

# Children and Young People in Russia today

*The following report is a summary of presentations provided by Dr Andrei Smirnov and his wife Natalia, Vice-President of the Family Therapy Development Fund in Ekaterinburg in Russia. They were made at the recent Youth Support Conference in London (October 2002).*

According to the data of Russia General Statistics Department by the beginning of 1995 the general number of children without parents' care was 442,000. The parents of the majority of them are alive, 113,000 of them have been adopted, 201,000 and of them are under somebody's guardianship or trusteeship. 112,000 and have been living in boarding schools for mentally and physically disabled children. Seventy percent of them suffer from delayed mental development and behavioural deviation (Shipitzina L.M.). One of the biggest disturbing tendencies which definitely needs special attention is the growth of social disadaptation of children, becoming more and more crashing and dangerous both for the children themselves and for the society.

It can be traced if only by the problem of homeless children. The history of this issue says that to the end of the forties the problem was practically done away with in Russia, but unfortunately today it has come back with new strength. Different official sources give different numbers of homeless children in Russia: from one to more than five million. Ninety percent of them have their parents

alive. Only in Moscow there are (officially) 50,000 homeless children. The majority of them escaped to a large city from the provinces. Usually about 70 % of them are boys, but the rate of homeless girls increases very rapidly.

The rate of homeless was stated only twice in the whole Russian history:

- after the October revolution, when there were 540,000 homeless children in asylums;
- and after the World War II, that figure was about 200,000 children.

Only now this problem has attracted the Russian Parliament's attention. According to some MP's opinion the growth of homeless children is a real threat to the state's national security.

What are the main reasons that make children and adolescents leave their homes?

One of the main- is dreadfully low financial level of their families and strict business of the parents, even in well-to-do families, that does not allow the parents to pay much attention and devote much time to children.

Among other reasons are the following:

- 40% conflicts with own parents,
- 20% quarrels with coevals,
- 14% fear of the punishment for some faults,
- 14% yearning for the change of location,
- 4% school problems.

The majority of Child Psychologists consider that the main reason for leaving home is *cruel treatment by the parents of their own children*. Jobless, hard work for low wages, permanent growth of prices, political and economical chaos - these are some of the main reasons of parents' irritability. Once coming back home with deep inner dissatisfaction they vent their anger on their own children, justifying themselves according to the principle: "It's my child and I can do everything with him!"

Such families can be grouped according to the following signs:

1. Families where children are real orphans because of the death of their parents.
2. Families where the parents were sentenced to prison or deprived of their rights for parenthood, or seriously sick or missing, living abroad etc.
3. Families where the parents are alcohol or drugs-addicts, or gave up from taking care of children, or cruelly treat them.

## The Sverdlovsk Region

The official rate of homeless children and adults this year is more than 14,000.

According to the formal data there are 67 special institutions of Social Defense aimed at solve their problems:

- 17 asylums,
- 39 Centers for Social Rehabilitation,
- 11 Centers for Family and Child Assistance.

In reality it's next to impossible for a street child to get to such center. And in 13 cities of the region there are not any asylums or other places so there is no way to help a street child. By the way according to the officials all these institutions can help only 15 % of those who need it. For instance: this year a special action named "The homeless children" was provided by the local Ministry of Social Defense and Militia. Only in one city (Ekatherinburg) during three days there were found 1073 adults and children and...the officials faced a problem: how and where to locate them?! This problem was solved with difficulties because there are only two valid special Centers in the region: one for boys and one for girls.

For comparison: in Russia during last five years 220,000 of children and adults were taken in such Centers. Their number grows year by year: in 2001 growth was 27,000. More than 17,000 escaped from the Centers and the cause of it, *incorrect forms of education (means - physical and moral violence)*.

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Table 1

**Trends in crime among the Moscow adolescents during the 5-years period.**

Murder	+141%
Severe corporal damages	+20.2%
Robbery	+122.1%
Fraud	+102.7%
The drugs trade and manufacturing	+392.8%
Crimes in alcoholic state	+111.7%
Crimes in the narcotic	+140.7%

The same growth of the adolescents' crimes was noted in Russia in the above-described periods of time, which characteristic was a high level of homelessness and lack of care of the children.

There are some structures dealing with the adolescents' deprivation in Russia nowadays:

- **Social service** (called here as the Social defence service)- provides the organization and supply of the asylums for the adolescents and children where they stay not more than six months and after that have to be put at the orphanage or to be adopted by somebody.
- **Education system**- includes some specialized institutions: specialized schools for the "heavy tutored" children, for those who have behavioural disorders, for the children which don't want to study, for those escaped from home; schools for mentally disabled children; boarding schools and orphanages.
- **The Home Office structure (called Militia)** also contains: special Centers for the temporary staying of those escaped from home or who committed some crimes; the labour and tutoring colonies for the "under aged" where they've been sentenced by the court.
- **The Health service** organizations deal with the problems of adolescents' deprivation in the structures of the children and adolescents' psychiatric service and their main problems are: low level of family therapy and the majority of the physicians are oriented towards psychopharmacological therapy.

The main goal of our research is to investigate the typical so called "closed" institutions: The Interregional Center for the temporary isolation of adolescents (ICTIA);

Specialized School for the delinquent children; The District Social-rehabilitation Center for the under age children which lost their parents' care and the orphans (The Asylum).

