

## **REPERTORY GRID TECHNIQUE IN ADOPTIVE PARENT CANDIDATES COUNSELLING**

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*Parental expectations play an important role in the success of adoption or foster placement. We propose a qualitative approach to explore parental expectations based on repertory grid technique with children's photos as elements. Its main advantage rests on the ability to assess such interrelated aspects of parental expectations as the elaboration of personally important content, the ability to regulate reactions, the presence of stereotypes about adoption, lack of awareness or evasive thinking and specific attitudes towards family members. The article presents rationale, administration and interpretation procedures, the results of an exploratory study of parents from 48 families in order to define preliminary norms for quantitative indexes and a sample of grid analysis to illustrate how the method can be employed in counselling.*

Keywords: *adoption, repertory grids, family counselling, parental expectations*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Adoptive parents form an idea of their future child long before adoption. They also develop meanings of desired and undesired behaviours and interactions, supposed signs of a successful adoption process and anticipate themselves in the parental role. All this can be called expectations of child adoption. When positive expectations are violated, or when negative ones are realised, this can lead to severe disillusionment of the parents and contribute to adoption failure. Not only do the discrepancies between expectations and experience matter, the nature of the expectations themselves may contribute to the heightened risk of mismatch. Some discrepancies are normal and inevitable, and the ability of parents to acknowledge reality, adjust to it and make the necessary minor or major corrections to initial expectations is crucial.

The formation of expectations is influenced by various factors: motivation to adopt, past experiences of parenting, beliefs, values, family dynamics, traumatic experiences, individual personality traits, etc. Importantly, they are also shaped by social constructions of adopted children, which usually contradict each other (Miall, 1996). This problem is of particular

relevance in the Russian Federation, where the large number of orphans is acknowledged as a problem, and active efforts have been made to reduce it. This resulted in a decrease in the number of orphans in institutional care from 120,000 to 52,000 in the period from 2012 to 2017<sup>1</sup>. To achieve this goal, an extensive promotional campaign was launched. Billboards, TV advertisements, radio, social networks presenting powerful messages and images of children desperately looking for a home and of parents, changing the life of both children and adults and creating a new family. Conversely, the obligatory pre-adoption training programmes aim to challenge the myths of adoption, and support the expectations of difficulties, disruptive behaviours, slow and gradual formation of affective bonds, emphasizing differences between the parenting of biological and adopted children.

Since expectations are changeable and complex, a clear-cut distinction between those

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<sup>1</sup> As stated by the Russian government report on its performance in 2012–2017 (<http://government.ru/en/news/32246/>, last accessed 25.11.2018).

that are adequate (functional, adaptive) and those that are not, is difficult to make. A statement of what parents want from adopting a child is not enough, and a qualitative approach is required that takes into consideration the complexity of motivational content of expectations, their flexibility, adjustability to new experiences and degree of realism. Moreover, adherence to a help-oriented approach that integrates assessment with counselling is very important. Personal construct psychology and repertory grid technique offer a proper methodological paradigm. The expectations about the child and adoption can be regarded as parents' personal theories, developed to anticipate important future outcomes, that reflect how parents construct their lives and representations of self, e.g. their 'core constructs'.

### **Studies of adoptive parenting using personal constructs approach**

There are few records of attempts to use personal construct methodology with adoptive parents. Pokela in her PhD thesis was able to predict successful fostering from structural variables of grids, but not from the content (after McConachie, 1986, p. 80). Nissim (1996) studied differences in perceptions of problematic situations by foster carers and social workers. Cooper (2011) used Tschudi's ABC technique and Perceiver Element Grids, developed by Procter (2014), to compare personal construct systems of foster carers and their children. Several studies explored adopted or foster children's perceptions of self and others (e.g. Butler & Green, 2007; Hicks & Nixon, 1989).

