

## Emotional and Cognitive Characteristics of Children Living in the SOS Children's Village

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**Abstract:** The article investigates the characteristics of emotional and cognitive spheres of orphans and children without parental care and those living in the SOS Children's Village. We analyzed the R. Silver test (RTS) results to assess the emotional and cognitive spheres, creativity, features of the "I image", questionnaire "General condition-Activity-Mood" (SAN) results and the Wechsler test results to reflect different aspects of children's verbal and non-verbal intelligence. Gender- and age-specific emotional and cognitive spheres of children were noted.

**Key words:**Orphans • SOS Children's Village • Emotional characteristics • Cognitive characteristics • "I image" • General condition • Activity • Mood • Verbal and non-verbal intelligence

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### INTRODUCTION

The intellectual and emotional spheres of the child are the key spheres in the overall brain development, determining the mental health of the child. Contemporary researchers of our country and foreign researches note that poor mental health has the capacity to interfere with an individual's ability to function adequately across all areas of life [1; 2]. It has however been shown that the consequences of poor mental health in childhood extend into adulthood, which clearly indicates that a healthy mental development in childhood is of utmost importance. Children who are victims of circumstances stand the risk of being exposed to experiences that could negatively affect their mental health (for example the orphaned children) thereby robbing them of the opportunity of a healthy mental development in childhood and a healthy mental status in adulthood [3; 4; 5].

Rozhkov O.P. in particular in his study of children living in conditions of maternal deprivation (in the child's home), detects a number of violations of their intellectual and emotional development: psychomotor retardation, poor adaptation in a peer group, low level of intellectual curiosity, social and cognitive activity and initiative, hyperexcitability or, on the contrary, slow response, etc

[6]. Other studies have studied the characteristics of rehabilitation of orphans in a foster family [7], factors and conditions for the creation of the developing environment for orphaned children in the family-type institutions [8, 9], but the psychological characteristics of children living in SOS Children's Village families, are not well studied.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

Based on the above, the purpose of this study is to investigate the characteristics of emotional and cognitive spheres of orphans and children without parental care. The study involved 39 children and adolescents aged 5 to 14 years old living in the SOS Children's Village families.

For the empirical study the following diagnostic techniques were used: R. Silver drawing tests (RTS), option A, which is cross-culturally adapted, includes the verification of the validity and reliability and restandardization on the Russian sample and which is designed to assess the characteristics of the "I image", emotional and cognitive areas of creativity [10, 11, 12]; the Wechsler intelligence test diagnostics (WISC-Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children) in adaptation and standardization of A. Panasiuk, additions and corrections of Y.I. Filimonenko and V.I. Timofeev. We analyzed the

following subtests: "Awareness" (subtest 1), "Comprehension" (subtest 2), "Repetition of digits" (subtest 6), "Missing Parts" (subtest 7), "Cossa Cubes" (subtest 9); questionnaire "General condition-Activity-Mood" (SAN), developed by V.A. Doskin, N.A. Lavrentyev, V.B. Sharai, M.P. Miroshnikov, designed for self-assessment of functional mental states. The resulting empirical data were processed by the methods of mathematical statistics by using the statistical software package SPSS 17.0. The analysis of the age and gender differences was performed using the Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis test.

**The Main Part:** The analysis of children's drawings and stories on them on the basis of the R. Silver test allows to assess the quality and degree of the emotional state of children. Thus, 25.6 % of drawings and short stories (among which 46.7 % of the sample of girls and 12.5 % of the total sample of boys) had a positive emotional content, which is associated with the image of happy and successful characters, relationships, friendship and love or care there between. 46.2% of pictures and stories on them (including half of the sample of girls and half of the sample of boys) had a neutral emotional content, for example, the image of the characters with the ambivalent characteristics, contradictory or unclear meaning and without emotional content.

When analyzing the semantic content of pictures and stories of children on the basis of the RTS test, the following characteristics can be noted. The overwhelming majority of the drawings are in one way or another connected with domestic themes of games, eating, walking, sleeping, relationships between the characters (both friendships and conflicts, which often ended in reconciliation). In this case, the stimulus picture of the "refrigerator" and the theme of food dominates: grocery shopping in the store, cooking, holidays, birthdays, treating of guests, gifts, etc. With the children brought up in the SOS Children's Village families, drawings and stories about their mother, who is an established leader in the family and a role model are quite common; rarer there are pictures of a dad or an uncle, who are also positive characters (defenders) for the kids, or take a detached position.

On the evaluation scale of the "I image", 51.3 % of children's drawings (short stories) are a reflection of contradictory or ambivalent fantasies when children identify themselves with an experiencing conflicting feelings or indifferent character or a narrator himself. 17.9% of drawings (short stories) indicate pleasant fantasies of children who identify themselves with

happy, but passive characters, or those who are saved. 15.4 % of children's drawings (short stories) reflect unpleasant fantasies associated with the image of frightened, frustrated, unhappy or frightful characters. 10.3 % of children (including boys only) undergo painful fantasies, when the child identifies himself with a sad, helpless, lonely, dead character or character who is in danger of death. 5.1% of children's drawings (the authors of which are girls) express positive fantasies related to the fulfillment of desires and the child identifies himself with active and satisfied character, who achieved his goal, as well as with those who they love.

Undoubtedly, the fantasies of the orphans are closely connected with their current life activity, as well as with past negative experiences when children lived in their own, but often dysfunctional families or in a children's home (orphanage). More than that, some children had traumatic experiences of a secondary rejection of foster family or a change of state-owned institutions.