The Interregional Center for the temporary isolation belongs to the Regional Home Office Department and is intended for the boys living on the territory of the Sverdlovsk region, West Siberia and European part of Russia until the city of Samara. There were 1246 children for the 9 months period of last year and for the same period of this year- 1100 children in the Center. Usually there were 138 children last year and 123- this year monthly. And at the moment there are 30-70 children simultaneously. The average repeat stay in the Center is 34.5%. 14.6% of them last year and already 26.8% this year- are the teenagers who committed crimes. Others are the tramps which attracted Militia's attention with their behavioural problems (as the beggars, prostitutes and other social disorders). While interviewing them becomes clear the lack of parents' care and permanent place of accommodation.

Usually these children come to the Center from poor social conditions and they suffer from numerous diseases: 13% of them last year were sick with different infectious diseases, and 10.9% of them had scabies and pediculosis; this year already 57.7% of them have scabies; more than 80% of them suffer from nutritional disorders and dystrophy and different chronic digestive diseases; all of them have behavioural deviations and the main part have some psychical problems.

It's of common that all of them are terrible smokers and 70% of them used drugs and alcoholic beverages.

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# Conferences

**Synergy: Arts, Health and Design-World Symposium** Feb 2 - 5, 2003, Sydney  
A forum for sharing and further developing the critical debate in the field of art, design, and culture - within the context of health and well-being Contact: Arts for Health Research Centre, Sydney, Email: Marily.Cintra@placemaking.com.au Web site: <http://www.placemaking.com.au/>

**Society of Adolescent Medicine Annual Meeting** SAM will be 35 years "young" in 2003. Pan upon joining us in Seattle between March 19-22 2003. This year, 51 pages of the actual Program Book, a separate designation for the SAM Registration Form, and the Hotel Reservation Form may also be found on our Home Page at <http://www.adolescenthealth.org> Please share this with your friends, colleagues, and interested others.

**3rd Asia Pacific Conference on Psychotherapy** 6th Pacific Rim Congress of Group Psychotherapy Singapore March 12 - 15 2003 Contact: Ms Allison Law,

Association For Group & Individual Psychotherapy, c/o Conference & Travel Management Associates Pty Ltd 425A Race Course Road SINGAPORE 218671, Ph : 299 8992, Fax : 299 8983 Email: [ctmapl@singnet.com.sg](mailto:ctmapl@singnet.com.sg) <http://www.psychotherapy.bizcal.com>

**Stay in touch: 3rd European Conference: Youth Work, Youth Care and Drug Prevention** March 13 - 15 2003, Lucerne, Switzerland Web site: <http://www.stayintouch.ch>

**3rd International Adventure Therapy Conference** April 20 - 24, 2003 Victoria, Canada "Ethical and Quality Practice in Adventure Therapy: Defining commonality while honouring diversity." Contact: Ph: 1-800-375-2363 or 250-478-0161 Fax: 250-478-0164, Email: [info@3IAT.com](mailto:info@3IAT.com) Web site: <http://www.3IAT.com>

**Society for Research in Child Development: 70th anniversary meeting,** April 24-27, 2003 Florida USA Venue: Tampa Convention Centre, Florida USA; Email: [srccd@umich.edu](mailto:srccd@umich.edu)

**The 4th International Conference on Drugs & Young People** May 26 - 28, 2003 Wellington NZ Themes:

- drug use within youth populations
- workforce development
- legal issues, law enforcement, justice
- prevention / education / health promotion
- early intervention, treatment
- drug policy
- indigenous populations and groups
- culturally diverse communities
- parent roles
- media impact

Contact: Conference Secretariat Australian Drug Foundation PO Box 818 North Melbourne 3052; fax (03) 9328 3008 ; email: [events@adf.org.au](mailto:events@adf.org.au) Web site: <http://www.adf.org.au>

**Youth: Similarities, differences, inequalities: 4th international youth research conference,** June 7 - 10 2003 Nütylähti, Finland Youth researchers from all disciplines are invited to participate and to submit theoretical, methodological and empirical papers on the following themes:

## **Russian Children Continued**

### **The Family Therapy Development Fund's activities:**

- The coordination of work of the institutes dealing with the adolescents' problems, regular consulting of the staff and administration of the above described Centers in the part of organization and methodology of work.
- Psychotherapeutic and other medical aid for the families of the delinquent children, families who include sick and invalid people, using the methods of family therapy in medical the same as in social-psychological and educational aspects.

- Attracting sponsors for concrete material assistance to the children from these institutions and "risky families".
- Providing of scientific activities-preparation of several researches and reports devoted to the problems of children and adolescents and their families.
- Participation in the training programs for schoolteachers, social workers and physicians in the questions of adolescents' and family psychotherapy.
- Organization of the permanent seminar including scientific and practical issues, lectures,

supervisions and Balint groups for the professionals who are interested in.

- Providing of the joint Russian-British programs and projects on the problems of adolescents' and family therapy.
- I think we have the reasons for:  
*Announcing our region to be the zone of humanitarian disaster. (At least in terms of children and adolescents situation). Attracting an international attention to this problem. As the poor situation in our region may cross the borders and one day may have a negative influence on the society in any other place of the world.*