Psychological and pedagogical support of the family in a difficult life situation

Apoyo psicológico y pedagógico de la familia en una situación de vida difícil

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ABSTRACT:
The relevance of the study is determined by the current global social and economic situation and the spiritual and moral crisis in society which undermines normal functioning of a larger number of families. Helping such families requires not only social and economic support, but also psychological and pedagogical measures. The article aims to substantiate the effectiveness of the model of psychological and pedagogical support to a family in a difficult life situation, including target, content, practical, evaluation and performance components. Keywords: family, difficult life situation, coping strategy, psychological and pedagogical support, parenting

RESUMEN:
La relevancia del estudio está determinada por la situación social y económica mundial actual y la crisis espiritual y moral en la sociedad que socava el funcionamiento normal de un mayor número de familias. Ayudar a esas familias requiere no solo apoyo social y económico, sino también medidas psicológicas y pedagógicas. El artículo tiene como objetivo fundamentar la efectividad del modelo de apoyo psicológico y pedagógico a una familia en una situación de vida difícil, que incluye componentes de objetivos, contenido, práctica, evaluación y desempeño. Palabras clave: familia, situación de vida difícil, estrategia de afrontamiento, apoyo psicológico y pedagógico, crianza de los hijos

1. Introduction
The global economic crisis changed the socio-economic situation, which naturally led to an increase in the number of families in a difficult life situation, i.e. social functioning of which is difficult or disrupted for subjective or objective reasons, and their existence as families is threatened. A difficult life situation means one that objectively violates the life of family members (forced migration, illness, disability, low income, unemployment, neglect, loss of
parents, having no fixed abode, conflicts, abuse, etc.), which they can not overcome on their own and need the expert help. Thus, it is necessary to consider family functions crucial in today’s reality, the potential of developing mechanisms for its further self-help and self-organization. These circumstances necessitate the creation of a model of psychological and pedagogical support for the family in a difficult life situation as a condition for the comprehensive development of a socially successful person.

In this study, we applied the following research methods: the pedagogical experiment, the questionnaire, R. Lazarus coping test (adapted by T.L. Kryukova), and the method of the Family Education Strategy by S.S. Stepanova in the version of I.I. Makhonina.

Study findings include the development of a theoretical model of psychological and pedagogical support of the family in a difficult life situation consisting of target, content, practical, evaluation and performance components and proving the effectiveness of the proposed model. The materials of the article can be useful for the staff of support centers for families in difficult life situations, social counselors and psychologists.

In psychological and pedagogical studies on helping families in various situations that disrupt their functioning, support is defined as a special form of the implementation of long-term social, psychological and pedagogical assistance. It does not mean “eliminating drawbacks and transformation”, but looking for hidden resources for the development of a person or a family, reliance on their own potential and using this as a basis for creating pedagogical conditions to restore connection with the world.

At the same time, the analysis of the theoretical and practical aspects of psychological and pedagogical support to families in a difficult life situation allowed us to identify the following contradictions:
- on the one hand, society needs social and pedagogical support of the family in a difficult life situation, and on the other hand, there are no inadequate practices for helping such families;
- the main family functions are changing in modern reality, whereas this is not taken into account when working with a family in a difficult life situation;
- when supporting the family in a difficult life situation, assistance is provided for this particular situation, while insufficient attention is paid to developing family’s mechanisms of self-help and self-organization.

Proceeding from the foregoing, the problem of our study stems from the need for psychological and pedagogical support for families in a difficult life situation.

According to the proposed hypothesis, holistic understanding of the ways and methods of helping families in a difficult life situation can be effective if one develops methodological support (social projects, methodological guides and methodological recommendations) on the basis of the created theoretical model of the psychological and pedagogical support of a family in a difficult life situation.

The article aims to substantiate the effectiveness of the model of psychological and pedagogical support of a family in a difficult life situation, with its target, content, practical, evaluation and performance components.

According to the goal of the research and the hypothesis, we set the following tasks:
1. To explore the theoretical approaches to the psychological and pedagogical support of the family, to make a retrospective analysis of the family’s problems in a difficult life situation considering the conditions of the current migration and socio-economic situation in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), the Russian Federation;
2. To determine the content of the theoretical model of the psychological and pedagogical support of the family in a difficult life situation;
3. To develop and test the model of psychological and pedagogical support of the family in a difficult life situation.

