ӘЛЕУМЕТТАНУДЫҢ ӨЗЕКТІ МӘСЕЛЕЛЕРІ
АКТУАЛЬНЫЕ ВОПРОСЫ СОЦИОЛОГИИ
<u>TOPICAL ISSUES OF SOCIOLOGY</u>

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CHILD WELL-BEING IN A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE: PROBLEMATIZATION OF CHILDHOOD DISCOURSE

Abstract

The purpose of this article is a sociological understanding of child well-being in the context of contemporary conception of childhood and new approaches to studying children's life. The authors identified the phenomenon of childhood as an object of research, focusing on the concept of child well-being in the context of difficult life situations. In contemporary research, childhood is regarded as a social construct formed by the interaction of children with the surrounding cultural and social environment.

Childhood is conceived as an active process of creating and interpreting social reality, where children actively participate in shaping their own experiences. This is a discursive, pluralistic approach, different from the usual universalism. Modern research on childhood actualizes the question of the ethics of research involving and in relation to children.

The authors conducted desk research by analyzing data obtained from official Internet resources, scientific articles, reports revealing the results of the analysis of the phenomenon of childhood, including the database of peer-reviewed scientific literature Scopus over the past five years. The method of obtaining primary sociological data was an expert survey, which was attended by 111 specialists working with children: social workers, school and university teachers, medical professionals, psychologists, lawyers, representatives of juvenile justice, government officials, as well as employees of sociological research structures and NGOs.

The findings of the expert survey indicate that primary determinants of the well-being of children in adverse life circumstances are institutional support, access to spesializaed services, and the resource potential of the family. It hase been determined that current social policy frameworks fail to encompass all vulnerable child populations, thereby underscoring the necessity of revising existing legislation.

The results contribute to the advancement of the sociology of childhood by conceptualizing child well-being as a multidimential construct, contingent upon specific socio-cultural conditions. The study also provides a foundation for the development of evidence-based recommendations aimed at enhancing social policy in the best interests of children.

Keywords: childhood, new sociology of childhood, construction of childhood, difficult life situation, methodology of childhood research, child well-being.

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БАЛАНЫҢ ӘЛ-АУҚАТЫ ӘЛЕУМЕТТАНУЛЫҚ ПЕРСПЕКТИВАДА: БАЛАЛЫҚ ШАҚ ДИСКУРСЫН МӘСЕЛЕНДІРУ

Аңдатпа

Бұл мақаланың мақсаты-балалық шаққа қатысты заманауи түсініктер контекстінде зерттей отырып, балалар әл-ауқатын талдау және балалар өмірін талдаудағы жаңа әдістерді қарастыру барысында әлеуметтанулық пайымдау.

Авторлар, қиын өмірлік жағдай контекстіндегі баланың әл-ауқаты тұжырымдамасына назар аудара отырып, балалық шақ феноменін зерттеудің объектісі ретінде анықтады. Қазіргі зерттеулерде, балалық шақ - балалардың мәдени және әлеуметтік қоршаған ортамен қарым-қатынасының нәтижесінде құрастырылған әлеуметтік конструкт ретінде қарастырылады.

Балалық шақ-балалар өз тәжірибесін қалыптастыруға белсенді қатысатын әлеуметтік шындықты құру мен түсіндірудің белсенді процесі. Бұл қалыпты универсализмнен өзгеше дискурсивті, плюралистік көзқарас. Балалық шақ туралы заманауи зерттеулер, балаларға қатысты және олардың қатысуымен өтетін зерттеулердегі этикалық сұрақтарды көтереді.

Авторлар ресми балалық шақ құбылысын талдау нәтижелерін ашатын есептерден, интернет-ресурстардан, ғылыми мақалалардан, соның ішінде соңғы бес жылдағы рецензияланған ғылыми әдебиеттерінің Scopus дереккорынан алынған деректерді талдай отырып, кабинеттік зерттеу жүргізді. Бірінші реттік әлеуметтанулық деректерді алу әдісі ретінде балалармен жұмыс істейтін 111 маман қатысқан сараптамалық сауалнама жүргізілді, оған: әлеуметтік жұмыскерлер, мектеп және ЖОО оқытушылары, медицина қызметкерлері, психологтар, заңгерлер, ювеналды әділет өкілдері, мемлекеттік қызметкерлер, сонымен қатар әлеуметтанулық зерттеу құрылымдары мен ҮЕҰ қызметкерлері қатысты.

Сараптамалық сауалнама нәтижелері, өмірлік қиын жағдайдағы балалардың әл-ауқаты және оларды институционалды қолдау, мамандандырылған қызметтерге қол жетімділігі, сондай-ақ отбасының ресурстық әлеуетіне әсер ететін негізгі факторларды айқындады. Әлеуметтік саясаттың қолданыстағы тетіктері балалардың барлық осал санаттарын қамтымайтынын анықтады, бұл қолданыстағы заңнаманы өзекті тұрғыда қайтадан қарастыруды қажет етеді.

Алынған нәтижелер, мазмұны бойынша нақты әлеуметтік және мәдени жағдайлармен анықталатын көп өлшемді категория ретінде балалардың әл-ауқаты туралы түсініктерді кеңейте отырып, балалық шақ әлеуметтануының дамуына ықпал етеді. Сонымен қатар, зерттеу балалар мүддесіне қатысты әлеуметтік саясатты жетілдіру үшін ғылыми негізделген ұсыныстарды құрастыруда да өте қолданбалы болады.

Түйін сөздер: балалық шақ, балалық шақтың жаңа әлеуметтануы, балалықты конструк-циялау, қиын өмірлік жағдай, балалық шақты зерттеу әдістемесі, баланың әл-ауқаты.

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БЛАГОПОЛУЧИЕ РЕБЕНКА В СОЦИОЛОГИЧЕСКОЙ ПЕРСПЕКТИВЕ: ПРОБЛЕМАТИЗАЦИЯ ДИСКУРСА ДЕТСТВА

Аннотация

Целью данной статьи является социологическое осмысление благополучия детей в контексте современного понимания детства и новых подходов к изучению жизни детей. Авторы

определили феномен детства в качестве объекта исследования, сосредоточив внимание на концепте благополучия ребенка в контексте трудной жизненной ситуации. В современных исследованиях детство рассматривается как социальный конструкт, формируемый в результате взаимодействия детей с окружающей культурной и социальной средой.

Детство рассматривается как активный процесс создания и интерпретации социальной реальности, в которой дети активно участвуют в формировании своего собственного опыта. Это дискурсивный, плюралистический подход, отличный от обычного универсализма. Современные исследования, посвященные детству, актуализируют вопрос об этичности исследований с участием детей и по отношению к ним.

