

Psychological Adaptation of Children in Remarried Families

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Abstract: The aim of the article is to study the child-parent relationship, the peculiarities of the state of socio-psychological adaptation of children of different ages in remarried families.

The following methods were used in the study: author's questionnaire "Family of remarriage" (Matsenko, 2015), projective technique "Family Drawing" by A. Wenger (2003); questionnaire "Analysis of family relationships" by E. Eidemiller, V. Justickis (2001); questionnaire "Social Adaptability" by A. Furman (2000); method of diagnosis of socio-psychological adaptation of K. Rogers and R. Dymond (Lemak & Petrishche, 2012).

According to the typology of remarriages according to T. Argentova and V. Kolotylna, there are two important conditions: 1) whether or not there are children from previous marriages; 2) whether or not there are children in a new family. The results of the research showed statistically significant differences in the child's perception of her new remarried family depending on its type. In type 1 families, the child's relationship with the new family member is formed favorably. It has been proven that having a child together in a remarried family significantly changes the family situation. Children raised in type 3 families, where the new husband did not have children of his own, but had a child together, in contrast to children from type 4 families, develop a much better relationship with the stepfather. There is a deterioration in the attitude to the stepson in connection with the spouses having children together in a new marriage.

The conclusions establish the specifics of parent-child relationships in remarried families. The specifics of parent-child relationships in remarried families depend to a large extent on the age of the child, on whether the stepfather or mother has children from previous relationships, and on whether children are born into the new marriage.

Keywords: *parent-child relationships, family, remarriage, types of remarried families, psychological adaptation, step-father (mother).*

How to cite: Rudenok, A., Petyak, O., Komar, T., Afanasenko, V., & Khanetska, N. (2022). Psychological Adaptation of Children in Remarried Families. *Revista Romaneasca pentru Educatie Multidimensionala*, 14(1), 521-534. <https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/14.1/533>

1. Introduction

In modern society, the creation of families through remarriage is quite common. As a rule, remarriages created as a result of divorce become a new form of marital union, in which the children of the spouses from previous marriages begin to live and be brought up together. (Posvistak, 2016). At the same time, in repartnered families there may be difficulties for children to establish relationships with new marital partners of the father or mother (Yermolayeva & Smirnova, 2020). This is often due to the preservation of emotional attachment to the birth (biological) parents who live separately, a sense of jealousy for a new spouse who claims the love and attention of the mother or father (Zueva & Zuev, 2015). The attitude of the wife's children to the stepfather (more often this phenomenon is inherent in the remarriage of mothers, because mainly after the divorce of the parents the child stays with the mother) is due to many factors, including age and sex of children (Soriano et al., 2016).

Psychological or mental adaptation of a child to the family of one of the parents' remarriage is defined as the adaptation of the individual to the existence in the family together with the new spouse of the father or mother, taking into account the requirements, own needs, motives and interests (Bocharina & Mazur, 2017). Social adaptation is defined as the constant process of active adaptation of the individual to the conditions of the social environment and the corresponding result as the completion of this process. Haletska notes that the social adaptation of a child to a remarried family is the integration of an individual into a new family environment, in the process of which there is the formation of self-awareness and role behavior, improving the ability to self-control and adequate connections and relationships (Haletska, 2003, p. 434). Thus, social adaptation of the child in the family - is the active adaptation of the individual to local, relevant social conditions by learning the norms, values, styles of behavior that are accepted in a particular family (Sulimina & Leontiev, 2014).

The opposite process of adaptation is maladaptation. This is the process of forming inadequate mechanisms of adaptation of the child to environmental conditions (new spouse of the mother or father, living conditions and cohabitation, etc.) (Avdeyeva & Khoffman, 2019). This often leads to disturbances in the emotional well-being of the child, behavior, it contributes to conflict (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997), sometimes even violent interaction (Gomez et al., 2021), development of psychogenic diseases and reactions, increased levels of anxiety, and, in general,

inharmonious personality development. Maladaptation of school-age children, which hinders the socialization of the child, the harmonious development of personality, prevents further academic success, general socio-psychological adaptation (Zavatskyi et al., 2017).

Violations of the process of psychological adaptation and upbringing of children in remarried families may be associated with the underdevelopment of paternal feelings of the stepfather / stepmother to the stepchild, their inability to express and dose their feelings to the stepson / stepdaughter, fears not being accepted or even rejection, spoiling the relationship with her husband (wife) (Leontiev & Kaliteevskaya, 2006). The child in a remarried family is in a new socio-psychological situation, where there is a lot of uncertainty in building a relationship with a stepfather or stepmother (Romanovska et al., 2020). She needs support and assistance in mastering the rules associated with the arrival in the family of a new person or people (relatives, friends of the stepfather / stepmother) (Karabanova, 2005).

