 64 families lived in six SOS Children's Villages: 9 SOS families with many children and 1 classic SOS family live in 10 family houses in SOS Children's Village Tomilino; 57 children live with foster families or SOS mothers in 12 family houses in SOS Children's Village in the village of Lavrovo; 55 children live in 8 classic SOS families and 2 foster families in the town of Pushkin; 48 children are brought up in 5 classic SOS families and 7 SOS foster families with many children in 12 family houses in SOS Children's Village Kandalaksha; 48 children are raised in 11 family houses in the SOS Pskov Children's Village; 7 SOS foster families live in the SOS Children's Village in Vologda that completely switched to the model of foster families in 2014 [16];

- *inclusive, affordable and high-quality education* since children from SOS Children's Villages study in the kindergartens and schools located nearby.

The main activities of SOS Children's Villages in Russia since its existence and further development include:

- *social support of foster families* from preparation of foster parents to preparation of a teenager for independent living and includes psychological, financial, educational, methodological assistance and support. Researchers use empirical data to identify four groups of foster parents – competent, flexible, demanding, tired – with their typological characteristics, and the development of the parental potential of these families help prevent repeated social orphanhood in foster families [17]. The Center for Development of Family Forms for Children established in 2005 plays a major role in these activities.

- *educational projects* represent a systematic approach to consideration of difficulties in teaching children through interaction with educational institutions attended by children from SOS Children's Villages. Educational projects are implemented in the form of extended learning activities for children, meetings at parental clubs, individual consultations of parents and custodial parents, advanced training of school teachers, trainings and classes conducted by school psychologists and speech therapists, and provision of modern educational equipment for schools. In 2013, 1,951 people became beneficiaries of six educational projects, and in 2017, these were 2,698 people.

- *programs aimed at prevention of social orphanhood, Strengthening the Family* (since 2007), function to preserve the birth family for children who are at risk of abandonment. Strengthening the family is supported by such projects as *My Mother, Together with My Mother*, and *Family, Mother and Me*, which help single mothers with children, pregnant women, families in difficult social situations, and women in the divorce process. The project *Family Ecology* is aimed at supporting children from families where parents suffer from alcohol or drug addiction. The *World of Equal Opportunities* protects families with children with disabilities, and the *Gamma* project supports children of HIV infected parents and pregnant women with HIV-positive status. In 2011, 514 families raising 834 children were supported; in 2012, the number attained 738 children; in 2013, 495 families and 681 children were assisted;

in 2014, 455 families and 961 children were supported; in 2017, 1,789 children and family members of 3,628 people were assisted.

– *youth programs* aimed at soft transition to independent living are implemented for three age categories:

– for children from 12 to 15 years old in the form of life skills development training, psychological counseling, initial vocational guidance, the program covers all children at the specified age and are implemented based on SOS Children's Villages.

– for teenagers from 16 to 18 years old, the program is aimed at preparing them for lawful age and independent living, and successful integration into society.

– for 18-year-old graduates, the goals of the Maintenance Program (within 3–5 years) include completion of education, a stable job with a stable income, obtaining and arranging own housing.

– *protection of the rights and interests* of graduates of children's institutions and foster families is implemented in the form of trainings, round tables, methodological documents, conferences that increase their level of legal literacy, and the work of the Advocacy Group, whose activities are aimed to enhance implementation of the rights to housing, education, employment and medical care.

– *training and development of personnel* which imply strict selection and training of future SOS mothers and exchange of work experience with the personnel of state institutions of the social protection system. In 2017, 271 employees worked in SOS Children's Villages. All employees first undergo an adaptation program, participate in seminars, round tables, conferences, tutorials on psychology, pedagogy, conflict studies, and get first aid skills. Monitoring and quality control of implementation of the Standards for support of SOS mothers and SOS parents, and individual supervision of parents are carried out annually. Personnel is trained in accordance with individual plans, and great attention is paid to motivation of employees for long-term work in the organization. Annual surveys are conducted to monitor the level of work satisfaction among employees. The survey results are the basis for amendments to the Wage Policy and the Social Policy of SOS Children's Villages.

Thus, in 1995–2010, the personnel efforts were focused on support to children living in SOS Children's Villages. In 2005, the personnel contributed mainly to foster families support, strengthening of birth families, and prevention of early child abandonments. As a result, the organization gradually transformed from a simple institution to the complex of programs and projects. Various forms of social support led to an increase in the number of beneficiaries, the official website of the charitable organization presented annual reports since 2009, statistics on beneficiaries started in 2011, and in 2016, beneficiaries were distinguished into direct and indirect ones.



Fig. 1. Dynamics of the number of beneficiaries of the Russian SOS Children's Villages in 2011–2017 [16].

Despite high efficiency of SOS Children's Villages in Russia, researchers have identified the following problems:

– difficulties of social and psychological adaptation of SOS residents caused and complicated by the presence of high self-acceptance and desire for domination, and low acceptance of other people and internality of other people by adolescents. Empirical studies show that the majority of orphaned children have violations in the mechanisms of personal adaptation, and hence, they are characterized by high level of aggression, hostility, mistrust, and low level of social normativity. The longer the residence in the children's village, the more positively teenagers perceive a new family, respect, appreciate and obey a SOS mother, but they cannot say that they love her and their SOS brothers and sisters [18].