Some studies of non-adoptive parenting touch on the issue of parental expectations. Kotler and Chetwynd (1980) demonstrated that family therapy leads to more nuanced and realistic perceptions of both 'identified patients' and their non-disturbed siblings. Safuanov and Kulakov (2017) used grids with emotional states as constructs to study a couple's perceptions of conflict situations in forensic settings. A review of repertory grid studies concerning parental attitudes towards children with disabilities can be found in McConachie (1986). Vicary found that mothers who perceive their child as very different from normal children tend to perceive

the affected child in a positive light, whilst viewing the hypothetical normal child as the difficult one (McConachie, 1986, p. 77-78). Sharma et al. (2013) showed the relationship of conflicts and dissimilarities (to other children or family members) in construing their autistic child to a mother's parental distress.

### **METHOD**

The idea of the method proposed in this article derives from a practice widespread in Russia, when parents who consider adopting a child start browsing photos, stories and other materials of children suitable for adoptive care. Many charity foundations officially offer intermediate services that allow parents to get acquainted with a child before starting the formal adoption process. An extreme example is the "Same Face" project of the "Change One Life" foundation, that encourages adults to upload their own photo in order to get a list of orphans with similar facial appearance<sup>2</sup> [2]. We believe that some kind of exploration of photos or other materials is a rather universal phenomenon, even if not institutionalized, that reflects the crystallization of expectations and the decision to adopt. Thus, studying parental expectations through examination of photos could legitimately be called an experiment in Kurt Lewin's terms. It adheres to the principle of 'functional probe', formulated by the founder of the Russian (ex-Soviet) 'experimental abnormal psychology' approach, Bluma Zeigarnik (1972, p.24): experiment should model real-life situations, revealing genuine personal values, modes of task solving habitually used by a subject.

### **Procedure**

#### *Selection of elements*

Parents (couples or singles) are given a series of eighty 10x15 cm photos of children, aged approximately 5-12 years. They are asked to

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<sup>2</sup> The site of the project is available at <http://odnolico.changeonelife.ru/ru/uploadPhoto>, accessed 19.11.2018.

choose 20 portraits that elicit emotional reactions (whether positive or negative).

Photos were taken from open sources, including Internet sites on adoption. The choice was based on the results of 27 preliminary interviews and reflected the eight aspects of children's photos most frequently mentioned by adoptive parents as important ones: (a) age, (b) gender, (c) colour of hair and eyes, (d) Slavic or non-Slavic appearance, (e) signs of developmental abnormalities, (f) place where the photo was taken, (g) valence of emotions, (h) apparent proneness of the child to communication.

### *Construct elicitation*

Constructs are elicited from randomly assigned triads (avoiding the use of two particular photos in the same triad more than once). Parents are asked what is similar in the two pictures, what makes them different from the third one, and then about the opposite for the first pole. Standard recommendations for avoiding superficial, circumstantial or other types of 'not so useful' constructs (Fransella et al., 2004, p. 24) are followed, – but constructs about appearance, emotional states, and medical conditions are allowed. Eliciting constructs ends when no new constructs are provided, but at least ten are required.

The process of eliciting constructs has some particularities when a couple performs the task as a consensual decision is required, and the psychologist keeps track of the possible disagreements (seldom encountered) and the style of decision-making. This is not completely different from the conventional repertory grid interview, since constructs are always elicited in communicative interaction with the psychologist (Procter, 1985, p. 219).

### *Grid completion*

Parents are asked to keep only 10 portraits that evoke the strongest emotional reaction. Cards with names of family members are added. Portraits and cards are ranked from one pole to another of each elicited construct (it is important to shuffle the photos in-between), and when

finished, are ranked again using the provided construct *easy for us to adopt* vs. *difficult for us to adopt*. The estimated total time is between 60 and 90 minutes.

### **Interpretation**

In interpreting the grid both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data analysis are used. Priority is given to qualitative analysis, as implied by Kelly's original idiographic approach, where a conceptualization of each case precedes any group or inter-individual comparisons (Kelly, 1955, p.30). Quantitative indices are used as starting points for analysis of a grid, signalling a marked particularity of construing, that has to be further interpreted. It requires the examination of the grid as a whole, the necessity of accounting for both content and structural relationships of constructs and elements, readiness to turn to the raw data (complete wordings of constructs and even to the photos selected) to make sense of the findings. The preliminary norms for quantitative indices are based on the results of exploratory study (see below), and are recommended for robust use, with quartiles as criteria for differentiating low and high scores.

