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# Extra Section | Вне тематики

DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY | ПСИХОЛОГИЯ РАЗВИТИЯ

# Sociocultural Adaptation Strategies as Psychological Well-Being Predictors among Children of Foreign Citizens in Russia

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The aim of the study is to examine how the psychological well-being of children of foreign citizens is determined by their focusing on preserving the culture of their country of origin and accepting Russian culture, as well as by the level of expression of their national (Russian) and ethnic identity. Methods: Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale by E.S. Huebner, adapted by O.A. Sychev et al., Acculturation Scale for Children and Adolescents by O.E. Khukhlaev and M.Y. Chibisova, Measure of Youth's Ethnic and National Identity, MYENI adapted by O.E. Khukhlaev, sociometric testing. The sample consisted of 669 children of foreign citizens, immigrants from the countries of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, aged 7 to 17 years. As a result of regression analysis, significant positive correlations between sociocultural adaptation and psychological well-being indicators were obtained in the sample of primary school, middle school and high school students. It was revealed that among primary and middle school students, integration strategy orientation serves as predictor of psychological well-being, while among high school students, such a predictor is assimilative strategy.

**Keywords:** strategies of sociocultural adaptation; psychological well-being; life satisfaction; children of foreign citizens; migrant children.

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# Стратегии социокультурной адаптации как предикторы психологического благополучия детей иностранных граждан в России

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Цель исследования — изучение характера детерминации психологического благополучия детей иностранных граждан ориентацией на сохранение культуры страны исхода и на включенность в российскую культуру, а также выраженностью гражданской (российской) и этнической идентичности. Использовались методики: Многомерная шкала удовлетворенности жизнью школьников (Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale, MSLSS) Е.С. Хюбнер, адаптированная О.А. Сычевым с коллегами, Опросник аккультурации для детей и подростков О.Е. Хухлаева, М.Ю. Чибисовой, Методика измерения этнической и национальной идентичности детей и подростков (Measure of Youth's Ethnic and National Identity, MYENI) в адаптации

О.Е. Хухлаева, социометрическая процедура. Выборку составили 669 детей иностранных граждан — выходцев из стран Таджикистана, Узбекистана, Кыргызстана, Казахстана, Украины, Армении, Азербайджана в возрасте от 7 до 17 лет. В результате регрессионного анализа в выборке школьников младших, средних и старших классов получены значимые положительные взаимосвязи между показателями социокультурной адаптации и показателями психологического благополучия. Выявлено, что у учащихся начальной и средней школы предиктором психологического благополучия выступает ориентация на стратегию интеграции, тогда как у старшеклассников таким предиктором является ассимилятивная стратегия.

**Ключевые слова:** стратегии социокультурной адаптации; психологическое благополучие; удовлетворенность жизнью; дети иностранных граждан; дети-мигранты.

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## Introduction

According to statistics from the official website of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs, the number of migrants of other ethnicities in the Russian Federation is growing every year [9], which draws increasing attention to the problem of their adaptation and successful entry into Russian society. The adaptation of migrant children is of particular importance. Firstly, in the context of population decline, migrant children may provide the opportunity to acquire valuable young human capital of a considerable size for the Russian state. Secondly, children of migrants constitute a separate category of foreign citizens: through them, their parents also adapt more successfully to the host community [5], thereby the children of migrants can act as intermediaries or guides between two cultures. Educational institutions face the need to provide psychological support for the sociocultural adaptation

of children of foreign citizens [3], and researchers are faced with the task of studying the content, mechanisms, and criteria for its success.

In the course of sociocultural adaptation, migrants typically answer two important questions: to what extent to preserve the culture of the country of origin and to what extent to master the culture of the host community [15]. Depending on the answers to these questions, according to J. Berry, the migrant makes a choice in favor of one of four possible acculturation strategies: assimilation, separation, marginalization or integration.

