

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES OF STUDYING THE PHENOMENON OF EXTENDED FAMILIES IN PSYCHOLOGY

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Annotation: A large family is a family with three or more children, including adopted children under the age of eighteen. The types of large families are families in which the parents consciously decided to have many children, families in which the parents did not seek to have many children, families that have many children as a result of the formation of two single-parent families and families with many children as a result of disadvantage.

Key words: extended family, relationship, types of family, children, family dynamics.

The study of family relations is very difficult, as it is an area of purely personal and intimate life of a person. It is also worth noting that intra-family relations are not reduced only to the relationship of spouses. At different stages of its development, the family performs different functions, so the consideration of the study of interpersonal relations in the family acquires a complex character.

At present, a family with many children is a family with three or more children (including adopted children, stepchildren and stepdaughters) under the age of eighteen. According to E.F.Achildieva's classification, the following types of large families are distinguished:

- Families in which parents love their children and consciously wanted to have them. In these families the child acts as one of life values, and parents do everything in their power to make life better for their children.
- Families in which the parents did not consciously want to have many children. Third and subsequent children may have appeared in them mainly due to lack of family planning. Such families may be formed as a result of twins or triplets, fear of termination of pregnancy, medical prohibition of abortion due to the mother's health, refusal of abortion and contraception due to religious beliefs.
- Families formed as a result of the merger of two single-parent families, each of which already had children.
- Families in which the birth of a large number of children can be considered a manifestation of disadvantage. Family dynamics is one of the important parameters determining the characteristics of the family, as the stage



of family development, the period of life activity as a social group directly affects the functions and structure of the family, thus creating a unique image of each family.

The large family form of existence is defined by the number of children from 5 and more. A large family is a special kind of family with its own specific features and characteristics. A family with a large number of children is characterized by great cohesion of spouses, divorces in such families are quite rare and occur mainly due to the failure of husbands in bringing up children and failure to fulfill other family and household responsibilities.

According to the studies of E.G. Eidemiller, V.V. Yustitskis, G.I. Osadcha, A.I. Antonov, T.V. Andreeva, N.V. Aleksandrova, S.V. Kovalev, A.N. Obozova, V.M. Medkov, F.O. Semenova, etc. the problem of a large family is multifaceted and reflects often ambivalent assessments. Positively assessing large families, researchers point to the progressiveness of this phenomenon, its importance not only for simple population reproduction and stabilization of fertility in the country, but also its advantages and positive aspects for children's socialization [9]. One of the definitions of the family is Murdock's (1949), "The family is a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults". Extended families consist of several generations of people and can include biological parents and their children as well as in-laws, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Extended families are typical of collective cultures where all family members are interdependent and share family responsibilities including childrearing roles [8].

Extended family members usually live in the same residence where they pool resources and undertake familial responsibilities. Multigenerational bonds and greater resources increase the extended family's resiliency and ability to provide for the children's needs, yet several risk factors associated with extended families can decrease their well-being. Such risk factors include complex relationships, conflicting loyalties, and generational conflict [7].

Complex intergenerational relationships can complicate the child-parent relationship as they can cause confusion regarding the identity of the primary parent. Such confusion can result in a child undermining the authority of her existing parent (Anderson, 2012) and feeling uncertain about her environment [6].



Extended families often value the wider kin group more than individual relationships, which can lead to loyalty issues within the family and also cause difficulties in a couple's relationship where a close relationship between a husband and wife may be seen as a threat to the wider kin group. Another factor that can add to the complexity of relationships in an extended family is the need to negotiate the expectations and needs of each family member.

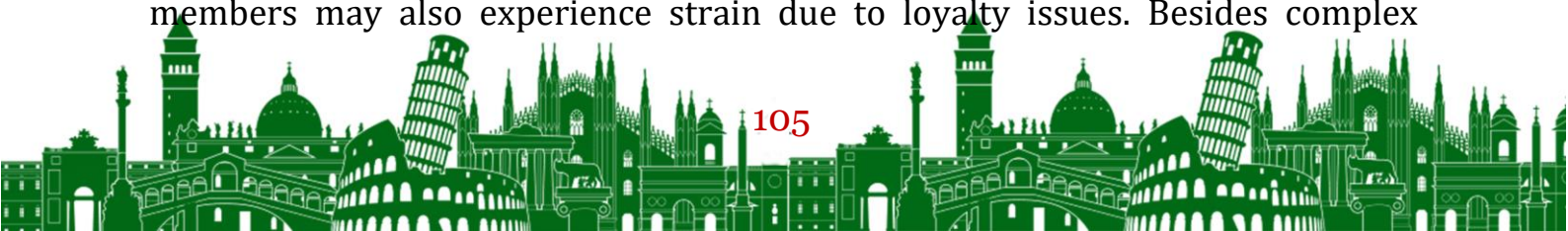
Complex extended family relationships can also detract from the parent-child relationship. The literature points to various protective factors associated with extended families that can help the parents and family meet the children's various needs. Extended families usually have more resources at their disposal that can be used to ensure the well-being of the children. Also, when the family functions as a collaborative team, has strong kinship bonds, is flexible in its roles, and relies on cultural values to sustain the family, the family itself serves as a lifelong buffer against stressful transitions [5].

Kinship care as a cultural value in extended families is associated with positive child outcomes, yet this may not be the case when such families have to take responsibility for a child because his parents are unable to do so. In such cases, kinship care becomes similar to foster care. Situations like the latter usually arise from substance abuse, incarceration, abuse, homelessness, family violence, illness, death, or military deployment [4].