### *Quantitative measures and indices*

Our approach to quantitative data analysis was developed with particular reference to *OpenRepGrid* for *R* package (Heckman, 2014), which is free and easy to use (with a web interface) by a practising psychologist inexperienced in statistics. The following measures are recommended for routine use: (a) overall number of constructs, (b) presence and prevalence of different content categories (see below) of elicited constructs, (c) correlations of elicited constructs with the provided construct (relevant to adoption success estimation); (d) indexes of differentiation of construct system (see Bell, 2004), including intensity index by Bannister (avg. intensity), percentage of variation accounted for the first factor (PVAFF), number of components to be extracted in principal component analysis (No. of components); (e) constructs' loadings in

principal component analysis (PCA); (e) calculation of Bannister's intensity index for provided constructs only (see Feixas & Cornejo, 2002); (f) distances and cluster analysis of elements.

### *Categories for content analysis*

In order to simplify the treatment of construct's meaning we suggest using categories for content analysis defined after the inspection of the set of constructs in exploratory study. Categories were further combined into three groups. *Adoption-related categories* include references to the usual preoccupations of adoptive parents, known from counselling experience. *Neutral categories* represent the most commonly expected descriptions of photos. *Special categories* may be seen as indicating problematic tendencies, if used excessively. Table 1 gives a brief description of each category. No more than two categories are assigned to each construct.

### *Goals and directions for qualitative and quantitative analysis of grid data*

In interpreting grids attention is given to: (a) the content of constructs used; (b) the characteristics that parents link to adoption success; (c) the structural properties of the construct system (as indicators of complexity, flexibility and consistency of construing); (d) the rankings of the present family members, especially of adopted children already in the family. There are some major issues that need to be evaluated.

#### *1. Variety of thematic content and ability to moderate the affective response*

An important aspect of adequate parental attitudes and expectations is the complexity of motivations, values and emotions that underlie them. There are various ways this can be traced from the grid: by the number of (non-synonymic) constructs, the variety of content categories, the measures of cognitive differentiation, an explicable structure in factor analysis (revealing semantically similar constructs forming different factors). One can also expect that, looking at a photo, a person is able to distinguish between the impressions and

emotions it evokes, and the real traits or experiences related to the child portrayed. Those moderated, controlled and distanced evaluations are reflected in neutral categories of constructs, with reference to emotional states or individual traits of children. Adoption-related constructs are also likely to appear, but if only these are present, an excessive responsiveness or proneness to distort reality in accordance with own expectations may be hypothesized. The exact meaning of the construct and how the elements are ranked has to be taken into account.

#### *2. Importance of stereotypes about adoption*

Fixed beliefs about the needs of children deprived of family, about how a child should change after adoption, what traits or behavioural signs are indicative of the children suitable (or not) for adoption, are typical to many non-maternal carers, including those with a lasting experience of adoption or fostering of children with difficulties. A key indicator here is the weight of the provided construct in the main factor in PCA and its intensity. One can try to derive the content of beliefs looking at the constructs that have the strongest correlations with the one provided.

#### *3. Low awareness, evasive or distorted mode of communication and thinking*

Another frequent issue in adoptive parents is the intricacy, ambiguity and low self-awareness of their feelings, wishes, and genuine intentions. Interest in adoption is usually rooted in unresolved problems, past traumatic experiences, suppressed motives, and the family dynamics are often characterized by evasion of certain topics, most typically in closed adoption. This is revealed in a discrepancy between similarity (or difference) of the constructs' semantic content and their measured relationships. For example, there are grids with very distinct constructs, but a high uniformity of rankings, which suggests the parents' continuous use of the same evaluative criteria without articulating it. Other signs are ambiguous, overly metaphorical or eccentric wording of constructs (making them hardly comprehensible) and striking inconsistencies in the use of constructs.