Assimilation means that the migrant assimilates the values, norms, and traditions of a new culture, identifying with the host society; separation, on the contrary, implies that he tries to preserve his own culture and cultural identity; marginalization means that the migrant does not seek to identify himself

with either his culture or the culture of the host society. And finally, integration, recognized by most researchers as the most successful strategy of sociocultural adaptation, means that a migrant strives to integrate into a new culture, while simultaneously trying to preserve both the culture of his origin and his cultural (ethnic) identity [15].

Many different markers (indicators) of the adaptation/maladaptation of migrant children at the personal and group level have been identified: ideas about the future, a lack of life prospects in a new place and the desire to return to their homeland, the readiness for interethnic interaction, positive personal and social identity, the mastery of social skills, a favorable psychoemotional state and many more others [6].

A key indicator of the successful adaptation of a migrant child, as many researchers emphasize, is the psychological well-being and satisfaction with various aspects of one's life [4]. Life satisfaction is considered as a multifaceted phenomenon, which is defined as the subjective assessment of the quality of life, as a characteristic of the inner world, as a synonym for happiness and psychological well-being [17]. Numerous empirical studies have shown that a high level of life satisfaction is closely related to an individual's adaptive coping behavior [10; 19; 20]. For migrant children, the satisfaction with various aspects of life as an integral characteristic of their internal state acts, on the one hand, as a determining criterion for the success of adaptation, and on the other, is a powerful resource [2; 12].

The predictors of the psychological well-being of migrant children have been studied intensively [13]. These include the psychological characteristics of the children themselves (acculturation strategies, expression of ethnic identity), the composition of the ethnic contact environment, the characteristics of parental upbringing, the social capital of the parental family, etc. [13; 14; 24; 27].

At the same time, the determinants of the psychological well-being of mi-

grant children have not been studied in the Russian context. In this research, we pose the following research question: in what way does the orientation towards preserving the norms of one's own and a new culture, as well as the salience of national (Russian) and ethnic identity, determine the psychological well-being of migrant students?

The purpose of the study is to study the pattern of the determination of the psychological well-being of children of foreign citizens by their orientation towards preserving the culture of their country of origin and accepting Russian culture, as well as the salience of national (Russian) and ethnic identity.

Study sample. The study involved 669 children of foreign citizens. Of these, 328 (55% boys) were primary school children, 220 (58.6% boys) were middle school students and 121 (54.5% boys) were high school students. We included children receiving primary general education and studying from grades 1 to 4 as primary school students; the average age was 9.3 years. Secondary school students were on the level of basic general education and studying from grades 5 to 9; the average age was 12.24 years. The average age of high school students receiving secondary general education and studying in grades 10—11 was 15.97 years. The majority (58.8%) of children were from Central Asian countries (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan), 19% were children were from Ukraine, 15.8% were children from Armenia and Azerbaijan, and 6.4% were from other countries. The average length of stay for primary school children was 3.47 years, for middle school children — 4.31 years, and for high school children — 4.97 years. 10.6% of the total number of children participating in the study spoke Russian at an elementary level, 32.1% at an average level, 38.2% at a good level, and 19.1% at an excellent level.

The study was conducted by a research team led by O.E. Khukhlaev as part of the

testing of the Program for Assessing the Special (Additional) Educational Needs of a Migrant Child in the Areas of Psychological Well-being, Social Skills and Cultural Adaptation in 2022 in the following regions: Moscow and Moscow Region, St. Petersburg and Leningrad Region, Krasnodar Region, Kaluga Region, Novosibirsk Region, Rostov Region, Samara Region, Sverdlovsk Region, Tyumen Region. [7; 8]. Empirical data was collected with the help of educational psychologists working in educational organizations where children of foreign citizens studied. Educational psychologists took part in the program of additional professional education "Assessment of the Special Educational Needs of Children of Foreign Citizens", within the framework of which they mastered the diagnostic tools listed below. Participation in the continuing education program provided the level of proficiency in the diagnostic tools necessary to conduct the study. Diagnostics were carried out individually, in a location familiar to the students. Also, educational psychologists collected information about the socio-demographic characteristics of each student (gender, age, country of origin, level of Russian language proficiency, family migration intentions: to stay in Russia, return to their homeland, leave for a third country, or unspecified intentions).