The issues of adaptation of children in remarried families remain quite relevant in connection with the increase in requests for psychological assistance from parents and children from such families. Remarried families attract the attention of psychologists in connection with the increasing frequency of requests for psychological help from parents and children from such families. In the psychological and pedagogical literature there is a large number of studies, including international (Bochaver et al., 2019), devoted to the study of the influence of parental attitudes on the development of the child's personality, personality traits, behavior (D. Bowlby, E. Eidemiller, M. Ainsworth, V. Justickis, etc.), the impact of unfavorable and destructive parental relationships on child development (A. Barkan, L. Benjamin, V. Bodalev, D. Bowlby, A. Varga, J. Langmeier, G. Homentauskas) (Pleshakova, 2011, p. 999). Socio-psychological adaptation of the child, perception of the stepfather/stepmother and stepson/stepdaughter, as well as the development of new functions for stepparents relative to the stepchild, is a serious problem today, which led to the relevance of our study.

1.1 The aim of the study

The aim of our study was to study the child-parent relationship, the state of socio-psychological adaptation of children of different ages in remarried families. Accordingly, the research hypothesis suggested that there is a certain specificity in the child-parent relationship in newly formed families through remarriage.

1.2 The aim of the article

Currently, scientists have developed a small number of studies of child-parent relationships and the state of socio-psychological adaptation of children in remarried families (Banovcinova & Levicka, 2015). Such families differ in the degree of formation of the child's relationship with the stepfather/stepmother and the influence of stepfather/stepmother on the stepchild. T. Argentova and V. Kolotilina propose a typology of remarriages, based on two important conditions:

- 1) whether or not there are children from previous marriages;
- 2) whether or not there are children in a new family (Argentova & Kolotilina, 2013).

According to these parameters, the authors distinguish the following types:

Type 1. A repartnered family - marriage in which a stepfather / stepmother who has no children from previous marriages marries a woman (man) who has a child (children) from a previous marriage, and they have no children together.

Type 2. A stepfamily - marriage in which a stepfather / stepmother who has children from previous marriages marries a woman (man) who has a child (children) from a previous marriage, but they have no children together.

Type 3. A blended family - marriage in which a stepfather / stepmother who has children from previous marriages marries a woman (man) who has a child (children) from a previous marriage and they have children together in the new (re) marriage.

Type 4. An instafamily - marriage in which a stepfather / stepmother who has no children from previous marriages marries a woman (man) who has a child (children) from a previous marriage and they have children together in new (re) marriage.

Families of each type of remarriage face specific problems in child-parent relationships and socio-psychological adaptation of children (Kozyakov et al., 2011). That is why the objectives of our article are to study the scientific literature on the adaptation of children of different ages in remarried families; empirical study of the family and relationships in it from the point of view of children; diagnosis of the type of parental upbringing and the degree of satisfaction of the child's needs, the number and quality of requirements for the child in the family; determining the personal adaptation of a child living in a remarried family to the external and internal world.

2. Methodology

The basis of the experimental study consisted of 111 families whose children study in the educational complex №2 in Khmelnytskyi. The adult sample included 63 stepfathers and 48 stepmothers. The group of children's respondents consisted of 115 students of educational complex №2 (including 65 girls and 50 boys), aged 7 to 17. The selection of respondents for the diagnostic stage was carried out by socio-demographic differentiation of children whose parents started families by remarriage. Also, all adult participants gave their written informed consent to their own participation and participation of their minor children in the study.

2.1 Measures and procedure

The following methods and techniques were used in our study:

1. Author's questionnaire "Remarried Family", designed to study the socio-demographic characteristics, life situations of respondents and typological grouping. This questionnaire was used for parents.

2. Projective method "Family Drawing" by A. Wenger. The child can perceive in her own way the family situation, which parents evaluate positively from all sides. By learning how she sees the world around her, family, parents, herself, a specialist can understand the causes of many problems and effectively help the child in solving them. That is why the test is designed to identify features of intra-family relationships.

3. Questionnaire for parents "Analysis of family relationships" (AFR) (Eidemiller & Justickis, 2001) exists in two versions - children and adolescents. The method is designed to study the experience of parents in raising a child (adolescent) and finding mistakes in parenting. It allows to diagnose dysfunctions in the system of mutual influence of family members, violations in the structural-role aspect of family life and in the mechanism of its integration.