## *Repertory Grid Technique in adoptive parent candidate counselling*

Table 1: *Description of categories for content analysis*

<i>Adoption-related categories</i>	
INS Insecurity as to the child's sincerity and benevolence	Constructs that reflect suspicions of manipulative tendencies, callousness or hidden motives, e.g. <i>genuine sadness vs. tries to attract attention from adults; empty vs. emotional; approachable vs. hostile</i>
DEP Deprivation and traumatic experiences.	Any indication of the need for or a lack of parental care, family, possessions or to (implicit) traumatic experiences, e.g.: <i>got what they wanted vs. wait for parents; cannot trust people vs. trusting; from a family vs. orphan.</i>
HELP Helping and growth perspectives.	Judgements about potentials of care for particular children, e.g.: <i>can succeed vs. too difficult for me; can be helped vs. cannot be helped.</i>
<i>Neutral categories</i>	
EMOT Emotional states.	Any emotions, feelings, moods (not covered by adoption-related categories), e.g. <i>crying vs. smiling, frustrated vs. happy, angry vs. quiet.</i>
PERS Individual and personality traits.	Any trait potentially deductible from a photograph, e.g.: <i>active vs. doesn't want to make efforts, expressive vs. reserved.</i>
<i>Special categories</i>	
STR Strange and eccentric.	Either hard to understand, or extremely arbitrary, or with inappropriate thematic content, e.g. <i>dancing vs. strong feelings of bodily secrecy; reminds me of myself in youth vs. reminds me of my daughter.</i>
MED Medical and disability.	e.g.: <i>normal vs. has an intellectual deficiency.</i>
ETN Ethnicity.	Includes suggestive appearance descriptions, e.g. <i>white vs. dark.</i>
PHY Physical.	Indications to appearance, gender or age.
FORM Formal or situational	Mere descriptions of the photograph or the circumstances in which it was taken, indicative of inability to articulate more significant constructs.

#### *4. Signs of specific attitudes towards family members*

Specific attitudes are detectable from the results of clustering, distances between family elements and their rankings on significant constructs. Contraposing one family member with others could reveal emotional refusal or neglect, depending on the content of the constructs involved (the provided construct being one to look at). The perfect alignment of family members' rankings, however, is suggestive of unrealistic representations of children (they are seen as closer to the adult family members than to other children). The extremity of any

element's rankings may reveal a reference model for some role (of good or bad child, family member, typical adopted child, etc.). Attention should be paid to the rankings of family elements on constructs that a psychologist believes are of particular significance or to the signs of conflicts in an element's rankings (when the rankings are different from those predicted by correlations of constructs).

#### **RESULTS OF AN EXPLORATORY STUDY**

The exploratory study pursued two objectives: (a) to get the provisional norms for quantitative

indices and frequencies of the content of analytic categories; (b) to trace some particularities of construing by adoptive parents. Participants were adults representing 46 families (18 couples and 28 singles), with and without experience of being non-maternal carers (25 and 21 cases respectively). The groups were heterogeneous in socio-demographic, economic and other aspects, with ages ranging from 30 to 65 years for the adoptive parents group and from 22 to 52 years for the second group.

The results of the analysis of the distribution of quantitative measures are summarized in Table 2. Quartiles (Q1 and Q2) may be used as thresholds for determining low and high scorers.

Inter-group comparisons of mean values result in a lack of significant differences, apart from the numbers of elicited constructs and elements being understandably higher in the group of adoptive parents (Mann-Whitney's  $U=159$ ,  $p<0.02$ , and  $U=149$ ,  $p<0.01$  respectively). The intra-group differences are more pronounced (to note the magnitudes of deviation), which once again supports the qualitative and informal approach to the treatment of grid data.