Research methods. To assess psychological well-being, the "Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale, MSLSS" method by E.S. H bner was used [18], adapted for Russian schoolchildren [11]. The Russian version of the "Multidimensional Scale of Life Satisfaction for Schoolchildren" (abbreviated MSLSS) contains 30 statements grouped into five subscales, which are aimed at diagnosing the degree of satisfaction with the relationships with family members, classmates, teachers, friends, as well as the degree of satisfaction with oneself. Each statement is rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 is "never," 2 is "sometimes," 3 is "often," 4 is "almost always," and 5 is "always." Responses are scored according to the key and summed for each scale separately and for all scales together. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients for the scales range from 0.812 (School scale) to 0.900 (Friends scale), which indicates the high reliability of the scale.

To assess the adaptation to a new culture, the Acculturation Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents, developed by O.E. Khukhlaev and M.Y. Chibisova, was used [8]. Separate versions of the questionnaire were developed for primary, middle and high school students. The version for primary school includes 8 statements (Cronbach's alpha 0.704), for middle school — 12 statements (Cronbach's alpha 0.811), and for high school — 28 statements (Cronbach's alpha 0.916). Statements are scored on a 5-point scale, where -2 means "never" or "completely disagree"; -1 means "rarely" or "disagree"; 0 means "from time to time" or "agree with some things, disagree with others"; +1 means "often" or "agree"; +2 means "always" or "completely agree". The statements of the method are grouped into two scales: "Preservation of the native cultural environment by the migrant child" and "Inclusion of the migrant child in the culture of the host (Russian) society."

Measuring the national (Russian) identity of children of foreign citizens and their identity with the country of origin was carried out using the Method of Measuring the Ethnic and National Identity of Children and Adolescents (Measure of Youth's Ethnic and National Identity, MYENI) [21], which was translated into Russian and adapted by O.E. Khukhlaev [8]. The questionnaire includes 12 statements (Cronbach's alpha 0.882), the degree of agreement with which students rated on a five-point scale, where 1 was "do not agree at all" and 5 was "completely agree." As a result, the sum of points was calculated on the scales: Identity with the country of origin (homeland) (questions No. 1—6) and Russian identity (questions No. 7—12). This technique was carried out only with middle and high school students, since, according to the existing consensus in psychology, it is possible to talk about a formed ethnic and national identity only starting from adolescence [16].

A sociometric procedure was also carried out. The questions and principles for calculating sociometric status are presented in the program [8].

Data processing and analysis was carried out using the IBM SPSS Statistics 23 statistical package. Descriptive statistics methods were used, a scale reliability analysis was carried out (Cronbach's a coefficient), difference analysis was carried out (Student's t-test), and a hierarchical linear regression analysis was carried out with control of social demographic variables (gender, age, length of residence in Russia, level of Russian language proficiency, migration intentions of parents, sociometric status of the child in the school community). The dependent variables were the overall indicators of life satisfaction, as well as each of its five components: the satisfaction with relationships with family members, classmates, teachers, friends, and oneself. Separate models were built for each dependent variable. The predictors in the models were the following variables: the migrant child's preservation of his native cultural environment, the migrant child's inclusion in the culture of the host society, the national (Russian) and ethnic identities.

# **Research Results**

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table. 1.

In accordance with the calculated test standards for children who are children of foreign citizens for the "Multidimensional Scale of Life Satisfaction among School-children", integral average scores characterize the average level of psychological well-being [8]. The indicators of national (Russian) and ethnic identity also correspond to the average values in accordance with the test norms we calculated for children — minor foreign citizens.