4. Test-questionnaire "Social Adaptability" (Furman, 2000) allows us to quickly diagnose the personal adaptation of the student to the external and internal world at all possible levels of its functioning.

5. Methods of diagnosis of socio-psychological adaptation of K. Rogers and R. Dymond (Lemak & Petrishche, 2012). This personal questionnaire is aimed at identifying the personality of the subject and the degree of socio-psychological adaptation, often to the new environment, conditions and rules of conduct.

In statistical data processing, the methods of primary statistics were used (analysis of average data, construction of histograms), as well as the method of determining the reliability of differences - Mann-Whitney U-test,

Spearman's correlation analysis. Data processing was performed in the software package SPSS Statistics 17.0.

3. Results and discussions

Depending on the type of remarried families (according to Argentova & Kolotilina, 2013), in which children live, their socio-demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of children living in remarried families

Type of marriage	Number of boys	Number of girls	Age of children			
			7-9 years old	10-12 years old	13-14 years old	15-17 years old
Type 1	8	9	5	5	4	3
Type 2	7	14	6	7	4	4
Type 3	13	10	7	8	5	3
Type 4	22	32	21	13	15	5

According to the socio-demographic differentiation of respondents, the most common in the sample was the 4th type of remarriage (54 children), in which a stepfather (stepmother), who has no children of his own from a previous marriage, marries a woman (man) who has a child (children) from a previous marriage and they have a child (children) together. The family was created by a man and a woman aged about 35 with a child aged 7-8. This type of family is most common.

The least common in the sample was 1 type of family (17 children), in which the stepfather has no children from a previous marriage, marries a woman with a child from a previous marriage, but they have no children together and they raise a wife's child (children).

The age of spouses at the time of remarriage for men and women is approximately the same: men - 32-40 years, women - 30-37 years. A certain age of parents is most active in matters of intimacy, childbirth, the desire to remarry and start all over again. The term of remarriage of respondents is 8-9 years. These are mostly already established relationships, except for type 1, in which one of the partners has a child (children) from previous marriages, and the other - no children, or children are still planned.

The results of the diagnosis of respondents using the method "Family Drawing" showed the presence of statistically significant differences

in the child's perception of her new family depending on its type. The drawings took into account: the order in which family members were depicted, the presence of non-existent characters and pets, the spatial contact of hands between family members, their distance from each other (including the spatial distribution of objects or people), the size of each figure, and also the size of the actual image on the space of the paper. In the 1st type of families with stepparents who do not have their children and experience of married life, the child's relationship with a new family member is formed more favorably, in contrast to type 2, in which the stepparent has a child (children) from previous marriages, at the same time they have no common children in either type. The child in the families of the 1st type in comparison with the families of the 2nd type draws the figure of the stepfather (stepmother) almost last ($t = 2.85$; $p = 0.05$), and the mother (father) is the last figure she draws ($t = 2.36$; $p = 0.03$). She more often draws herself holding the hand of her mother (father) ($t = 3.43$; $p = 0.002$) and her stepfather (stepmother) ($t = 4.56$; $p = 0.000$).

Having children in a remarried family significantly changes the family situation, affects the relationship of the stepson / stepdaughter with the stepfather (stepmother). The importance and significance of the stepfather (stepmother) is growing. This is reflected in the drawing of the family. Children in remarried families of the 1st and 2nd type, where there are no children together, first of all represent the mother of the largest size ($t = -3.26$; $p = 0.002$). Children in families of the 3rd and 4th type, where the spouses have children together, draw a stepfather in the first place, and the figure of the mother is on the third place ($t = 2.33$; $p = 0.028$). Children raised in type 2 families where there are no children together but there is a child (children) from previous marriages, compared to type 3 families where they have children together, a relationship with a stepfather (stepmother) are formed more positively: in the drawing of the family, children are the first to portray themselves ($t = -2.15$; $p = 0.04$) and mother ($t = -3.26$; $p = 0.002$). Children from type 3 families are much more likely than type 2 to draw pets as family members ($t = 2.14$; $p = 0.047$).