In both groups the most frequent were one neutral (EMOT) and two adoption-related (DEP and INS) categories of content analysis. In both groups there were grids dominated by constructs referring to sensitivity, to helplessness and deprivation in children or reflecting the position of suspicion and lack of confidence (either in the child, in interaction or in themselves). Difficulty in producing and defining constructs, reliance on situational or superficial constructs was also encountered occasionally in both adoptive and non-adoptive parents, as well as imprecise and ambiguous definitions. The difficulty of the task and its projective element should be noted. Most salient examples of idiosyncratic or self-discordant constructs come from the adoptive

parents group, but this is not reflected in content analysis results. A general tendency towards simplified, monolithic construing is also present (most notable in the asymmetry of distribution of differentiation measures towards the low end). This may result from the circulation of stereotypic ideas about orphanhood and adoption that are not challenged by reflection and personal experiences, often avoided due to their painful nature even by many adoptive parents.

The task was not only performed, but also perceived similarly by participants from both groups. Most of them acknowledged that the photos belonged to orphans. The analysis of individual cases in non-adoptive parents group suggests that the method can be used to provide insights on attitudes towards adoption, and, more generally, towards what it means to be a parent, regardless of being actually involved in the adoption process.

#### **SAMPLE OF A GRID ANALYSIS**

The sample comes from a counselling session with Jana, a 64 year old adoptive mother of Oxana, a girl aged 12. Jana's biological daughter had a difficult time struggling with substance abuse, and Jana had to care for her grandson for prolonged periods, with whom she had developed a strong affective attachment. The idea of adopting a child arose in the context of conflicts and strains with her daughter about parenting roles, and after Oxana was eventually adopted the chances for Jana to stay with her grandson diminished drastically, which she was devastated about. She resorted to psychological help because of difficulties in everyday interactions and minor behavioural problems Oxana had at school.

Table 2: *Descriptive statistics for quantitative indices and content analysis categories in total group (N=46)\**

	AVG (DEV)	Me	Q1	Q3	Min	Max
Total constructs**	12.7 (1.6)	12	11	13	11	16
Provided construct's intensity	0.29 (0.16)	0.27	0.17	0.41	0.07	0.65
Differentiation measures:						
Avg. intensity	0.33 (0.15)	0.28	0.21	0.43	0.15	0.73
PVAFF	0.82 (0.13)	0.84	0.71	0.95	0.47	0.99
No. of components ***	2.26 (1.18)				1	6
Content analysis categories:						
Adoption-related (all)	3.9 (2.4)	4.5	2.8	5.5	0	9
INS	2 (1.5)	2	1	3	0	5,5
DEP	2.5 (1.9)	2	1	3.5	0	8.5
HELP	0.2 (0.4)				0	1.5
Neutral (all)	4.1 (2.8)	4	1.9	6.3	0	9.5
EMOT	3.2 (1.7)	3	2	5	0	7
PERS	1.8 (1.5)	1.3	1	2.5	0	6
Special (all)	1.6 (1.55)	1.5	1	2	0	6.5

\* AVG – average value, DEV – standard deviation, Me – Median, Q1 and Q3 – lower and upper quartiles (25th and 75th percentiles), Min and Max – minimal and maximal values; abbreviations for indexes and categories of content analysis are explained in text;

\*\* the number includes provided construct;

\*\*\* Velicier's MAP criterion was used (see Bell et al., 2004)

Extended and up-to-date normative data, full descriptions of content-analysis categories are available from Andrey Ryzhov (see **ABOUT THE AUTHORS** section).

Jana's grid represents a rather normative example. Among quantitative measures, summarized in Table 3, only a low number of elicited constructs, low intensity of the provided construct and omission of constructs of the INS category, fall outside the interquartile range. There are no manifestations of the major problematic issues encountered in adoptive parents, mentioned above. The content of the constructs is rather variable, includes both conventional characteristics, applicable to most children (EMOT, PERS) and those revealing thoughts related to adoption (preoccupations with the child's experiences of trauma and deprivation and potential for development). The ideas behind constructs are clearly expressed. Special categories are represented only by two