Авторы провели кабинетное исследование, проанализировав данные, полученные из официальных интернет-ресурсов, научных статей, отчетов, раскрывающих результаты анализа феномена детства, в том числе из базы данных рецензируемой научной литературы Scopus за последние пять лет. Методом получения первичных социологических данных стал экспертный опрос, в котором приняли участие 111 специалистов, работающих с детьми: социальные работники, школьные и вузовские преподаватели, медицинские работники, психологи, юристы, представители ювенальной юстиции, государственные служащие, а также сотрудники социологических исследовательских структур и НПО.

Результаты экспертного опроса показали, что ключевыми факторами благополучия детей, находящихся в трудной жизненной ситуации, выступают институциональная поддержка, доступ к специализированным услугам, а также ресурсный потенциал семьи. Установлено, что существующие механизмы социальной политики не охватывают все уязвимые категории детей, что делает актуальным пересмотр действующего законодательства.

Полученные результаты вносят вклад в развитие социологии детства, расширяя представления о детском благополучии как многомерной категории, содержание которой определяется конкретными социальными и культурными условиями. Исследование также важно для формирования научно обоснованных рекомендаций по совершенствованию социальной политики в интересах детей.

Ключевые слова: детство, новая социология детства, конструирование детства, трудная жизненная ситуация, методология исследования детства, благополучие ребенка.

INTRODUCTION

From a sociological point of view, childhood is not just a certain set of children or a period of development until adulthood, but a stable component of a social structure. It is formed through children's relationships with adults, the social and cultural environment, and with each other. Childhood turns out to be dependent on culture, social contexts, and the correlation of social forces in society. Different cultures and societies have different ideas about the role, status, and functions of children, which in turn determines childhood policy.

It should be noted that one of the central trends in children's research is the development of issues related to the quality of life of children. In world practice, the concept of child well-being or children's werll-being is often used to describe the quality of life of children. In general, this concept reflects the interaction of external factors (for example, socio-economic status, family circumstances, the physical environment of the child) with individual characteristics (for example, the child's personality, cognitive abilities, etc.). As a result, the child's needs are more or less met and psychological resources, skills, and positive interaction with the outside world are combined.

Within thew framework of the research presented in the article, an analysis of existing approaches to measuring child well-being was carried out and the difficulties of involving children in such studies were identified. Under a difficult life situation, the authors mean circumstances or conditions that significantly complicate a person's life, create stress, and threaten their physical, psychological, or social being. In the context of children, difficult life situations may include the lack of a stable life, lack of care and attention from parents or caregivers, abuse, neglect of needs, and other factors that hinder their normal development.

The problems of children, especially those who find themselves in difficult life situations, require a very careful and delicate approach from a sociologist. In this case, one of the most effective research methods is an expert survey. Referring to this method is primarily related to ethical considerations. The purpose of the expert survey was to deepen understanding of childhood in the context of difficult life situations and the role of adults in their well-being. The main question of the study was formulated as follows: *What factors determine the well-being of children in difficult life situations and what is necessary to ensure this well-being?* The hypothesis is as follows: the well-being of children in difficult life situations largely depends on their ability to access the necessary services and specialists, as well as on the availability of comprehensive government programs to support children.

In the modern world, the subject of childhood has a very special meaning: memories of childhood, a returning back to it and an analysis, the formation of its value and a call for children not only to take care of them, but also to "hear their voices." D. I. Mamycheva calls modern culture "the culture of questioning childhood", showing various ways of addressing this phenomenon to academic, institutional, everyday, personal views. From such judgments, the following questions arise, "why is it so important for a modern person to find himself in discourses about childhood, is it "fashion" related to this topic? or does it correspond to the deeper foundations of subjectivity?" [1, p.4].

The "discovery" of childhood as a separate social phenomenon date back only to the twentieth century, and until the 70s of the last centuries, children "it is not now."- they were considered in the position that they have not yet received an education, are not yet an adult, and cannot yet have their own views and opinions. In the 80s, criticism began to grow in science that there was a paradox regarding the competence of children. On the one hand, institutions of socialization and methods of socialization require from children social competence (in particular, the ability to reflect the social world or oneself, an understanding of its basic provisions, participation in its creation) and its constant development. On the other hand, the family or school ignores such competencies.

By the 1990s, when the popularity of "outsider" trends in theory increased and the sensitivity of social sciences to minorities increased, a direction called "New sociology of childhood" was formed. The new sociology of childhood in its content, as an interdisciplinary approach, brought together sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, educators, historians and geographers.

In the spirit of feminist criticism, condemns traditional sociology for never seeing children as full-fledged participants in social action. In rebuilding a world based on fundamental, different principles, the voices and experiences of children, like women, have previously been trapped and excluded from the patriarchal adult-oriented perspective [2, p.107]. Nikitina-den Besten, studying the changing meanings of childhood, shows which positions are most criticized in traditional sciences: 1) ignoring new types of intimate relationships and home structure, as opposed to the "usual" or nuclear family; 2) the authority of adults over children, enshrined by the elitist positions of socialization theory; 3) in traditional developmental psychology, insufficient attention is paid to the socio-historical context of children's life, its maturity, and its acceptance as a standard for all aspects of human life [3, p.9-10].

Although childhood is a well-known phenomenon, its reflection within the framework of philosophical, pedagogical and sociological theories has long been insufficient. According to theorists of the new direction, childhood was conceptually neglected, as if children "did not have their own refuge in social theories" [3, p.10]. Today it is already clear that childhood is not just a certain set of children or a period of development up to adulthood, but a stable component of the social structure, an element of the architecture of a complex and independent society with its own functional connections. As Löf notes in his study of "other" childhood, only recently children and their actions were analyzed in the direction of psychological development, which gave universal ideas about children. As a rule, it was explained that all children of a certain age behave the same way, the internal characteristics, and individual experiences of children in this age-specific group were of little interest to the researchers [4, p.147].

From a new point of view, childhood is very discursive, it requires a pluralistic understanding that is not universal. Such attitudes towards childhood indicate the existence of a social construct that is formed through relationships with adults, the social and cultural environment and between children (Jens Qvortrup, Alan Prout, Allison James). In this context, childhood turns out to be dependent on culture, social contexts, and the ratio of social forces in society. Different cultures and societies form different ideas about the role, status, and function of children, which in turn also determine the policy regarding childhood. That is why cultural norms and values dictate what skills and knowledge are important to children, how they should relate to others and what role they should play in society.

Thus, childhood is variable, since the social and economic conditions in which children grow up, even in the same country or culture, differ in their own way. In addition, children are actively involved in creation their own experiences and as social agents, they build their own identity and relationships by influencing the environment. In this context, even socialization is not seen as internationalization, but as constructivism.