2. Literature review
At present moment, researchers use different approaches to define the concept of “a difficult life situation” and the criteria of classifying a family as experiencing such a situation. In our work we relied on the results of studies obtained by teachers, psychologists, and sociologists who addressed various issues of a difficult life situation [Muzdybayev, 2000; Osuhova, 2005; Rean, 2015; Vasilyuk, Karyagina, 2017].

N.G. Osuhova (2005) proposes the following definition: “A difficult life situation is a situation when due to external influences or internal changes, a person’s adaptation to life is undermined, as a result of which they are unable to satisfy their needs through models and modes of activity (behavior) developed over previous periods of their life”. The author emphasizes that “a person’s customary relations with the world are not simply violated, but it becomes impossible to adapt to these changes without serious work in the external or internal world” [Osuhova, 2005].

F.E Vasilyuk and T.D. Karyagina [2017] considered the issue of a difficult life situation from the perspective of coping and psychotherapeutic help. They also named the difficulties that cause critical disturbances of a person’s normal functioning. A critical situation, in their opinion, should be defined as a situation of impossibility, i.e. this is a situation in which the person finds it impossible to realize the inner crucial aspects of his life (motives, aspirations, values, etc.). To denote this, they introduce a synonymous term – “a critical situation”.

Having analyzed such terms as life difficulties, critical situations, negative life events, stressful life events, life crises, disasters, economic deprivation, K. Muzdybayev [2000] generalized the concept as a situation which makes demands on people that exceed their usual adaptive potential and resources (moral and material). According to the author, both these situations act as stressors, i.e. these factors cause stress, whereas stress is nothing else but a complex response of a person when facing a situation that jeopardizes his well-being. These reactions can occur at the physiological, cognitive, and emotional levels [Muzdybayev, 2000].

When analyzing the grounds for classifying situations and distinguishing their types, F.E. Vasilyuk and T.D. Karyagina [2017] define stress, frustration, conflict (intrapsychic one), and crisis as types of difficult life situations.

Difficult life situations are an integral part of the processes of socialization, first, as they are generally routine, and secondly, they do not always hurt the person; thirdly, they favor development, when there are constructive changes that enable the achievement of new forms of a balanced relationship with the external environment.

Thus, difficult life situations arise either due to the imbalance in the system of relations between the individual and his environment or the discrepancy between the goals, aspirations and opportunities for their realization and the qualities of the individual. Such situations impose higher demands on the abilities of a person, on his personal potential and stimulate his activity.

A person has an inner need to follow his life path and to fulfill his life’s purpose. From a psychological point of view, developed volitional traits of the personality contribute to the realization of this idea, helping to overcome the inevitable difficulties and obstacles the world poses. The will may fail to deal with difficulties arising in a person’s life, and this results in a critical situation – a crisis, a specific condition affecting one’s performance. This is a condition caused by a problem a person is facing which he can not avoid and which he can not resolve fast or in a usual way.

Russian psychologist F.E Vasilyuk called the process of overcoming this the crisis experience, thus giving a new meaning to this term. The author considers experience as an inner work on restoring mental equilibrium, filling a person’s activity with a new meaning after overcoming a critical situation.

Difficult situations in life test the family system for strength. The family possesses a special quality – regeneration which means elasticity, the ability of the family to quickly restore strength in the event of failure, trauma or rapidly changing events, after suffering stress or to tolerate stress. This quality allows the family to form and maintain stable patterns of functioning under the impact of stress. The failure of a family or its members to cope with
difficult life situations can lead to a family crisis. Psychology defines crisis as a serious condition arising due to some cause or a sudden change in the individual’s life. In a critical situation, the family seeks to restore stability by any means. Deformed interactions can also maintain family homeostasis, and, consequently, the core of the vital functioning of the family. For instance, this refers to the difficulty of social rehabilitation of dysfunctional families. Families with dysfunctions often do not want to change their way of life and shy away from the specialists help.

In general, the concept of a difficult life situation has certain specifics for representatives of dysfunctional families. For them, stress is not something special or extraordinary. Most of these people constantly live in extreme, or close to extreme conditions, experiencing chronic states of anxiety, instability, emotional, psychological, and social discomfort. People adapt to these conditions over time and see them as something inevitable and natural. A prolonged experience of stress has a pathogenic effect and undermines habitual ways of coping with it. As a result, members of disadvantaged families become passive and submissive, incapable of deep reflection, and focus not on a solution, but on denying problems, as well as on blaming anyone but themselves for everything. Stressed living becomes irrational, filled with overwhelming aggression.