constructs: one, *handicap vs. harmony*, refers to medical problems and is associated with a traumatic past and evaluation of prospects for care (see the PCA loadings in Table 3), what seems allowable, and other, *boys vs. girls*, might not be purely formal, but also have a personal significance to Jana. Her construing is more differentiated than average in our sample, the low level of the provided constructs' intensity and its relatively equal weights in PCA factors mean there are no signs of a major issue dominating her attitudes towards adoption – in fact, she had no plans to adopt again. The only significant correlation ( $\rho=0.59$ ) for the provided construct is *calm vs. mischievous*, above  $\rho=0.3$  also *harmony vs. handicap, girls vs. boys* and *has a future vs. hopeless*. Literally,

in her estimating of the prospects of imagined placements, she resorts to different reasons in each case, but tends to avoid those children who are supposedly prone to difficult behaviour or require too much effort.

The factor structure suggested by PCA (explaining more than 85% of variance) includes three semantically distinct components. Most of

her evaluations may be explained in terms of future prospects, trust towards adults in relationships and dominant affective tonality. These are further attenuated by accounts of traits of activity (tranquility) and of traumatic susceptibility, loosely associated with the female gender.

Table 3: *Constructs, family elements rankings, quantitative indices and content analysis categories for Jana's grid*

	Construct	Family elements ranks (max=12)		Prov. rho*	PCA loadings			Content cat.
		Mother	Oxana		RC1	RC2	RC3	
1	<i>mistrust in eyes vs. peacefulness</i>	8	10	-0.3	0.94	0.12	0.21	DEP
2	<i>sad vs. happy</i>	9	11	-0.05	0.84	0.40	0.26	EMOT
3	<i>has future vs. hopelessness</i>	2	4	0.38	-0.96	0.04	-0.23	HELP
4	<i>vulnerable vs. feeling of internal security</i>	12	4	-0.06	0.64	-0.08	0.65	DEP
5	<i>boys vs. girls</i>	9	8	-0.36	0.07	-0.22	-0.73	FORM
6	<i>reflective vs. light-hearted</i>	6	9	0.13	0.39	0.80	0.03	PERS
7	<i>angry vs. joy</i>	9	11	-0.24	0.89	0.24	0.03	EMOT
8	<i>mischievous vs. quiet</i>	9	3	-0.59**	-0.02	-0.95	-0.14	PERS
9	<i>had a trauma vs. serenity</i>	7	2	0.17	0.42	0.05	0.85	DEP
10	<i>handicap, deficiency vs. harmony</i>	11	12	-0.51	0.93	-0.05	-0.04	MED
11	<i>easy for us to adopt vs. difficult for us to adopt</i>	3	6		-0.52	0.57	0.46	
Differentiation measures: <i>PVAFF: 0.8 ; avg. intensity: 0.27; No. components (MAP): 3</i>								
<i>Intensity of the provided construct: 0.11</i>								

\* Spearman's correlation coefficient with the provided construct, \*\* significant at  $p < 0.05$

She construes herself and Oxana in rather positive terms, giving similar ranks on constructs that represent the first, evaluative, component of PCA (Table 3). Unlike herself, Jana sees Oxana as vulnerable, mischievous and having a traumatic past. Two trauma-related constructs contribute towards inconsistency in how Oxana is ranked: despite receiving high ranks on them, she is not evaluated as hopeless, sad, angry or mistrustful, which is what the strong correlations

of constructs (1,2,3,7 and 9,4) would imply. Cluster analysis (Figure 1) places Oxana closer to boys, evaluated as less problematic, than to girls. Of interest are the intermediate ranks of both Oxana and Jana on the provided construct. This probably reflects the acknowledgement of difficulties in the adaptation process that are seen as dependent on both family members, not just the adopted child.