Defining the phenomenon of childhood as an object, we put in the center of research interest the concept of child well-being. The purpose of the study presented in this article will be sociological analysis of children's well-being in the context of modern understanding of childhood, new approaches to the analysis of children's lives and the world of childhood.

Literature review

An analysis of the literature on the sociological problems of childhood suggests the need for greater inclusion of sociology in the understanding of various childhood phenomena: from Neil Postman's "disappearance of childhood" [5] to the virtually unexplored issues of the ability of children to to overcome difficulties at an amazing level, and their constructions of childhood culture, which have their own meaning in dramatic situations of ethnic discord and wars, migration [6, p.1-2]. It should be noted that one of the central trends in children's research is the quality of life of children.

In world practice, the concept of child well-being or child welfare is often used to describe the quality of life of children. In general, this concept reflects the interaction of external factors (for example, social-economic status, family circumstances, physical environment of the child) with individual characteristics (for example, the personality of the child, cognitive abilities, etc.). As a result, the needs of the child are more or less met and psychological resources, abilities and positive interaction with the world around them are combined.

There are two broad approaches to determining and measuring the well-being of children. The first approach, to consider well-being as a multidimensional concept. Researchers, identify the most important aspects (domains) of children's lives and complement them with indicators that include mental/psychological, physical, and social dimensions. The source of data here is censuses, official statistics, and special social surveys. In the second approach, asking the children themselves directly about how they value their well-being can be a recognized "full children's perspective". Therefore, it is necessary to participate in the design and conduct of research to provide information on how children understand their well-being [7]. But in this case, it is necessary to take into account all the methodological features and ethical aspects discussed above.

An example of this approach is the research carried out within the framework of the program of the British charity "The Children's Society" on the index of wealthy childhood (Good Childhood Index) since 2010.

Specialists developed a brief questionnaire to assess general well-being and related to 10 aspects of life: the use of time, home, family, friends, health, making choices, future, things, appearance, school. Each of the personalized aspects is arranged on a scale of happiness from 0 (completely unhappy) to 10 (very happy) and says "how much you yourself ....?" the questions are asked. Based on these scores, the overall index was calculated [8].

In general, measuring the well-being of children is a very difficult task, as it requires considering various aspects of children's lives, their age and context. In world practice, as a result of

many years of research on child well-being, a sufficient indicator experience of calculating child well-being indices has been accumulated. In most cases, a multidimensional concept is used (identifying vital areas and filling them with indicators).

Child well-being in Kazakhstan in 2012, with the support of the UN children's fund (UNICEF), a team of specialists prepared the report "Child well-being in Kazakhstan" [9], which became a large-scale study. The authors of the study were from the UK (Keetie Roelen), the Netherlands (Franziska Gassmann) and Kazakhstan (Saltanat Kazangapova, Yerlan Abil). As part of this study, a quantitative analysis was carried out based on data from HBS 2009 (household budget study) and MICS 2010 (many indicators of cluster study). The main sections are demographic profile; monetary poverty; child welfare (nutrition, education, health, housing, water supply and sanitation, social inclusion and protection).

In 2015, UNICEF experts proposed a methodology for implementing the "Child-friendly city" initiative in the Republic of Kazakhstan with practical tools for monitoring and assessing the situation of children in cities and districts [10]. Based on the study of the materials of long-term studies of the well-being of children in European countries and the United States, a mixed methodology for studying the well-being of a child was proposed, combining two assessment approaches. As a result, two sets of indicators are obtained: 1) an objective system of indicators in the official statistics database; 2) a subjective assessment of their own well-being by children (considering age characteristics). In this case, special attention should be paid to the second group of indicators, using the sociological methodological arsenal.

The first set of indicators is grouped into 10 domains or areas of life: 1) demographic profile; 2) health; 3) ecology, water supply, pipelines; 4) education; 5) family environment, society; 6) leisure activities; 7) economic aspects; 8) social protection; 9) child-friendly legal justice; 10) access to information. The source of information is official statistics.

The second set of indicators reflects satisfaction with personal living conditions: wealth, housing, nutrition, social protection, participation, etc., as well as the situation in the state: availability of education and health care, safety of life, environmental well-being. The source of data is sociological research based on survey methods with the participation of children.

In 2022, Kazakhstan adopted an official document established the Child Well-being Indez. The Index was approved and enacted by the Decree of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated February 1, 2022. The Index comprises four domains: "child", "family and society", "public policy" and "national well-being". The are also 14 components and 56 indicators. Of these, 36 indicators are based on official statistics, and 20 are derived from survey data [11].

Why is this important? Subjective well-being is an important concept due to a number of circumstances. First, research shows a limiting relationship between well-being and economic prosperity, when the increase in wealth, subjectively, does not mean an increase in well-being. Secondly, the study of subjective well-being can be useful to clarify the most important aspects and factors in a person's life. For example, there are data confirming the importance of family ties and feelings of autonomy, self-sufficiency in the life of a child or young person. Third, there is evidence that low levels of subjective well-being, such as other mental health problems, may be precursors.

In addition, the subjective well-being of children is a phenomenon that is not well understood today. In particular, there is no data on how it changes over time and between groups of children. Until now, data sources have not been created that provide information on trends in the development of subjective well-being. In addition, it is necessary to learn more about the children and young people themselves, how they understand their own well-being. Children's responses can make an important contribution to" indicator-based " information, especially in some areas, such as the quality of family relationships or peer relationships, where it is difficult to determine and collect a satisfactory indicator.

In modern research, the child is shown as a social actor, he/she acts, makes changes and changes under the influence of the environment. This approach does not take into account the differences between adults and children, as it is taken for granted. Addressing a child as a social

actor is aimed at the importance of children's voices, at analyzing the social foundations of constructs created by children. It mainly uses "soft " research methods [12, p.429].

Another modern approach determines the role of the child as a participant or joint researcher. This approach has its roots in the past, it constructs children as active participants in both research and social life. According to P. Christensen and A. Prout's definition, children are represented as active citizens who "must participate, inform, consult and listen" [12, p.430]. The basic principles are the participation of children in their lives, free expression of thoughts, the presence of advice to the children themselves in making decisions related to their lives. In such studies, focus group interviews with children, control with photographs are used [12, p.430-431].

It should be noted that the choice of methods, depending on the research questions, depends on the age characteristics of children, socio-cultural and historical conditions in which children live and interact. The combination of different research methods and the use of different data sources allows for a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of childhood as a social phenomenon. Researchers should also consider the ethical principles that ensure the protection of the rights and well-being of children during the study.