Assessment scale of cognitive and creative abilities of children by the RTS test carried out the following indexes: the ability to choose (the idea or the content of the picture and the story), the ability to combine (the form of the picture) and the ability to communicate their ideas in the pictures and stories (creativity). Artistic abilities of children in this case were not taken into account. The analysis of the results showed that the ability to choose is expressed in children middling and increases from preschool age to adolescence and most children had the ability to combine and share their ideas by stories and pictures developed below average level, which is a personal reserve and requires appropriate training. No significant age and gender differences in performance by the R. Silver test was found, although there was a trend in the manifestation of a more positive emotional state and positive "I image" in girls than in boys.

Data obtained using a SAN questionnaire confirm the results of RTS test: average value of mood as relatively long steady state of children is  $56,8 \pm 10,09$ . High levels of mood are observed in 24% of children, average-58% and low levels-18%. As a variable of health, reflecting the degree of psychological and physiological comfort of the child, average value is  $55,6 \pm 8,4$ ; and a variable of activity as the characteristics of temperament, which is determined by the intensity and the amount of the child's interaction with the environment, is  $106,17 \pm 17,86$ . Thus, average severity of all SAN indicators prevails in children of SOS Children's Village, that is, the majority of children have moderately satisfactory state of health, mood, neutral backdrop and

moderate activity. Significant age and gender differences in the severity of health, activity and mood of children by non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test were not found.

The study of verbal intelligence using the Wechsler test (n=33) showed that the majority of children in SOS Children's Village (78,8% of the sample) have an average level of general awareness, erudition, adequate representation of the outside world-from 7 to 11 standard scores and only a small portion (21.2 % of the sample )-a low level of these indicators which is not appropriate to their age development. Also, the majority (75.8 % of the sample) of children have an adequate level of memory (subtest "Repetition of numbers") that provides understanding and assimilation of new material and only a small portion (24.2 %) of children have low level of these indicators, which can cause difficulties in mastering the school curriculum.

It should be noted that more than half of the children surveyed (54.6 % of the sample) have average, age-appropriate level of social intelligence that indicates their ability to orient themselves in everyday situations of interactions with others, knowledge of social and moral norms and rules. However, many children (42.4 % of the sample) have low level on subtest "teachable"-6 or less standard points, indicating the lack of development of their social intelligence and it is one of the tasks of the subsequent developmental work.

The study of non-verbal intelligence using the Wechsler test showed that the majority of children in SOS Children's Village (66.7% of the sample) have an average level of visual perception, the ability to analyze visual image-from 7 to 11 standard points, which is a good prerequisite for the development of creative thinking and further – of more complex its forms. In this case, third of the sample have low rates for a given parameter, which may indicate a lack of potential mental development of these children.

However, it is encouraging to note that 24.2% of children have a high level of creative thinking and 72.8% of the children-an average level. The data obtained may indicate the ability of orphans to learning and successful social and psychological adjustment and, consequently, to compensate for adverse conditions of early development, taking place prior to placing them in the developing environment of SOS Children's Village.

### **CONCLUSION**

- The study of emotional and cognitive areas of orphaned children living in SOS Children's Village, with the R. Silver test (RTS) has revealed that half of

the subjects observed a neutral emotional state, a quarter of the children (dominated by girls)-a positive emotional condition and the other quarter of the children (dominated by boys)-a negative emotional state.

- On an evaluation scale of the "I image" half of the children's drawings and stories are a reflection of emotionally neutral, contradictory or ambivalent fantasies; quarter of drawings (short stories) indicate the presence of pleasant dreams and fantasies related to the fulfillment of desires (more common with girls) and the other quarter children's drawings (short stories) reflect unpleasant or painful fantasies (more common with boys).
- The analysis of the results of the RTS test on a scale of cognitive and creative abilities showed that the ability to choose is expressed in the majority of children at the average level and the ability to combine and share their ideas in drawings and stories (creativity) is developed in most of the children below average level, which is a personal reserve and demands further creative development.
- No significant age and gender differences by RTS test were found, but there are trends in the manifestation of a more positive emotional state and a more positive "I image" in girls than in boys.
- According to the SAN questionnaire results, average severity of health, activity and mood dominates in the children of SOS Children's Village, that is, the majority of children have moderately satisfactory state of health, mood and the neutral backdrop of moderate activity. No significant age and gender differences in the severity of health, activity and mood of the children were found.
- The study of verbal intelligence using the Wechsler test showed that the majority of children of SOS Children's Village have an average level of general awareness, erudition, memory, adequate representation of the outside world and only a small proportion of children (one-fifth of the sample)-a low level that does not meet their age development.
- More than half of the children are of the average, age-appropriate level of social intelligence that is shown in a developed ability to navigate in everyday situations, interactions with others and knowledge of social and moral norms and rules. However, much of the students showed a low level of social intelligence, which requires deliberate psychological and special education in this area.

- The study of non-verbal intelligence using the Wechsler test showed that the majority of children have an average level of visual perception, the ability to analyze the visual image and the third of the sample has low scores on this parameter.
- The fourth part of the sample of children demonstrated a high level of creative thinking by the Wechsler test, the rest of the children have an average level of creative thinking, which is a prerequisite for successful learning and creativity.

**Summary:** Diagnosis and consistent development of emotional and cognitive spheres are an important part of preventive psychosocial maladjustment and improve the quality of life of children at risk. The premises of orphans and children without parental care in favorable living conditions in the SOS Children's Village is a happy chance for the child to find so necessary for him receiving and supporting family, gives the opportunity to heal old wounds and resentments of negative life experiences and provides a solid foundation for child's further successful integration into a society.

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