Social services most often intervene during the aggravation of the crisis situation (severe crisis situation). We will also call it a dysfunctionality crisis. These are, for example, imposition of administrative sanctions or criminal prosecution, as well as child removal and the threat of deprivation of parental rights. Parents’ inability to take care of the child is the crisis of a dysfunctional family. If the family copes with it, the child returns to the family, and its members obtain the experience of coping with the critical situation. If this does not happen, parents lose their parental rights and the child loses contact with the family which has ceased to fulfill the most important socialization function. All this leads to the actual disintegration of the family and, in case of alcohol addiction, the gradual ultimate degradation of its adult members.

Therefore, early identification of families in a difficult life situation will facilitate timely comprehensive professional (psychological, pedagogical, social, legal) assistance through psychological and pedagogical support for the restoration of the family’s normal functioning. Psychological and pedagogical support of the family should aim at activation of its potential by stimulating mechanisms of its self-help and self-organization [Appolonova, 2013; Mozdzynska, 2014; Zakirova et al., 2016; Prokopyeva and Prokopyeva, 2007].

Considering all the above, our theoretical model of psychological and pedagogical support of the family is based on the following propositions:
- providing social services to help families in a difficult life situation;
- an integrated approach to the organization of psychological and pedagogical support of families in a difficult life situation;
- psychological and pedagogical support of families in a difficult life situation should aim at self-help, self-organization.

Developing the model, we relied on the findings of modern research papers of teachers, psychologists, and sociologists which consider the issues of a difficult life situation [Androsova, Afanasyeva, 2017; Moźdżyńska, 2014; Zakirova et al., 2016].

3. Materials and methods
The experiment was held in the Terchy Family Support Center in Yakutsk, the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), the Russian Federation.

The study involved 58 families as the subject of research (the total of 299 people, including 207 minor children). These people found themselves in difficult life situations and contacted the Terchy Family Support Center. The analytical study of the categories of families provided the following indicators: 18 two-parent families; 41 large families; 56 poor families; 39 one-parent families; 5 families with disabled children; 5 families of disabled parents with minor children; 1 foster family.
Studying families in a difficult life situation included the following research methods: surveying; the analysis of the social profile of the family; R. Lazarus coping-test (adapted by T.L. Kryukova) and the methodology of the Family Education Strategy by S.S. Stepanova modified by I.I. Makhonina.

Lazarus methodology helps to determine coping mechanisms and ways to overcome difficulties in various areas of psychic activity and coping strategies. This questionnaire is considered the first standard technique for measuring coping that was developed by R. Lazarus and S. Folkman in 1988 and adapted by T.L. Kryukova, E.V. Kuftyak and M.S. Zamyshlyaeva in 2004. According to the authors, coping with difficulties life poses is constantly altering cognitive and behavioral efforts of the individual. Coping with negative life circumstances implies either overcoming difficulties or reducing their negative consequences, either avoiding these difficulties or tolerating them. Coping behavior can be defined as purposeful social behavior that allows dealing with a difficult life situation (stress) through conscious action strategies. This conscious behavior is aimed at actively changing, transforming the controlled situation or adapting to it, if the situation can not be controlled.

The experiment for testing the effectiveness of the model of psychological and pedagogical support of families in a difficult life situation consisted of three stages:

1. The ascertaining stage (September 2016) aimed to reveal the relevant psychological problems of families in a difficult life situation by using the abovementioned methods.
2. During the formative stage (October 2016 – April 2017) we tested the model of psychological and pedagogical support of families in a difficult life situation at the Terchy Family Support Center in Yakutsk, the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), the Russian Federation. The developed theoretical model is based on the unity of structural (goal, content of the process, the result) and functional components (principles, criteria, development levels) that ensure the integrity of the entire support procedure (Fig.1).