Children require special attention and protection as research participants, so when conducting research involving children, including involving parents or legal representatives, issues must be addressed: consent and awareness; privacy and anonymity; risk assessment for children's physical, psychological and social health; choose research methods taking into account their cognitive abilities to understand problems and situations; prevent manipulation; justifying the importance of research involving children and the relevance of its goals to public and scientific interests. In addition, an expert review and the consent of the Ethics Committee may be required.

Linnea Boden [13] in her article "On, to, with, for, by: ethics and children in research" raises questions about ethics in children's participation in research. Using the cartography method, the researcher reveals three contexts of this problem: ethics as justice, ethics as inclusivity, and ethics as the creation of new potential worlds. All ethical questions arise in the search for ways for children to acquire knowledge about a competent social subject and "their own vision of everyday life and experiences" [13, p.12-13].

Boden suggests that childhood researchers should be more open and have more opportunities in scientific communities to analyze ethical questions, find their own ethical positions, refuse to contrast "new" and "old" methodologies, expand interdisciplinary partnerships, and use multiethnic perspectives. When there are such opportunities, there will be research projects that concern children only when research concerns children in the first place, where children's ethical actions and values are based [13, p.12-13]

In our opinion, a good example of research involving children was the experience of Dutch scientists [14] conducting synchronous online focus groups during the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim of this study was to explore children's perceptions of health, their experiences with physical and mental health issues, and ways to address these problems.

According to the authors, "thematic guides are based on a special health tool" "tools of my dialogue on positive health for children", which allows you to get specific advice from children-to children on improving health [14, p.4]. In total, 76 children aged 10-12 years from nine primary schools, 13 online focus groups were conducted. As a result of the study, not only qualitative data was obtained, but also technical means used, recommendations were obtained, aimed at solving many problems: interaction between children and ethical issues.

Spanish researchers [15] conducted art-based research (ABR) under the positive parenting assessment program involving children. "Listening to children: Evaluation of a positive parenting program through art-based research" presents data from a special assessment of families through the program "we study together, we develop together" [15, p.312-315]. The program is being implemented in 14 cities in Spain. It is based on an assessment using the ABR qualitative research methodology with the participation of 86 children between the ages of 6 and 12 were. In total, 18 semi-structured group interviews with children were carried out. The target audience is families at psychological and social risk.

Through this study, it became known that children's understanding of improvements in their learning and their interpretation of changes in their parenting roles is a very valuable source of evidence for family interventions, program evaluation and a better understanding of the dynamics of families at psychological and social risk [15, p.327]. The application of the ABR methodology has made it possible to identify these perceptions and opens a new perspective on research related to children. It will be especially effective in evaluating programs that contribute to the positive education of children in order to prevent neglect.

The work emphasizes the ethical orientation of the proposed research. During the assessment, all participants in the study were duly informed about the educational process. Informed written consent only parents who agreed to the audio recording of the interview and the collection of pictures of their children were interviewed. The oral version of the informed consent was obtained from children who agreed to audio recording of interviews, collecting, and reproducing their images. During the study, a protocol was put into effect that ensures the confidentiality and anonymity of the information received, approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of La Laguna [15, p.319].

Modern childhood researchers are actively involved in protecting children's rights: they study social and structural factors that affect their well-being and development, which, in turn, helps to formulate policies aimed at improving the quality of life of children. The change in the concepts of childhood and children, in turn, led to the emergence of questions about the quality of life of children, indicators and methods of measuring it.

METHODOLOGY

This article is considered the result of desk research or office (documentary) research by analyzing data obtained from scientific articles, reports, internet resources that presented the results of the analysis of the phenomenon of childhood. The authors have turned to the Scopus database of peer-reviewed scientific literature over the past five years. The main method was a theoretical analysis of the approaches proposed in the scientific literature to determining the content of the concept of "childhood" and "child well-being", as well as a review of research on this topic.

The method of obtaining primary sociological data is an expert survey, when specialists in a specific subject area answer questions on certain problems. This method is used to obtain information about complex or specialized topics where expert opinion have great value. The result of the interview is "rich qualitative data on the experience and knowledge of the participants, as they describe this experience and meanings, which they attribute to this experience" [16, p.3].

The object of the expert survey was the well-being of children. The subject was the well-being of children in difficult life situation. The choice of this category of children was due to the fact that most sociological studies of children's well-being and quality of life often do not focus on all categories of children. The term "difficult life situation" allows to go beyond the usual sociological samples and approaches to the analysis of childhood, thereby expanding the sociological perspective.

By difficult life situation (DLS) we understand circumstances or conditions that significantly complicate a person's life, creating stress, a threat to his physical, psychological or social well-being. It is important that in DLS, an individual or a family usually does not have enough of their own resources to get out of it. In the context of children, difficult life situations may include lack of stable living, lack of care and attention from parents or caregivers, abuse, neglect of needs, and other forms of disadvantage that interfere with the normal development and well-being of children.

The purpose of the expert survey was to deepen the understanding of childhood in the context of difficult life situation and the role of adults in their well-being. The main research question was formulated as follows: *What factors determine the well-being of children in difficult life situations and what is necessary to ensure this well-being?*

The hypothesis is as follows: the well-being of children in difficult life situations largely depends on their ability to access the necessary services and specialists, as well as the availability of comprehensive state programs to support children.

The concept of "expert" can include not only "professionals" in the narrow sense of the word, i.e. people with academic degrees and high-ranking managers [17, p.142-143]. The range of people who are aware of the subject of interest to the researcher can be wider. Expert surveys are aimed at obtaining knowledge, not opinion. Knowledge of certain problems can be possessed only by those who have personal social experience in a particular area: personally acquired some experience or were direct witnesses of situations that are the subject of research.

The number of experts to be interviewed is determined by the specific situation and the goals of the study. The optimal number of experts may vary depending on the purpose of the study, the complexity of the topic, and the availability of experts. Within the framework of the presented study, 111 experts from various fields of activity were interviewed with a focus on children in difficult life situations: social workers, school teachers, university professors, medical workers, psychologists, educators, lawyers, representatives of juvenile justice, civil servants, as well as employees of research structures and NGOs, including parents of children with disabilities.

In the selection of experts, target samples are traditionally used with an emphasis on the search for carriers of experience / knowledge. But the researchers say that sounding is more important for obtaining rich data, delving into the topic and hints, refinement (prompting), rather than the number of interviews collected [18, p.11]. That is, a small sample with intensive probing of the topic will be more productive than a large sample with superficial interviews without probing. Within the framework of the presented study, the main criteria for the selection of experts were the availability of professional knowledge about children, various aspects of their lives, experience in working with children, including difficult life situations, and willingness to take part in the survey. Experts were recruited by the snowball method, in compliance with the principle of anonymity and confidentiality.