The average scores for the accepting of the host society's culture by migrant children correspond to the normative level of this parameter in all three groups of respondents, however, the indicators for the preserving of the native cultural environment correspond to a level below aver-

**Descriptive Statistics** 

Table 1

	Primary School (N=328, M=181, F=147)				High school (N=121, M=66, F=55)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Level of Russian Language Proficiency	2.46	0.90	2.71	0.88	3.12	0.79
Sociometric Status	2.09	0.60	2.09	0.65	1.88	0.50
Preserving the culture of the country of origin	0.40	0.83	0.31	0.87	0.41	0.83
Accepting the Culture of the Host Society	1.19	0.69	1.29	0.65	1.34	0.59
National Identity			22.83	4.95	23.60	4.22
Ethnic Identity			24.34	4.89	23.29	4.99
Overall Life Satisfaction	121.20	18.19	115.8	19.17	120.5	19.78
Satisfaction with Relationships with Family Members	25.60	3.87	24.53	4.16	24.38	5.08
Satisfaction with Relationships with Classmates	22.77	4.72	21.67	4.80	22.79	4.37
Satisfaction with Relationships with Teachers	23.78	4.83	22.36	5.38	23.59	4.86
Self-satisfaction	23.52	4.38	22.59	4.52	23.19	4.72
Satisfaction with Relationships with Friends	25.17	4.37	24.56	4.86	26.15	4.12

age. According to these parameters, there are significant differences between the groups: high school students demonstrate significantly more salient host culture acceptance, compared to primary and middle school students, and middle school students are less focused on preserving the culture of their country of origin.

Table 2 presents the results of a hierarchical linear regression analysis of the connection between the general level of life satisfaction of primary, middle and high school students with their attitudes towards the preservation of the culture of their country of origin and accepting the host society's culture, as well as with the national (Russian) and ethnic identities when controlling such variables as gender, age, length of residence in Russia, level of proficiency of the Russian language, the sociometric status of the child in the class and the migration

intentions of his/her family. At the first step of the analysis, we assessed the contribution of control variables towards the variance of the indicator of overall life satisfaction, and at the second step, the contribution of indicators of preserving the culture of the country of origin and accepting the host society's culture, national and ethnic identities.

As can be seen from the data in Table 2, such control variables as gender, age, family migration intentions and sociometric status make a statistically significant contribution to the dispersion of the general life satisfaction of primary school children. The level of language proficiency and sociometric status make a statistically significant contribution to the dispersion of the general life satisfaction of high school students (the corresponding models are statistically significant). At the same time, none of the control variables make a statistically significant contribution

Table 2
Hierarchical Linear Analysis of the Relationship between Life Satisfaction
with Indicators of Sociocultural Adaptation of Migrant Children Studying
in Primary, Middle and High Schools

Predictor	Primary School		Middle School		High School		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	
Control Variables							
Gender	0,12*	0,08	0,05	-0,01	0,16	0,12	
Age	-0,17**	-0,16**	-0,03	0,05	-0,12	-0,16	
Length of Residence in Russia	-0,11	-0,01	-0,13	-0,12	0,07	0,06	
Level of Russian Language Proficiency	0,10	-0,06	0,09	0,08	0,24*	0,13	
Family's Migration Intentions	-0,17**	-0,11	0,07	0,18*	-0,18	-0,22	
Sociometric Status (Reverse Scale)	-0,17**	-0,12*	-0,16	-0,14	-0,35**	-0,36*	
Preserving the Culture of the Country of Origin		0,18**		0,07		0,19	
Accepting the Culture of the Host Society		0,44***		0,12		0,17	
National (Russian) Identity				0,38***		0,25	
Ethnic Identity				0,25***		0,09	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.12***	0.24***	0.02	0.28***	0.21**	0.28**	
F	6.65***	11.24***	1.70	7.50***	3.86**	3.48**	

Notes: \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001;  $\beta$  — standardized regression coefficients; R2 — proportion of explained adjusted variance; F is the Fisher statistic.

to the variance in the overall satisfaction of middle school students (the model is not statistically significant (Table 2).