![Figure 1](image-url)

Theoretical model of psychological and pedagogical support of the family in a difficult life situation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REFLECTION</th>
<th>TARGET COMPONENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal:</strong></td>
<td>Helping families in a difficult life situation by providing psychological and pedagogical support.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Objectives:** | - to develop motivation to overcome a difficult life situation as a condition for restoring the normal functioning of the family;  
- to develop social partnership to optimize resources for dealing with difficult life situations in the family;  
- to develop skills for analyzing existing situations and building strategies for their solution (increasing social responsibility). |
| **Principles:** | - the principle of development,  
- the principle of individuality,  
- the principle of choice,  
- the principle of trust and support,  
- the principle of cooperation. |

| CONTENT COMPONENT |
The developed model of psychological and pedagogical support of the family in a difficult life situation consists of the following blocks:

The first block is represented by the target component which describes the provision of social services. Thus, the goal is to assist families in a difficult life situation through the organization of social and pedagogical support.

The objectives of psychological and pedagogical support of the family in a difficult life situation are:
- to develop motivation to overcome a difficult life situation as a condition for restoring the normal functioning of the family;
- to develop social partnership to optimize resources for dealing with difficult life situations in the family;
- to develop skills for analyzing the current situation and building strategies for their solution (increasing social responsibility).

Implementation of the model of social and pedagogical support of the family in a difficult life situation consists of the following steps:

- diagnostic,
- teaching,
- educating,
- developing,
- corrective.

Areas of work:
- diagnostics and counseling,
- correction and development,
- prevention,
- rehabilitation.

PRACTICAL COMPONENT

Stages:
- initial,
- forming,
- final.

Project implementation:
- the project of Terchy Family Support Center,
- the project “The Class for extended stay of primary school children which are in a difficult life situation – After School Center”,
- the project “Temporary shelter for families in a difficult life situation”,
- the project “Center for psychological and pedagogical support of families in a difficult life situation”.

Forms and methods:
- diagnostics
- lectures,
- trainings,
- classes,
- creative assignments
- counseling.

EVALUATION AND PERFORMANCE COMPONENT

Diagnostics of a family in a difficult life situation:
- determining the causes that led to a difficult life situation,
- determining the family potential,
- registration.

Criteria for assessing how a family can overcome a difficult life situation:
- restoring the normal functioning of the family;
- deregistration.
situation includes organization of interaction that is based on the following principles: unity, development, individuality, choice, trust, support, and cooperation.

The second block is represented by the content component of social and pedagogical support and includes the interaction of specialists with the family for overcoming a difficult life situation and restoring the normal life of all its members. The content component consists of a variety of activities with the family: diagnostics and counseling, correction and development, prevention, and rehabilitation.

Considering the fact that psychological and pedagogical support is a step-by-step process which includes planning, organization, coordination, control, correction and analysis of the results, we identified the following functions: diagnostic, training, educating, developing, and correcting ones.

The third block is the practical component of the model of psychological and pedagogical support and includes the following activity stages: initial (goal-setting and diagnostics), forming (organization of activity and control), and final (reflection). It also implies the following forms and methods of activity: diagnostics, lectures, trainings, classes, creative assignments; and the implementation of a number of projects: the project of Terchy Family Support Center, the project “The Class for extended stay of primary school children which are in a difficult life situation – After School Center”, the project “Temporary shelter for families in a difficult life situation”, the project “Center of psychological and pedagogical support of families in a difficult life situation”.

The fourth block represents the evaluation and performance component and includes diagnostics by specialists and self-diagnostics by families. Diagnostics enables to identify the potential of the family in overcoming a difficult life situation and teaching it different life strategies, with such criteria as motivation and initiative to overcome difficulties, social responsibility that are required for the restoration of the normal functioning of the family.

Thus, the application of the model of psychological and pedagogical support can contribute to the restoration of the normal functioning of the family and develops self-help skills in difficult life situations.

3. The control stage of the experiment (May 2017) included the identification of the effectiveness of the work done by using the model of psychological and pedagogical support of the family in a difficult life situation.

4. Results

The ascertaining stage of the experiment allowed us to identify the relevant psychological problems of the respondents. When registering such people, we conducted a survey to collect initial information and determine the type of a difficult life situation. Next, we compiled a social profile of a family and conducted further diagnostics which included such methods as Family Education Strategies and the Lazarus coping test.

Having applied the methodology of the Family Education Strategy, we revealed the following pattern of parenting styles: authoritarian – 22%; indulgent – 18%; neglectful – 29%; democratic – 31% (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Parenting styles</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Authoritarian</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Indulgent</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Neglectful</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.
Findings obtained by using the methodology of the Family Education Strategy during the ascertaining stage (%)
The research findings obtained by using R. Lazarus method enabled us to determine the following characteristic behavior of respondents in a difficult life situation (see Table 2).