To collect data, a semi-standardized questionnaire was developed, which included questions aimed at identifying the key factors of children's well-being, the role of the family and the state in it, identifying the problems faced by children in difficult life situations, the extent to which the needs of these children were met by the state and society; access to services; as well as assessing the effectiveness of state programs aimed at the well-being of children. This format allowed for the collection of both quantitative assessments and qualitative expert judgments.

Data collection was conducted online in compliance with the principles of voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality. The survey link was sent to experts individually via e-mail or through professional and organizational channels (messenger apps, internal mailing list of NGO and institutions working with children). Prior to receiving the questionnaire, each potettial participant was provided with a brief cover letter explaining the objectives of the study, conditions of participation, and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. Participation in the survey was entirely voluntary.

Qantitative data were analized using descriptivw statistical methods, while open-ended responses were processed through content analysis with thematic categoriozation of key expert perspectives.

It should be noted that conducting an expert survey on the problems of children in difficult life situations is justified primarily by ethical considerations, age characteristics of children and difficulties in interacting with parents. An expert survey provides accurate and reliable data while minimizing potential harm and discomfort to children and their families. This research method ensures the protection of the rights and interests of children, compliance with ethical standards and obtaining quality information for the development of effective support and assistance measures.

RESULTS

The problems of children who are especially in difficult life situations (DLS) require a very careful and delicate approach from the researcher. As mentioned earlier, in this case, one of the most effective research methods is to conduct an expert survey. The rationale for choosing an expert survey is primarily related to ethical considerations related to the need to protect the rights and interests of children in a difficult life situation, their increased vulnerability and the age characteristics of their cognitive and emotional spheres. Another important argument in favor of turning to an expert opinion is the difficulty of interacting with parents, their resistance, stress and anxiety.

As part of the expert survey, a happy childhood was defined as "a *period in a child's life when they feel loved and protected, when they have the opportunity to play, learn, explore the world around them, develop physically and emotionally. Important components of a happy childhood include the love and care of parents, a safe and stimulating environment, the opportunity to communicate with other children, freedom for creativity and self-expression, and support in developing their unique abilities and interests. A happy childhood leaves long-term positive traces in a person's life, forming their personality, attitude to the world around them and the ability to be happy.*"

According to experts, the family is a fundamental factor in a happy childhood: "*the family plays a central role in creating conditions for a happy childhood, providing not only material benefits, but also emotional and psychological support necessary for the healthy development and well-being of the child.*" This position is confirmed by the answers to the closed-ended question of the questionnaire "*What factors, in your opinion, affect the well-being of the child?*95.5% of the survey participants chose the answer "family and parental support", emotional support and upbringing are in second place (49.5% of the elections), and socio-economic conditions are in third place (46.8% of the elections). For more details, see Picture 1.
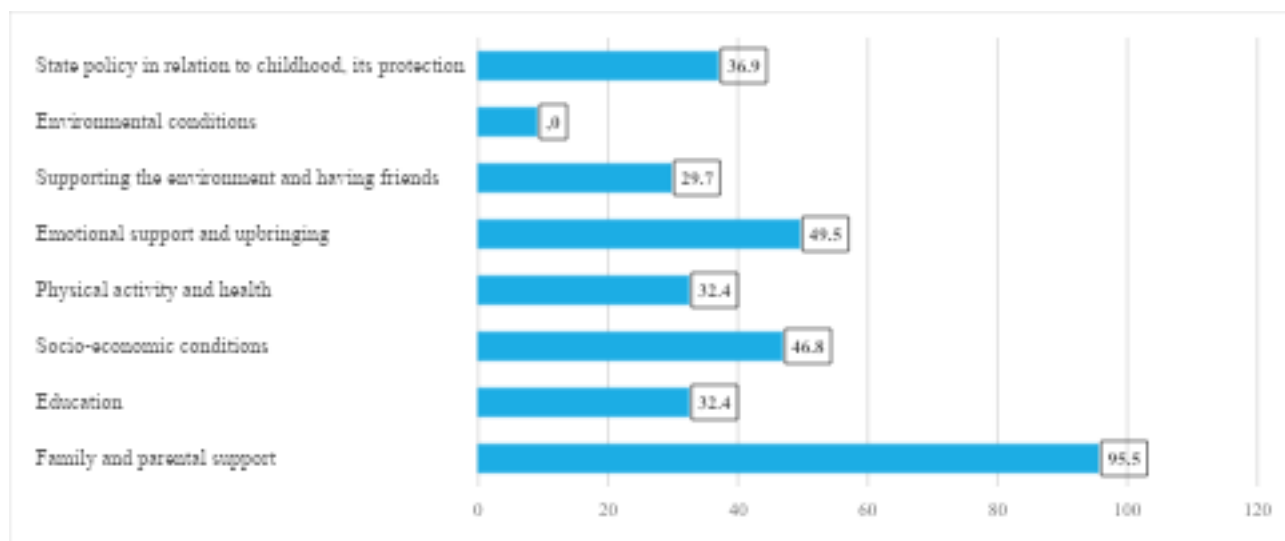
Picture 1 – Dispersion of answers to the question "What factors, in your opinion, affect the well-being of the child?, %

Child well-being and family well-being are closely interrelated, as the family is the primary social institution in which children grow and develop. The family environment has a significant impact on a child's physical, emotional and psychological well-being. Key factors that contribute to the well-being of both children and the family as a whole include economic status, educational attainment, social relationships, and the quality of interactions among family members. The family is not only a nurturing environment for children, but also the mainstay for their healthy development, and the state of well-being of parents and other family members directly affects the vitality and success of future generations.