– difficulties of organizing inclusive education in regular schools attended by children from SOS Children's Villages, including those with special educational needs.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we can say that the most important features of functioning of SOS Children's Villages in Russia are:

– SOS Children's Villages activities are carried out in the conditions of active fundraising, which is due to insufficient state funding (within 5.5% (2015), 5.6% (2016), 4.1% (2017) of the total income). According to the statistics provided in the reports of SOS Children's Villages International, funding of SOS Children's Villages is 4–8 fold less compared to the amount of state support for SOS Children's Villages in other countries (21% (2015), 32% (2016), 39% (2017)).

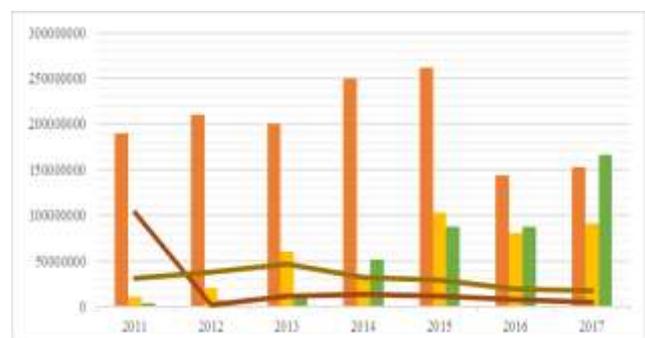


Fig. 2. Dynamics of receipts for maintenance of the activities of SOS Children's Villages in Russia in 2011–2017.

In Figure 2, the receipts from SOS Children's Villages International are marked in orange, donations from partner companies are highlighted in yellow, donations from individuals are in green, grant funds are in burgundy, and government subsidies are in brown.

The first step was financial support of the construction of SOS Children's Villages by the administration of Pskov and Vologda regions in 2009, which allowed the construction of the village located in Vologda region that was funded by Russian funds only, including funds from the Victoria Children's Charity Fund. In 2010, for the first time, all children living in SOS Children's Villages received budget support for food and clothing.

Secondly, in recent years there has been a tendency to a decrease in benefactions from SOS Children's Villages International and to an increase in donations from partner companies and individuals. In order to increase individual donations, all types of electronic payments are available now on the organization's website. Since 2013, the Direct Dialogue campaign was initiated to attract regular donations through a direct appeal to people. SOS Children's Villages project was among nine charitable organizations to be supported by the program of private donations *To Everyone* launched in 2015.

– *programs and projects are implemented only in seven regions where SOS Children's Villages are located.* Other regions of Russia are aware of this project thanks to media and information provided by fundraisers working in Moscow, Vladimir, Tver, Kazan, Nizhny Novgorod, Ryazan, Naberezhnye Chelny and Sochi.

– *duplication of certain activities of state organizations,* for example, in the field of family care. However, implementation of educational projects, youth programs, protection of the rights and interests of children are based on the needs of residents of SOS Children's Villages and the need for their social support.

– *changing the legal status of children brought up in SOS Children's Village.* Until 2014, they were considered orphans and did not have the status of adopted children, they were equal to orphans and children from residential institutions who were not adopted or fostered. In 2014, along with classical SOS families, first foster families appeared in SOS Children's Villages in Russia. To date, there are two mechanisms to support foster families living in their own living space and in SOS Children's Villages. For example, in 2017, Tomilino SOS Children's Village supported 4 foster families with 9 children living in their own living space, and Lavrovo SOS Children's Village helps participants of the SOS program, external foster families with 3 children.

The analysis of recent studies revealed a mixed attitude of researches towards SOS Children's Villages, from enthusiastic reviews, which are quite numerous, to completely negative attitudes. For example, the website of the Parental All-Russian Resistance, an all-Russian public organization for family protection, provided an opinion saying that “the problem of global control over children of all the world is solved through

the system of SOS Children's Villages” and that “Western non-profit organizations are often foreign spies whose purpose is to impose their values on children from other countries,” which is an obvious hint about the activities of SOS Children's Villages. The authors note that information about the principles of children selection for SOS Children's Villages, pedagogical foundations, real values that guide SOS mothers and real values that are inculcated in children is not available to the public.

The book *Forced to Silence* (2014) by Horst Schreiber, professor of modern history, describes the first experience of quasi-family relations between single Catholic women, village "father" and orphans in post-war years. On the website of the public organization, they refer to this book to write that the children lived there, but nobody cared about their upbringing, and no full emotional contact occurred between them and their social mothers. They claim that the approach to upbringing and education of children was similar to fascist ideology since the children were selected in accordance with the eugenic approach and sexual harassment, which were hidden carefully.

Nevertheless, despite mixed attitudes of researchers and public figures to the activities of SOS Children's Villages in Russia, their most important results are:

– *absence of repeated social orphanhood* in children from SOS Children's Villages, which means that graduates of SOS Children's Villages acquire necessary life skills and support from SOS Children's Villages, which is evidenced by zero percent of repeated social orphanhood [19];

– *reduced financial costs of raising orphans* since the amount of money spent on one child in SOS Children's Villages is substantially less than the cost of raising a child in the system of residential institutions.

– *involvement of SOS Children's Villages in the work of expert groups* during the development and discussion of various legislative acts in the field of family and childhood protection, for example, the Concept of the State Family Policy of the Russian Federation until 2025, the National Strategy for Children 2012–2017.

– *strengthening and expansion of the concept of professional parenting* in Russia, which implies informed participation and inclusion of parents, who are friends and mentors, in the lives of their children [20].

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