

UDRUŽENJE ZA PODRŠKU I KREATIVNI RAZVOJ DJECE I MLADIH  
EDUKACIJSKO-REHABILITACIJSKI FAKULTET  
UNIVERZITETA U TUZLI

**UNAPREĐENJE KVALITETE ŽIVOTA  
DJECE I MLADIH**

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# UNAPREĐENJE KVALITETE ŽIVOTA DJECE I MLADIH

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# QUALITY OF LIFE OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER FAMILIES

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*Stručni rad*

## ABSTRACT

The family is the natural environment for the growth and development of each child that enables security and sense of belonging. Unfortunately, there are situations when the children lack the opportunity to grow in their biological family with their parents, and they need care in an institution or foster family. Generally accepted UNICEF slogan "every child needs a family" justifies the alternative care of children without parents or parental care in foster families. In the Republic of Macedonia there is not sufficient research on the quality of life of children fostered in the institutions and families. This was the main reason for setting up our research. Subject of research is the quality of life of children in foster care. The aim of the research is to assess the quality of lives of children in foster families and to recommend the directions for further improvement. We used descriptive method and scales as research techniques with appropriate indicators for measuring the objective and subjective well-being of the lives of children in foster families. The sample contains 30 children in families. Collected data were treated with quantitative and qualitative analyses. The results point out the critical areas for further intervention in order to improve life of children in the foster families

**Keywords:** Quality of life, objective and subjective well-being, foster families

## INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Macedonia, as a co-signer of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (state-member), takes all necessary legal, administrative, social and educational measures to protect children as well as conducts all activities that are in the best interest of the children. Based on the legal regulations in the Republic of Macedonia, the children without parents and parental care are included in the system for Social protection through which these children are provided help and support according to their individual needs and life situations. A child without parental care is a child whose parents are not alive, are missing, are unknown or have an unknown residential address more than a year as well as a child whose parents regardless of the reasons, temporary or permanently – do not perform their parental rights and obligations. The category - children without parents - includes children that have tragically lost their parents out of many reasons (accident, disease etc.). Children without parental care are children for whom we possess evidence that they live with parents who are not capable to look after and take care of them, neglect their basic needs or violate their rights. These children are exposed to a special kind of risk and they have hard lives, experiences and conditions. Each of them carries a specific burden. Some of these children have different traumas (deep emotional shocks) due to losses or accidents. Certain number of these children has not been included in the regular educational process and regardless of their age they are illiterate. The inadequate, dysfunctional families which these

children are part of have influenced negatively on their development leaving permanent marks on the children's psychological condition. The quality of love of each child is conditioned by many components. Most of them refer to the social factors, the family environment, housing and material condition of the family, social status of the family, quality of family relations inside the family system, protective and educational parental role in the life of the child, furthermore the school, interacting with children of the same age etc. The family is the first and most important environment where the child begins its life and personal development. A healthy family system is a precondition for a healthy and rightful development of the offspring. The family is a system and natural context where the child is brought into the world, grows and is developed. The family system is usually defined as a social group, which is characterized by specific functions: biological-reproductive, economic, protective, educational, sexual, emotional, and socialization. However, what makes the family distinctive from other social groups is the togetherness, interactions that exist between the members of the family and the quality of emotions within their mutual relations. According to the analysis of the conditions of the children without parents and/or parental care prepared by the Institute for Social Works, based on the data provided by the 30 centers for social work, there have been total of 1530 registered children in 2016 that were without parents and parental care up to 26 years of age. And in city of Skopje have registreted 201 foster family who was care about 67 children. A family is created by giving birth and with adoption. The family is the first group that the child belongs to and where it functions, grows and develops. Belonging to a family is something that is given; it is not something one chooses. Individuals are created, grown and exist within the family, and the family is called the family of origin. The family should provide support to the child in all its phases of development, among which are the period of its separation and integration in the wide social community. The family should provide the environment where the child will develop its potentials and will grow into a healthy and socially useful person. The quality of life that the child receives in the primary family system during childhood and adolescence directly influences in the child's development and its forming as a person. Therefore the family has an indispensable meaning in the life of each child. In a wider sense the family, as a basic cell, has a very significant meaning in every society. Unfortunately in each society there are a large number of children that live without the support of one or both parents, children who suffer from abuse, neglect, children who live in poverty and are exploited and not provided any care at all. A large number of children live in families that do not offer healthy and friendly family environment live with parents who do not have the capacities to provide the necessary parental love, care and protection to the children. These children usually lack the basic needs (food, clothing, heating) and their quality of life is at the lowest level. The bas social conditions (unemployment, social insecurity, lowered social standards) additionally bring to weakening of the family systems in one society and in the increase of all the negative issues: family violence, juvenile delinquency, alcoholism, disorganization and bad family relations and values. As a consequence for the loss or the deranged social relations, a large number of children remain without parental care, leaving their faith to unknown people, who they expect to provide them compassion, love and protection. What does the state do in relation to the children without parents and parental care?How does the state protect