Thus, the mass survey "Factors influencing the formation of a prosperous family", conducted by Kazakhstan Institute of Social Development [19, p.124-125], determined the following factors of family well-being: the conditions of "mutual love and respect" - 88.8%; "relationship between children and parents" - 85.2%; "absence of addictions among family members" - 83.3% were named as an obligatory condition of a well-being family. At the same time, the factors "having many children" (37.2%) and "having few children" (41.6%) were not important in the majority (see Table 1).
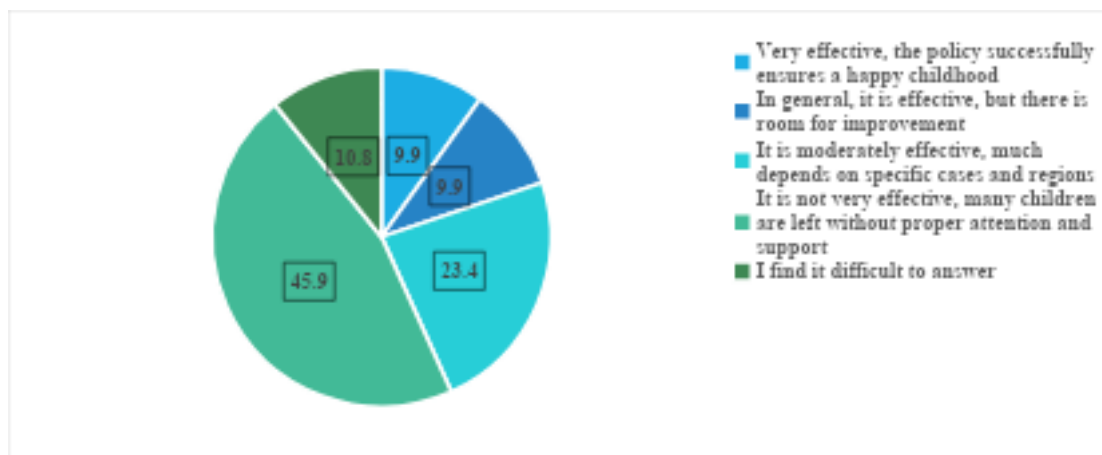
Table 1 - Distribution of answers to the question: "In your opinion, what is necessary for a family to be considered prosperous?", %

Conditions	Mandatory condition	Desirable, but not mandatory	Doesn't make much difference
Official registration of marriage	61,3	29,1	9,6
A stable, long-lasting marriage	73,4	21,2	5,5
Full family (presence of both parents children)	71,8	21,2	7,1
Having many children (at least 4 children)	23,5	39,3	37,2
Small children (less than 4 children)	17,0	41,4	41,6
No housing problems	65,5	27,3	7,2
No financial problems	70,8	24,3	4,9
Physical and psychological family health	79,3	16,6	4,1
Mutual love and respect	88,8	9,4	1,8
No addictions among family members (alcohol, drugs, gambling)	83,3	12,6	4,1
Mutual understanding between children and parents	85,2	12,5	2,3

Source: Sociological research KIPD.kz. Sample - 2400 respondents, 2024.
https://kipd.kz/article/analiticheskiy-otchet-po-rezultatam-sotsiologicheskogo-issledovaniya-na-temu-faktory-vliyayuschie-na-formirovanie-blagopoluchnoy-semi

Most of the experts assess the efforts of the state to ensure a happy childhood as not very effective, since "*many children are left without proper attention and support*" (45.9% of elections). 23.4% of experts define this policy as effective at an average level, noting that "*much depends on specific cases and regions*». An equal number of survey participants believe that the state pursues an effective and generally effective policy in ensuring a happy childhood (9.9% each). Details are in Picture 2.

Picture 2 – Dispersion of answers to the question "In your opinion, to what extent
Is the state policy effective to ensure that the childhood of every child is happy?", %

Of the programs listed in the questionnaire aimed at supporting children's well-being and development, the most successful were the Damubala initiative (28.8% of elections) and the national program "National Fund for Children" (18.0% of elections). Professionals commented that the population is poorly informed about such state projects to support children, some believe that the work carried out within individual institutions is a more effective tool for improving children's well-being.

At the same time, according to professionals, the least supported by the state and society are children "*growing up in families that are in a difficult life situation, but do not have a certain status. In such families, parents often do not know where, how and from whom to get support, they do not know about their rights, services, existing programs, benefits*."

During the study, we identified the following categories of children in a difficult life situation:

1. Children left without parental care (orphans)
2. Children with disabilities, with chronic diseases, including HIV-infection
3. Abused children or victims of violence
4. Children in family crises (divorce, domestic violence, etc.)
5. Children living on the streets or in disadvantaged areas
6. Children who abuse substances or alcohol
7. Children who have committed offenses
8. Children experiencing psychological or emotional difficulties
9. Children experiencing difficulties in learning or adapting at school
10. Children in migration processes

Experts point out that the most common problems faced by children in a difficult life situation are, first of all, difficulties in meeting basic needs "*when parents cannot provide the child with adequate daily food, stable housing, cannot dress and shoe their children; Then there are problems with lack of attention and care from adults, children are left to themselves.*" The lack of a meaningful, stable and safe adult with whom you can honestly and frankly talk about your fears, troubles, domestic violence, leads children to loneliness, leaving the family, initiation of substance use and the formation of addictions. Participants in the expert survey write that "*due to the infantilism of parents, children, as a rule, are not covered by medical and other services, sometimes there are even no documents for the child.*"
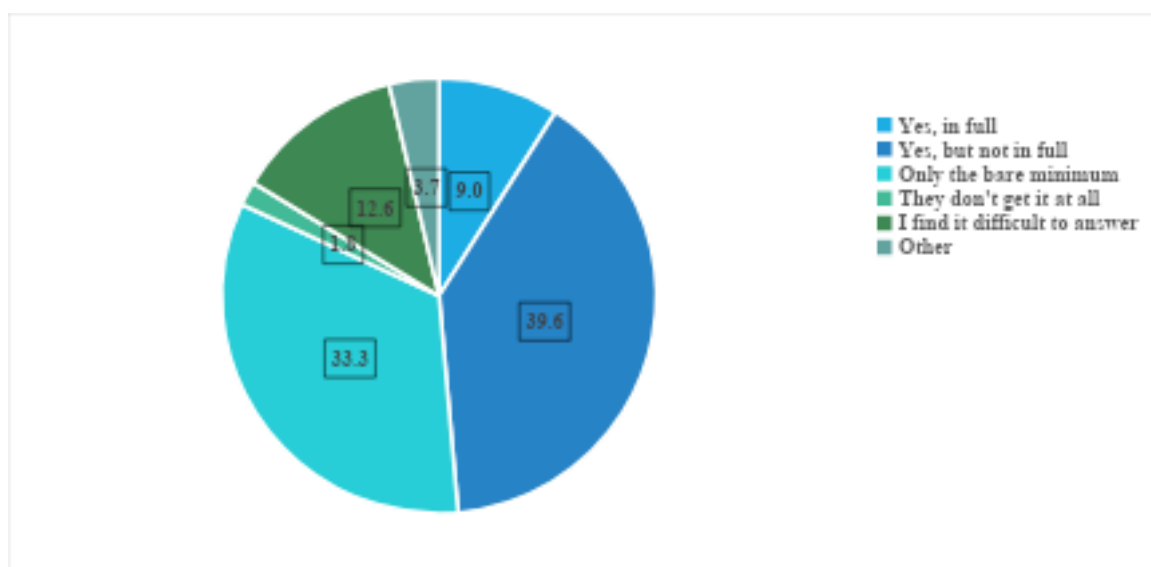
Children in a difficult life situation experience difficulties with social adaptation, are bullied by peers, stigmatized. At the same time, the system of psychological assistance so necessary for these children is *"either fragmentary or one-time"*. Experts point to the lack of qualified child psychologists who are ready to work with difficult life situations. If we are talking about childhood disability or serious illnesses, then help is often needed by adult family members: in accepting the diagnosis, providing access to treatment, informing about the peculiarities of the course of the disease, overcoming trauma. As a result, such an adult cannot always be a support for the child.