Table 2.
The research findings obtained by using R. Lazarus coping test (adapted by T.L. Kryukova) during the ascertaining stage (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Coping strategies</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective coping strategies</td>
<td>Distancing</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Escape or avoidance</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confrontation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seeking social support</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral coping strategies</td>
<td>Positive reappraisal</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-control</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective coping strategies</td>
<td>Accepting responsibility</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning how to solve problems</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most respondents used inefficient coping strategies: distancing –13%; escape or avoidance –15%; confrontation – 3%; seeking social support – 34%. Neutral coping strategies are observed in 23% of the respondents: positive reappraisal – 10%; self-control –13%. Only 12% of parents had effective coping strategies: accepting responsibility – 7%; planning how to solve problems – 5%. Analyzing the results, we found a correlation between parenting styles (authoritarian, indulgent, neglectful), which we conditionally called ‘depressive’ (demonstrated by 69% of the respondents), and ineffective coping strategies (distancing, escape or avoidance, confrontation, seeking social support) – 65%. This proves the need for psychological and pedagogical support of families in a difficult life situation with the purpose of stimulating their self-help and self-organization mechanisms. In this regard, at the formative stage of the experiment, we tested the program of psychological and pedagogical support of the family in a difficult life situation which adopts a comprehensive approach to resolving a difficult life situation.

Having implemented this psychological pedagogical support, we conducted another study of coping strategies according to R. Lazarus methodology and parenting style analysis. It showed positive dynamics and the family’s ability to overcome a difficult life situation by stimulating the internal reserves of parents and legal representatives (see Tables 3 and 4).
The control check showed positive dynamics regarding the selection of coping strategies by families in a difficult life situation, as well as a parenting style.

## 5. Discussion

In our study, we considered families in difficult life situations of different types. Proceeding from the assumption that a difficult life situation has a disrupting effect on the normal functioning of the family, we decided to study the behavioral coping strategies of the respondents who applied to the Terchy Family Support Center. Next, we identified parenting styles and compared them with the findings of the research conducted according to R. Lazarus coping test (adapted by T.L. Kryukova). At the ascertaining stage, we estimated that 65% of families use inefficient coping strategies in difficult life situations and also experience difficulties in raising children due to disadaptive parenting styles (shown by 69%). At the formative stage, we considered the results obtained and provided a comprehensive psychological and pedagogical support to families in a difficult life situation. The forms and methods of working with parents and children included diagnostics, lectures, trainings, classes, creative assignments, and counseling. At the Terchy Family Support Center, the respondents attended the Parents School (trainings, talks, workshops, lectures, counseling, etc.).
and creative activities) in order to balance their relationship with children. The work also included regular classes with a psychologist to adjust strategies for coping with difficult life situations. Based on the diagnostic data of coping strategies used by respondents in difficult circumstances, we selected trainings that focused on communication, personal development, goal-setting, reducing conflict and stress. Depending on their age and problem, children attended the psychologist and the Children Development Club (for preschool children not attending nursery school), a speech therapist, and an after school club (for children of primary school age from families in difficult life situations). The results of the control stage showed positive dynamics of qualitative and quantitative changes regarding the use of effective coping strategies in difficult life situations, as well as improvement of relationships between parents and children.

Our theoretical model of psychological and pedagogical support of the family in a difficult life situation was tested at the Terchy Family Support Center in Yakutsk, the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) (under the supervision of Doctor of Medical Sciences, Professor M.M. Prokopieva), with the results of experimental work proving its effectiveness.

6. Conclusion
At first, finding themselves in a difficult life situation, families demonstrated their inability to cope with the situation on their own and, as a consequence, inflexibility, despotism in children upbringing. Psychological and pedagogical support of these families provided within the developed model helped to reveal the self-organizing potential of families which was confirmed by a positive shift towards the development of effective coping strategies by parents and changes in their parenting styles.

Thus, the retrospective analysis of problems families in a difficult life situation have that was conducted in the current socio-economic situation in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) allowed us to determine the content of the theoretical model of psychological and pedagogical support of the family in a difficult life situation, and also to develop and implement a model of psychological and pedagogical support of such families. The research findings demonstrated that strategies for coping with difficult life situations can be adjusted by adopting an integrated approach to the organization of psychological and pedagogical support for the family and teaching self-help strategies.

References

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