Although children in kinship care often fare better than children in foster care, various risk factors can have a negative impact on the children's well-being. Risk factors include low socioeconomic status, inability to meet children's needs properly, unhealthy family dynamics, older kin, less-educated kin, and single kin [1].

Kinship care as foster care is often characterized by complex relationships and the trauma caused by the loss of an able parent. The family member who assumes the role as parent often finds it difficult to balance his former relationship with his new role as the person responsible for the child's well-being. For instance, a grandmother may have to adapt to the idea of being a strict parent instead of a loving, indulgent grandmother [3].

The extended family member who steps into the parenting role is often overwhelmed by the stress caused by new parental responsibilities, attachment difficulties, and possible feelings of resentment and anger toward the biological parent, as well as having to deal with traumatic transitions after the loss of an able parent. The relationship between the new parent and other family members may also experience strain due to loyalty issues. Besides complex



relationships, changes in the child's environment call for new routines, the setting of new limits, and sometimes coparenting with the biological parent, all of which can contribute to a less stable environment [2]

An extended family member who takes on kinship care faces many challenges, although positive experiences associated with such care can also serve as a protective factor buffering the child against the negative effect of traumatic transitions. The new parent may find this transition meaningful in the sense that it adds purpose to her life, and the child may also experience a sense of security, consistency, continuity in family identity, emotional ties, and familiarity.

The structure of interpersonal relations of the family is one of the basic concepts of interpersonal relations, and according to M.S. Matskovsky represents "the entire set of relations between its members, including, in addition to kinship relations, the system of spiritual and moral relations, including relations of power, authority, etc.". Based on this definition, family structure includes such components as numerical, generational and kinship composition (number of family members, number of generations, presence of marital, parental and kinship relations), as well as power structure and role structure.

V.N. Druzhinin believes that in the norm there is a certain basic structure of relations in the family, "which does not allow human passions to flare up and, at the same time, provides family members with opportunities to realize themselves in the family". And these basic relations realized in the family are: power, responsibility, emotional closeness. On the other hand, studies show that the character of role and emotional relationships in the family is also influenced by personal subjective features of the individual. Personality characteristics that determine the nature of interpersonal relationships include: gender, age, nationality, temperament, health, self-esteem and other characteristics. The study of family relationships is very difficult, as it is an area of purely personal and intimate life of a person.

Extended families composed of grandparents, aunts, and uncles can be protective of children, given a nonabusive ideology. If there is an abusive ideology, however, the extended family can pose as much a risk as a buffer to children. Simple generalizations, therefore, about features of family structure and their role in child maltreatment cannot be made.

There are widespread beliefs that the presence of grandparents is a buffer for children, and probably inhibits abuse. However, research findings on the



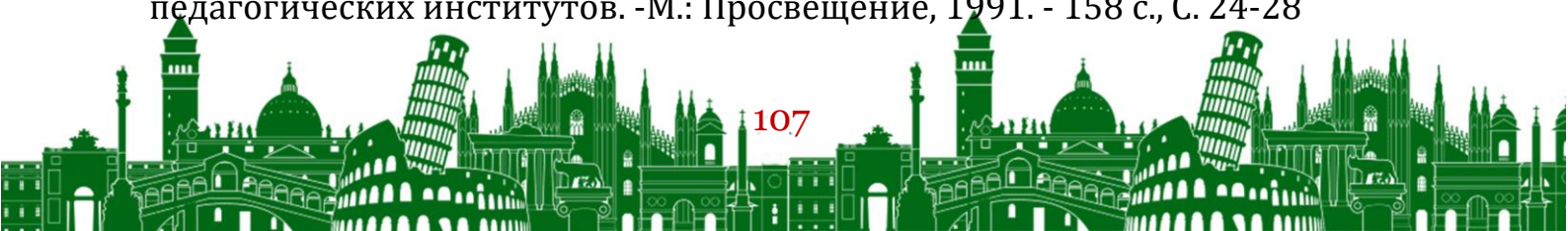
support provided by grandparents to young children are mixed. In one study of African-American extended families children within single or divorced mother-headed households, however, did show signs of better adjustment when a grandmother lived with them. However, this effect did not seem due to the grandmother's parenting skills or direct care to the child, but to the support these grandmothers provided their daughters. The daughters, therefore, became more effective and less stressed during their own parenting tasks, and the children subsequently benefited. In the United States, therefore, the nuclear family relationships remain the most critical for the children's health and outcome. When single mothers are nested in supportive extended family contexts, the children benefit from the direct aid offered to the mother.

There have been some studies on what kinds of skills promote nonviolent and nurturant parenting. For example, researchers in child development found that mothers who are able to develop higher levels of attunement or synchrony when interacting with toddlers, and who are able to establish a mutual focus with the child on some activity or thought, have children who are more compliant and happier than mothers who are less attuned, so to speak, to their young children. Flowing with the child rather than against her or him seems to be the best policy for socializing cooperativeness and stability. Finally, the quality of the relationship between parents has a profound impact on children's coping and mental health.

Once again, the indicators of nonviolent parenting seem to be more lodged within parenting beliefs than in the structure of the family. Coercive parenting engenders aggression in children, either through modeling parental aggression or through the development of an internal mental script or 'working model' of antagonistic interpersonal relationships. Although there have been few direct studies to date, it appears that parents who espouse a 'partnership model' with each other are more likely to raise children to do the same, and to develop mutual respect for boundaries, opinions, and interests that will benefit the child, as well as the parents. The 'dominator model', or the traditional patriarchal family, is a problematic environment for successful child rearing, and can diminish children's own self-esteem and ability to forge intimate relationships.

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