In the process of developing the toolkit, we identified 11 categories of the basic needs of children in DLS: 1) good nutrition; 2) quality education; 3) prevention of diseases; 4) medical treatment and supervision; 5) sanatorium-and-spa treatment; 6) rehabilitation; 7) adaptation; 8) social benefits; 9) provision of necessary equipment or footwear for the child's health condition; 10) the help of specialists necessary for the child; 11) interaction with other children, inclusion in communication. When asked whether these basic needs and the needs of children in difficult life situations are met by the state and society, the experts replied that most often this applies to "*only a certain group of children*". Details are in Picture 3.
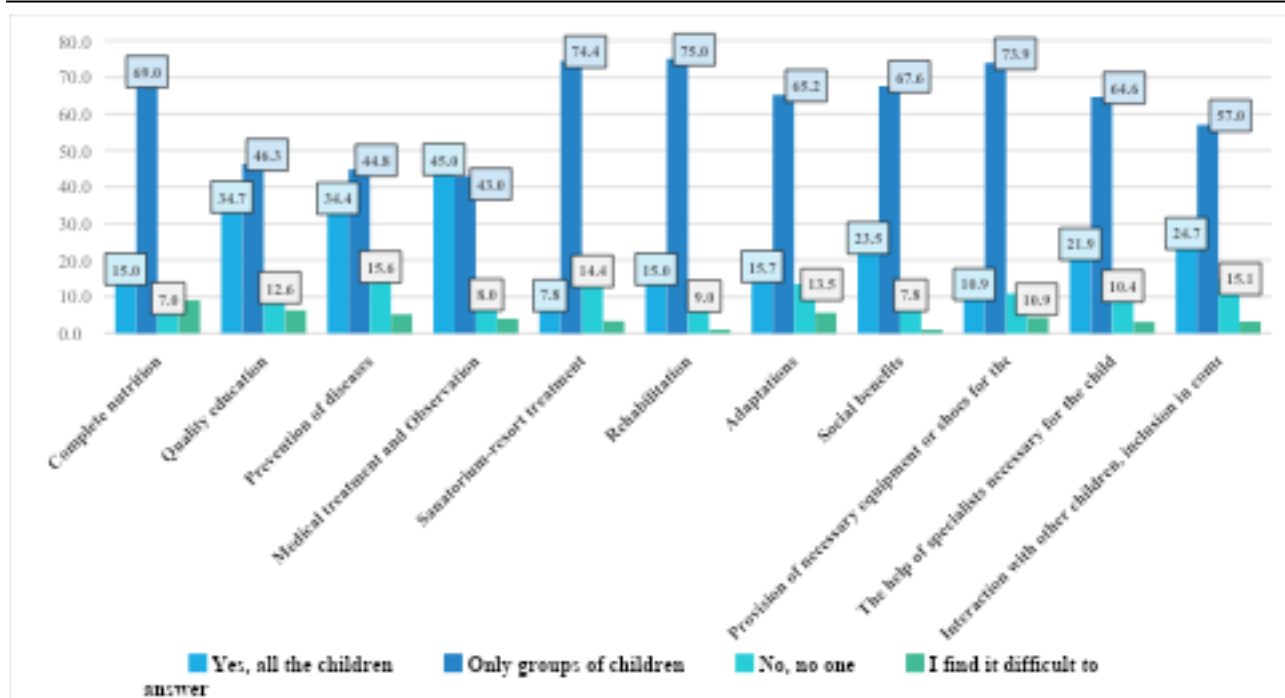
Picture 3 – Dispersion of answers to the question "Do you think the needs and requirements of children in difficult life situations are mainly met by the state and society?», %

In the opinion of most experts, children in difficult life situations receive the necessary services, but not in full (39.4% of elections). This can be illustrated by the commentary: "*only those children who have a certain status receive certain services (not all), confirmation that they belong to the category that has the right to receive services in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan".* Another 33.3% of survey participants believe that only the minimum of services is provided (Picture 4).

Picture 4 – Dispersion of answers to the question "In your opinion, do children in difficult life situations receive all the necessary services?", %

Experts point to legislative restrictions that cause barriers to obtain the necessary assistance: "... *There are many children in families who are in DLS and need a different range of social services, but they do not officially belong to any category of service recipients (list in the Social Code). They also do not have the opportunity to receive these services for a fee. Consequently, these families and children are left behind.*" There is also such a factor that the condition for receiving a service is an appeal to it from the family, which does not always happen.

It is difficult to assess the subjective well-being of children in a difficult life situation without directly referring to communication with them. But the answers of expert psychologists and teachers allow us to say that these children are characterized by psychological and emotional instability, aggression, irritability, and stiffness. They experience loneliness, isolation and stigmatization (up to suicidal intentions), do not trust adults, and are afraid to share their experiences. Even more important in this case is access to those specialists who can compensate for the negative impact of the environment on the well-being of children in DLS.

DISCUSSION

According to the results of the mass survey [19, p.146], the factors of aggressive behavior especially during adolescence, are virtual games on a computer or phone most often lead to aggressive behavior in adolescents (39.5%). A little more than a third of respondents (35.3%) believe that the example of aggressive behavior in the family is the cause of aggression of adolescents. Lack of parental warmth and attention to children was mentioned by 30.1% of the survey participants. Other reasons that lead to aggressive behavior of adolescents are noted in Table 2 below.

Table 2 - Distribution of answers to the question "In your opinion, what reasons lead to aggressive behavior of teenagers?", %

| AnswerVariants	Number of choices, %
Authoritarian, strict parents	11,3
No restrictions in the family	14,3
Lack of warmth and attention of parents to children	30,1
An example of aggressive behavior in the family	35,3
Harmful habits alcoholism, drug addiction, gambling addiction	28,3
Unfavorable school environment	15,5
Virtual games (on computer/phone)	39,5
Violent scenes on television, on the Internet	18,2
Personal qualities	9,1
Transition age	18,8
Mismatch between what is desired and what is real	9,8
Difficult to answer	4,3

Source: Sociological research KIPD.kz. Sample - 2400 respondents, 2024.

https://kipd.kz/article/analiticheskiy-otchet-po-rezultatam-sotsiologicheskogo-issledovaniya-na-temu-faktory-vliyayuschie-na-formirovanie-blagopoluchnoy-semi

The impact of digital content on the mental health of children and adolescents is no longer disputed by anyone. According to research by the American Psychological Association, the most important factors affecting the mental health of children and adolescents are the following [20, p.62]:

- the amount of time children and young people spend on platforms;
- the type of content they consume or are otherwise exposed to;
- the types of activities and interactions that social media provide;
- the extent to which they disrupt health-critical activities such as sleep and physical activity.