Children raised in the 3rd type of families, where the new spouse did not have children of their own but have children together in contrast to children from the 4th type of families, develop a much better relationship with stepfather, which is reflected in the pictures. : the child that parents have together is less often drawn last ($t = -2.82$; $p = 0.004$), much less often the smallest in size ($t = -2.08$; $p = 0.040$) and it is less often excluded from the family ($t = -3.21$; $p = 0.002$). In the 3rd type of family, compared to the

4th, children more often depicted pets as family members in the picture ($t = 3.28$; $p = 0.002$).

Diagnosis of parents to determine the types of upbringing in families with different types of remarriages by the method of "Analysis of family relationships" (Eidemiller & Justickis, 2001) revealed differences between the 2nd and 3rd types of remarried families. The results of the study indicate a deterioration in the attitude of parents to the stepchild due to the couple having children together. There is a contradiction in the requirements for the stepson / stepdaughter, the growth of hyperprotection, indulgence, lack of requirements on the one hand, and on the other hand on the contrary - the redundancy and inconsistency of the proposed requirements. The results were compared using the Mann-Whitney difference method. We also subjected to statistical processing the types of upbringing and attitudes of parents depending on the age of the children (Table 2).

Table 2. The results of a comparative study of the types of upbringing of children of different ages in remarried families (according to the method of "Analysis of family relationships")

Characteristics of the educational process	Age of children (average)				U-Mann-Whitney Criterion, U_{emp}
	7-9 years	10-12 years	13-14 years	15-17 years	
Hyperprotection	3.34	2.51	2.00	3.43	802.5; $p=0.032$
Hypoprotection	2.67	1.98	2.93	4.53	$Z_{2,3}=3.89^*$; $Z_{3,4}= 2.93^*$
Connivance	3.66	2.04	3.15	3.67	596.5; $p=0.000$
Ignoring the child's needs	2.39	3.24	1.33	3.29	$Z_{2,3}=4.01^*$; $Z_{3,4}=2.18^{**}$
Excess requirements-prohibitions	2.69	3.37	1.58	2.26	826.0; $p=0.048$
Insufficiency of requirements and responsibilities	3.09	2.58	2.04	2.85	$Z_{2,3}=2.34^{**}$
Excess sanctions	2.40	3.25	1.95	3.21	778.0; $p=0.02$
Minimum sanctions	3.35	1.66	1.52	3.04	577.5; $p=0.000$

Instability of parenting style	2.97	1.84	1.95	3.40	128.0; p=0.007
Underdeveloped parental feelings	2.15	2.44	1.79	3.47	Z _{2,3} = 3.37*

Note: * - p<0,01; ** - p<0,05

In families of types 3 and 4, where the spouses have children together, age-related differences in the relationship of stepfathers / stepmothers with stepchildren were found. In relationships with children aged 10-12, compared to children aged 7-9, stepfathers / stepmothers often significantly outweigh "excessive requirements-prohibitions" and "excessive sanctions" (Table 2).

In the attitude of the stepfather to the stepson / stepdaughter of adolescence (14-17 years) there are differences compared to younger children (10-12 years). There is a sharp change in parenting style: from strict to liberal, from considerable attention to the child to his emotional rejection, hypoprotection with impoverishment in emotional contact and minimal responsibilities of the child in the family, which can contribute to the formation of such traits as stubbornness, tendency to resist any authority.

Among the psychological problems of parents that are solved through the impact on the child in remarried families, where adolescents are brought up, were found "instability of parenting style" and "underdeveloped parental feelings", which is manifested in the desire to ignore the desires and needs of children, to stimulate their preservation of such childish qualities as spontaneity, naivety and playfulness. Such parents still think of their teenager as "a little one". At the same time there is also a weakness and underdevelopment of parental feelings, which is manifested in reduced interaction with the child, the superficiality of interest to how she is doing. Typical parental statements contain complaints about how tired parenting responsibilities are and how they distract them from their own affairs.

According to the results of the questionnaire "Social Adaptability" by A. Furman, it was found (Table 3) that among the surveyed children 9.1% of respondents with a high level of adaptability, 53.1% - with medium, 31.4% - with low and 6.4% with very low level of adaptability. Thus, the average level of adaptability prevails among the surveyed respondents. But a significant proportion of children living in remarried families have a low level of adaptability.