As we can see, in the sample of primary school children, significant predictors of overall life satisfaction turned out to be the attitudes towards both preserving the migrant child's country of origin culture ( $\beta$ =0.175, p<0.01) and his/her host society culture acceptance ( $\beta$ =0.438, p<0.001). In the sample of middle school students, significant predictors of overall life satisfaction are national ( $\beta$ =0.384, p<0.001) and ethnic identities ( $\beta$ =0.253, p<0.001). In the sample of high school students, no statistically significant connections were found between overall life satisfaction and the indicators of sociocultural adaptation.

Let us now consider the results of hierarchical linear regression analysis of the relationship between the indicators of sociocultural adaptation and each of the five components of life satisfaction: satisfaction with the relationships with classmates, teachers, family members, friends, and oneself, while controlling for the same above-mentioned variables.

When constructing a regression model in which the dependent variable was satisfaction with relationships classmates, it was found that the sociodemographic characteristics of students explained a very small proportion of the variance in the satisfaction with their relationships with classmates and the models that included them were not significant. In the sample of primary school children, the second regression model also turned out to be insignificant. The models describing the contribution of the indicators of sociocultural adaptation and identity among middle and high school students into the satisfaction with relationships with classmates are significant, but allow us to explain a small percentage of the variance (18.5% and 13.6%, respectively). At the middle and high school levels, national identity is a significant predictor (β=0.345, p<0.001 and  $\beta$ =0.340, p<0.05, respectively).

The results of a hierarchical regression linear analysis of the relationship between satisfaction with relationships with teachers and indicators of sociocultural adaptation demonstrate that in a sample of primary school children, this component of life satisfaction, as well as the previous component — satisfaction with relationships with classmates, is positively related to the acceptance of the host society's culture ( $\beta$ =0.340, p<0.001). However, the regression model for primary school children turned out to be insignificant. The regression models for the middle and high school levels turned out to be significant, and here the share of explained variance is also slightly higher — 31.2% for middle school students and 28.2% for high school students. National identity  $(\beta = 0.403,$ p<0.001 and  $\beta$ =0.353, p<0.01) turned out to be a significant predictor of middle and high school students' satisfaction with relationships with teachers, and among middle school students, ethnic identity ( $\beta$ = 0.262, p < 0.001).

Regression models for analyzing the connections between students' satisfaction with *relationships with friends* for primary and middle school students turned out to be insignificant, and for high school students, although the model is significant, it explains a very insignificant proportion of the variance (17%), and none of the parameters of interest to us turned out to be significant.

The results of a regression analysis of the relationship between *satisfaction with relationships with family members* and indicators of sociocultural adaptation indicate that among younger school children this component of life satisfaction is positively associated with the acceptance of the host society's culture ( $\beta$  = 0.294, p < 0.001) and the preservation of their native culture ( $\beta$ =0.208, p<0.01). Middle school students' satisfaction with relationships with family members is positively related to national ( $\beta$ =0.313, p<0.001) and ethnic ( $\beta$ =0.357, p<0.001) identities. No similar connections were found among high school students.

The regression model for middle school students explained 30% of the variance, while the regression models for primary and high school students explained 13% and 18.2% of the variance, respectively.

As a result of regression analysis of the connections between a migrant child's satisfaction with himself/herself and indicators of sociocultural adaptation, positive connections were obtained for this component of life satisfaction among middle school students — with the salience of national ( $\beta$ =0.223, p<0.01) and ethnic  $(\beta=0.212, p<0.01)$  identities; in the sample of high school children, no significant connections were found with the parameters of interest. At the same time, the regression model for primary school students turned out to be insignificant, the regression model for high school explains 32.6% of the variance (but significant predictors are not related to acculturation), and for middle school — 13.7% of the variance.