It is important to note that children and adolescents are differentially affected by social media depending on their individual strengths and vulnerabilities, as well as cultural, historical and socio-economic factors. The results of a study by the WHO Regional Office for Europe [20, p.62] showed the following the following groups of media users among adolescents in Kazakhstan (Picture 5).
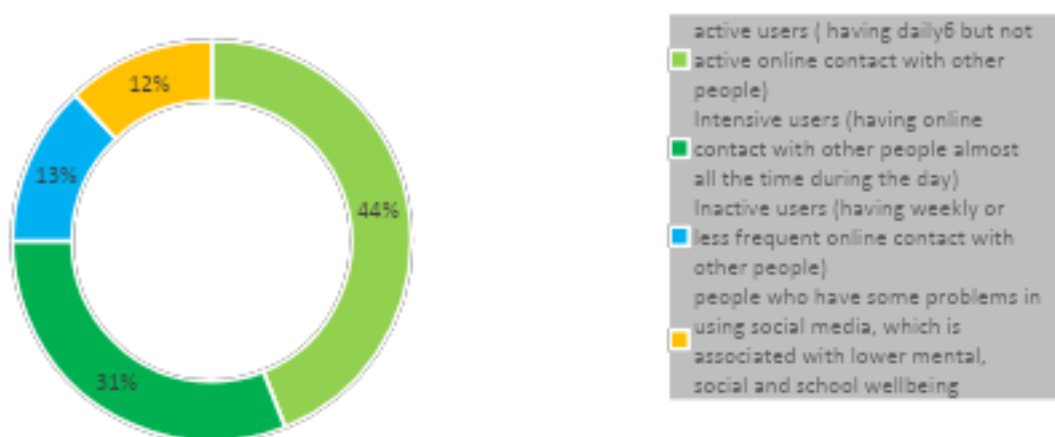
Picture 5 – The groups of media users among adolescents? %

Source: Methodological guide "Child Safety in the Digital Space: Methodological Guide for Parents and Teachers" https://kipd.kz/article/bezopasnost-detey-v-tsifrovom-prostranstve-metodicheskoe-posobie-dlya-roditeley-i-uchiteley

Scientists and doctors have conducted many studies that show a link between the time teens spend on social media and an increased risk of depression and anxiety.

A study from the American Academy of Pediatrics (2016) states that teens who spend more than three hours a day on social media have an increased risk of mental health problems including depression, anxiety disorders, and suicidal tendencies. This is due to the social comparison effect and feelings of social isolation that come from observing the "perfect" lifestyles of others [21, p. 3].

A study by the University of Pittsburgh (2016) found "strong and significant association between social media use and depression in a nationally-representative sample of U.S. young adults". Participants in the experiment who used social media less reported reduced negative emotions compared to a control group [22, p.15].

A research report titled Status of Mind by the Royal Society of Public Health (2017) concluded that platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat were the most harmful to young people's mental health. They contributed to self-esteem issues, anxiety and depression due to the visual nature of the content and the prevalence of idealized images of life [23, p.8-10].

A study published in JAMA Psychiatry, the medical journal of the American Medical Association, found an association between increased time spent on social media and an increased risk of depression in adolescents. The authors of the study argue that more time on social media contributes to increased negative thoughts and comparing oneself to others, which can negatively affect emotional well-being [24, p.1271].

In what direction should the efforts of the state and society be developed to improve the well-being of children, especially in relation to children in DLS? Experts are unanimous that a comprehensive approach is needed, including the following measures:

1. Raising public awareness of children's problems, bullying and violence, focusing on the diversity of the concept of childhood and the diversity of children's groups.

2. Ensuring a safe and comfortable environment for the life and development of all children, expanding access to services related to child development, increasing the number of specialists in various fields working with children.

3. Development of the range of psychological assistance for children and parents, increasing its accessibility.

3. Revision of the conditions for obtaining state assistance, expansion of the categories of children and families in the DLS, development of regional family centers and programs to combat child disadvantages.

4. Definition of the concept and methodology for calculating the child budget for further decision-making in the country, as well as the development of the Child Well-Being Index.

It should also be added that in the context of the issues considered in the article, it is very important to develop ethical rules regarding research related to children, their well-being, especially those in DLS.

CONCLUSION

The study of childhood is currently a broad layer in the structure of sociological knowledge. The complexity of the phenomenon of childhood presents sociologists with a number of difficulties: from the need to justify the approaches to its study, the formation of an active social position of sociology, to the problems of realizing children's rights, methods of expressing children's voices and the need to solve ethical dilemmas.

It can be said that in the last decade, sociology has made significant progress in the issues of involving children in research, the formation of interdisciplinary trends and understanding the phenomenon of childhood in general. As mentioned, several times in this article, combining different research methods and using different data sources gives good results.

Understanding the complexity of children's lives, the importance of protecting their rights, it directs scientific communities to study such phenomena as the well-being of children. The history of children's well-being research spans several decades. Most often, a multidimensional approach is used, as well as objective and subjective indicators of the well-being of children are distinguished.

Today, the subjective side of this phenomenon is still not sufficiently studied, since it involves the involvement of children in assessing their life, its individual aspects and personality. We present a set of indicators, both for assessing the objective side of the well-being of children, and for its subjective indicators. These indicators will be produced based on children's self-assessment of aspects of their lives such as wealth, housing, nutrition, social protection, participation, education and health, life safety and environmental well-being.

In the sociological study of children, through an objective and subjective assessment, we get to know their daily practice closely, this set of knowledge allows us to truly know their well-being, health, and, if possible, their worldview. By recognizing the well-being of children, the quality of life, we can build assumptions, models of what future generations can be, which, in turn, means that researchers determine the picture of the future society.

The results of the expert survey confirm the need to expand the concept of children's well-being, show the heterogeneity of the concept of "children in difficult life situations", focus on the role of specialists in ensuring their well-being and getting out of DLS. Kazakh sociologists need to fill the existing gaps in understanding childhood and the needs of various categories of children, develop methodological tools and address directly children's experience, including children's living through difficult life situations.

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