these children and where does she place/accommodate them? What are the living conditions within the foster families? What are the child's needs and what is the quality of their life after they leave the family home? How do the children feel in their new home? The term quality of life refers to the wellbeing of people. The sum of the wellbeing of all individuals in the society refers to the so-called "general wellbeing". The rise of people's wellbeing is directly connected to their freedom to choose. The quality of life contains several components. Some of them are measurable, like life standard, and others are not measurable, like: happiness, freedom of choice, life environment, free time, safety, social life etc. However, most of the part of the quality of life refers to the life standard of people. The term life standard refers to the material component of the quality of life of people and basically, explains the biggest part of this term. It represents the quantity and quality of the goods and services available to people as well as the ways these goods and services are distributed among people. The life standard includes all elements that influence the conditions under which the person lives and works; it represents the level of satisfaction of the material and other needs of the people which are created on a certain level from the development of the production forces and the social relations (Berkovic, 1997). The more significant norms for quality of life are: index of quality of life, index of human development, index of physical quality of life, total national happiness (content), and others. Of all of them, the most frequent use is given to the index of quality of life and the index of the human development. The human development is another term closely related to the life standard and the quality of life among people. In a broader sense, the quality of life refers to personal fulfillment, content and quality of social relations that are created between the individual and the environment. The quality of life depends on many outside factors, like political, economical, health protection, culture and tradition in one country, thus when determining the indicators for measuring the quality of life of a certain target group, one should take a multidimensional approach. The World Health Organization defines the term quality of life as the perception of life by the individual, of his/her own position within the culture and the values of the system where he/she lives, in relation to the goals, expectations, standards and problems within the environment (WHO, 1995). Therefore we can conclude that the basic components within the assessment of the quality of life are:

- physical condition;
- social functioning of the beneficiary;
- mental status of the beneficiary;
- personal perception of health and its components;
- number of years of life expectancy;
- indicators for the economic condition of the beneficiary.

The quality of a child's life is conditioned by the type of the family system it will grow into and how much will that family system be able to fulfill the child's necessary components for a quality life.

According to the Law on Social protection of the Republic of Macedonia (Off. Gazette of RM, no.50/97 article 16) the right to a location/accommodation to another family is given to people who do not have appropriate living conditions within their own family, or from other reasons they need to be placed in another family, where other forms of



care cannot be provided. Among the territory of the city of Skopje, only the form of foster family is present as a form of care that is outside the institutions.

Right to be placed in a foster family is provided to:

- A child without parents and parental care, until he/she is capable to have an individual life and can work by him/herself, until he/she finishes high school if there are no other possibilities to provide the care and upbringing in another way
- A child with educational and social problems (abused, neglected and social unsecured child) as well as a child victim of domestic/ family violence
- Juvenile/minor perpetrator of a criminal act or a violation
- A person with mild or heavy disabilities in the mental development, a person with deep disabilities in the mental development and a person with permanent bodily disability that requires a permanent care and
- Old person, adult person and person with disabilities in the mental development that is not capable to look after him/herself however, due to the residential and family condition there is no possibility to provide him/her with protection in any other way.

### **Subject of the research**

Quality of life of the children placed in foster families in the City of Skopje

### **Separate hypothesis**

The quality of life is good provided that:

- the level of education of the care provider/giver is higher
- the work experience is bigger
- the economic situation is better
- the living conditions are on a higher, better level
- the age of the child is younger

Subject of this research is to study the quality of life of the children without parents and/or parental care, who are placed in foster families in the City of Skopje. Having in mind the subject of the research, when executing it, we have taken into consideration many aspects that influence the quality of life of the child in the family system. The research was realized on the territory of the City of Skopje and it included 39 families that are registered as foster families at the Center for Social Works in Skopje, where 30 healthy children (all questioned for the research) and 19 children with special needs have been placed.

### **METHODS**

During the research we used a questionnaire specially designed for this research as well as a test to measure the quality of life - The Manchester Short Assessment of Quality of Life - MANSA. The scale consists of 16 questions; the questions are grouped and make up 5 factors used to measure content of the people being tested from different aspects and situations that are important for the quality of life: Social activities, general content, content from the physical and mental health, social contacts, and personal safety.

## CONCLUSION

The primary goal of this research is to improve the quality of life of the children without parents and/or parental care who are placed in systems where they are provided with care outside the institutions. Protection of children without parents and/or parental care is a complex area which includes several important segments: social and citizen responsibility, laws and regulations, institutional and human resources for appropriate placement of these children as well as a continuous and professional support of their personal and professional development, by trained care providers/givers, experts, as well as people employed in different systems of the society (nursery schools, schools, health system etc.) which provide their own contribution in the development of the child's personality. Through the recorded data and the determined differences and through this research, we are given the possibility to locate separate parts in the process of care, where we could encourage the rise of the criteria for care and encourage positive changes in the direction to achieving a higher level of quality of life for the children without parental care. The given results regarding the content of the children from the social activities (factor 1), where we have: free time, living conditions, personal safety from the people they live with and family relations. More than 67% of the people tested have responded that they are satisfied from the realization of their social activities. The result from the general content, content of the personal life (factor 2) shows that 74% of the children are content. The content of the children is higher than the physical and mental health, more than 79%, factor 3. A high percent of content was shown by the children for factor 4 social contacts (friendship, number of visits of friends and quality of relations) 96%. Regarding the questions related to personal safety - factor 5, 100% of the children responded that they have not been victims of violence and have not participated in any criminal activity. The research has shown that the quality of life of the children is better if the care provider/giver has a higher educational status, which also refers to the higher work experience. It has also shown that the quality of life among children is better if the economical and living conditions are better. The research also showed that the younger the care provider/giver the better the quality of life of the child, as well as the younger the child the better the quality of life of the child. The results of this research will serve for the expert public to gain new knowledge and encourage the application of new methods and procedures in order to improve the form of care in another family.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase of the preventive measures and activities from the system for social protection of the child within his/her biological environment
- Raising the level of promotion of the foster families
- Promotion of the knowledge and skills of the care providers/givers
- Enabling systematic and services outside the institutions for support for the care providers/givers and the children with problematic behavior
- Preparation for specialized programs for working with children, which will be appropriate for the different kinds of foster families

- Bigger cooperation of the institutions for social protection and the foster families with the local community
- Increasing the financial support for the care providers/givers registered in the Center for Social works

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