Table 3. The level of social adaptability of children (according to the method (Furman, 2001)

Level of social adaptability	Number of respondents (%)
High	9.1
Medium	53.1
Low	31.4
Very low	6.4

We also found respondents with a very low level of social adaptability. Low levels of adaptability can increase the risk of maladaptation when internal psychological problems complicate the socialization process. According to the results of the method of diagnosis of socio-psychological adaptation by K. Rogers and R. Dymond, 69.2% of children out of the total number have a high level of adaptation, among which mostly girls. There is a slightly lower level of adaptation among boys. The phenomenon of maladaptation among children aged 10-12 occurs among 30.8% of students, of which 7.1% are girls and 17.2% are boys. It is observed that boys also have higher level of maladaptation. Only 5.5% of boys aged 15-17 were diagnosed with maladaptation. According to the indicators of adaptability by types of socio-psychological adaptation, it was found that a high level of adaptability is inherent in 14.5% of adolescents, of which 11.8% are boys and 15% are girls. 37.8% of children aged 14-17 have an average level of adaptability, of which 12.5% are boys and 23.3% are girls. A low level of adaptation is observed in 21% of children, of which 6.5% are boys and 14.5% are girls.

It should be noted that girls have a slightly higher level of adaptability than boys in terms of the overall sample. The indicator of maladaptation contains obvious and non-obvious levels of functioning of personal adaptation. The results of the method showed unobvious maladaptation in 25.3% of surveyed children, of which 15.5% are boys and 9.8% are girls. 17.2% of respondents showed obvious maladaptation, of which 10.7% are boys and 6.5% are girls. There is also a difference in the rates of maladaptation of boys and girls. It is observed that boys have predominance of maladaptation. The maladaptation indicator contains situational, obvious, critical and supercritical levels of functioning. As a result of the study, we found that 6.5% of children (boys) from remarried families have situational maladaptation.

4. Conclusion

After analyzing the results, we came to the following conclusions.

1. There is a specificity of child-parent relationship in remarried families of different types, which confirms our hypothesis. Peculiarities of child-parent relationship in remarried families largely depend on the age of the child, whether or not the stepfather (much more often a husband) or stepmother has children from previous relationships and whether or not they have children together in a new family. The younger the child is, the easier it is for her to form an attachment to the stepfather or stepmother who is part of the family. The child quickly forgets her birthfather, especially if he is not particularly reminded of himself and does not take an active part in communication and parenting. It is also easier for a stepfather (stepmother) with a stepson (stepdaughter) of primary school age (7-11 years) to build a good relationship, there is a chance to become a "father" for the child. Such children are obedient, open, trusting.

2. Stepfather / stepmother relationships with adolescents (12-17 years old) are more complicated. Adolescents remember the father (mother) well or even have a close relationship with him (her), may be on the side of the abandoned father in the conflict between mother and father. An adolescent may not like the stepfather (stepmother) because of insults, personal impressions and beliefs. Often there are still grandparents (parents of the abandoned father) who also have their own interest and can set the child against a new spouse. Parents of stepfather / stepmother also do not always have a positive perception of daughter-in-law / son-in-law with child (ren). Therefore, the new family has to overcome many difficulties to be together, to build relationships with each other, to resolve issues related to the upbringing of the child. Here we observe two positions on the part of the stepparent: educational insecurity, "underdeveloped parental feelings", non-interference, ignoring, "not noticing" the child, emotional coldness, the minimum number of responsibilities of the child in the family, which is more common in stepfather / stepmother who do not have their own children and upbringing experience, and, conversely, excessive severity, criticism, especially in those who have left their children or meet with them from time to time. In the second case, parents consider themselves experienced caregivers, which leads to conflicts with stepchildren and spouses, inconsistency of the system of requirements to the child from the father and stepfather, excessive sanctions, as well as the presence of psychological problems solved by the child, the formation difficulties of self-expression with loved ones in children, stubbornness. Children feel

dissatisfied with the needs for love and attention of parents, in communication with them (Le Poire, 2006).

3. Most adolescents (12-17 years) have an optimal level of adaptation, but there are adolescents who need help in the format of psycho-correctional work. A significant number of adolescents show medium and low levels of adaptation. We have also identified maladapted adolescents who need special help. The phenomenon of maladaptation is mainly due to the negative social status of the adolescent in the remarried family, low self-esteem and changes in the requirements for the personality of the adolescent, both educational and social. In addition, maladaptation is largely associated with the psychological characteristics of adolescence, the experience of adolescent crisis, the change of social status from child to adult status.

In connection with the above, it is obvious (and confirmed by repeated requests for psychological help) the relevance and importance of psychological support for remarried families. The attitude of both the father and the mother to the child they have together in the remarried family in comparison with their attitude to their own children from previous marriages requires a separate study. Prospects for further research include the relationship between stepsiblings in the remarried families.

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