# Discussion of the Results

Thus, among primary school children, an orientation towards preserving the norms of their country of origin's culture and host society's culture acceptance are predictors of a general psychological wellbeing, as well as the satisfaction with relationships with family members.

These results generally coincide with the body of empirical data obtained from studying various samples of migrants [13; 23]. However, the vast majority of such studies involve respondents starting in adolescence. The data we obtained allows us to assert that the importance of acculturation strategies as a determinant of psychological well-being manifests itself already at the primary school age, and since the orientation towards both the culture of origin and the host society is important, this confirms J. Berry's thesis about integration as the acculturation strategy to the greatest extent contributing to life satisfaction.

It seems important to note the importance of acculturation strategies for the

satisfaction with relationships with family members. The key role of the family in the process of the adaptation of migrant children to the host society has been noted by a number of researchers [22]. On the one hand, by preserving the norms of the country of origin's culture the child maintains contact with the family as its carrier. On the other hand, mastering the norms of the host society also predicts a satisfaction with relationships with family members. Perhaps the child's adaptation to a new society is interpreted by the family as an indicator of his success and allows for the child to receive a positive reaction from family members, which, in turn, leads to an increase in his psychological wellbeing in this area.

For middle school students, the predictors of general psychological well-being are the salience of national (Russian) and ethnic identity, and these parameters are also predictors of the satisfaction with relationships with teachers, family members and themselves, and regression models of satisfaction with relationships with teachers and family members help explain a relatively high percentage variance. These results are also generally consistent with data obtained in similar studies [25]. And they can be explained by agerelated patterns: the formation of identity, both personal and social, is a key task of adolescence [26]. For migrant teenagers, this process is complemented by the understanding of belonging to their culture of origin and to the host society. It has been shown that the salience of ethnic identity allows us to come to the conclusion that the teenager is at the stage of achieved identity, according to J. Finney [26]. Having an answer to the question of his belonging to cultural groups allows a migrant teenager to achieve a satisfaction with the relationships with teachers as representatives of the host society, and relationships with family members as representatives of his native culture, and an overall satisfaction with himself.

Among high school students, national (Russian) identity is a predictor of satisfaction with relationships with classmates and teachers.

The high school age is traditionally viewed as a period of personal and professional self-determination [1], which involves the construction of life plans in the context of the education system of a particular state, for which national identity can be of significant importance. It can be assumed that the salience of national identity promotes agreement with certain school requirements and expectations, which ultimately leads to the greater satisfaction with relationships with teachers. Also, the salience of national identity contributes to the construction of life plans similar to those of classmates, which can also contribute to increased satisfaction in relationships with them.

Note that our regression models allow us to explain a larger percentage of variance compared to similar studies, where the maximum explained variance varies from 18% to 23.2% [13; 14] However, in general, even the maximum share of explained variance remains low. This may be explained by the fact that the psychological well-being of migrant children is determined not only by factors directly related to acculturation, but also by other determinants (for example, it has been shown that the main predictors of the psychological well-being

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of adolescents are the support from parents and peers, as well as anxiety [28]).

# **Conclusions**

Thus, the orientation of primary school children towards preserving the norms of their country of origin's culture and the host society's culture acceptance, i.e. the orientation towards the integration strategy is a predictor of general psychological well-being, as well as the satisfaction with relationships with family members. For middle school students, predictors of general psychological well-being, as well as the satisfaction with relationships with teachers, family members and themselves, are the salience of national (Russian) and ethnic identities, which can also be considered the result of the implementation of an integrative strategy of sociocultural adaptation. For high school students, the only predictor of satisfaction with relationships with teachers, family members and themselves is the national (Russian) identity, which suggests the importance of the assimilative adaptation strategy for their psychological well-being.

The limitations of our study include the ethnocultural heterogeneity of the sample. Perhaps dividing the students — children of foreign citizens into groups according to country of origin would allow us to obtain more detailed data.

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