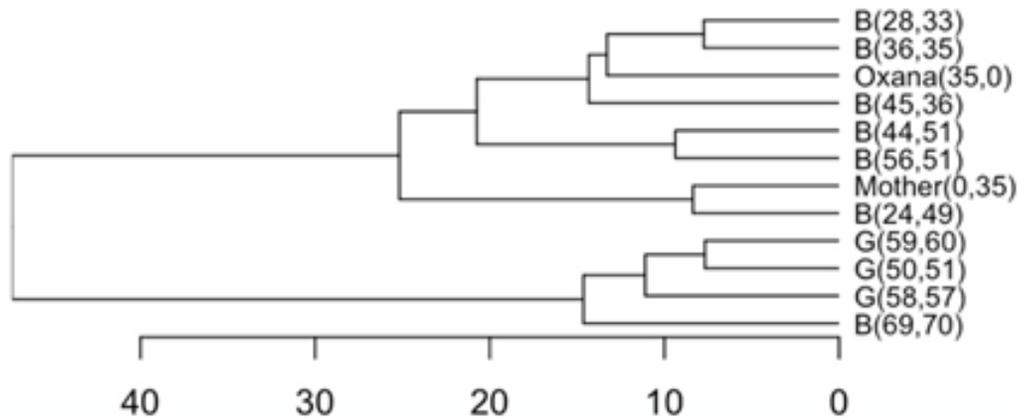


Figure 1: Cluster analysis of elements in Jana's grid: Euclidian distance and Ward clustering

B- boys, G-girls; in parenthesis – the city-block distances with Jana and Oxana elements respectively

The analysis of a grid in Jana's case highlights some potential targets for family counselling, which, in turn, could focus on actual worries, presented by the family, as no warning signs that require family crisis intervention were found. First, it seems that the position, assumed by Jana, is characterized by over-responsibility. She is concerned with feelings and the traumatic experiences of children (DEP, EMOT constructs) at the expense of common constructs that are more self-oriented, directed at clarification of the quality and reciprocity of interaction (INS). She emphasizes the attributes of a caring figure when presenting herself (secure, future-oriented, harmonious and happy) and, in general, appears as rational and goal-directed. In real life Jana is also a very helpful, socially-oriented and self-sacrificing person. The acceptance of spontaneous reactions, importance of her own feelings, the lowering of demands on the self, and the possibility of sharing responsibility with others (including her biological daughter) is one of the potential issues to address in counselling. Secondly, Jana is probably giving too much positive value to the peacefulness of interactions, and avoidance of problematic ones. To be noted is the highest rank given to Oxana on *harmony* vs. *handicap* construct. For the mother of a girl entering the early adolescence a positive reformulation of difficulties and tensions could be beneficial. Finally, one may discuss the impact of past

traumatic experiences of parenting on her perception of care at the moment, e.g. a tendency to perceive the girls as vulnerable, more difficult and less rewarding to raise. This can be linked to the disruption of the caring relationship with her grandson, and a tendency to contrast residual fantasies of how it could have been with the more troublesome reality of raising her daughters.

## CONCLUSION

The method described above is just one of the ways the personal constructs methodology may be used in work with adoptive families. Its distinctive feature was aptly put by Helen McConachie (1986, p. 81): "potentially the use of repertory grids in research with parents would meet the requirement of focusing on individual differences and since the content is personal it is not judged in advance as functional or dysfunctional". It is especially important in the contemporary context in Russia, where the dominant framework of dealing with adoptive parents is that of selection, monitoring, identification of risk signals and prevention of maltreatment. An evaluative, discriminative approach may be contributing to opposition between the parents, on the one hand, and psychologists and social workers, on the other (Zhuikova et al., 2018). There is a need for a

helping and collaborative framework instead, and the personal constructs perspective is one of the potential foundations for this.

Some further developments are needed to refine the diagnostic capacities of the proposed method for the study of parental expectations. The failure to find significant differences in our exploratory study wasn't unexpected, since the heterogeneity of both adoptive parents and control groups was extremely high and hard to control. There is a need for explanatory studies with well-defined groups based on their similarity in relation to specific adoption issues to test the predictions (for example, those who adopt chronically ill children, or those in kinship care). It remains unclear to what extent the low levels of differentiation of the construct system, typical in our sample, can be attributed to a stereotypic approach by parents or the particularities of the chosen grid elicitation method. Some problems remain with the use of a content analysis system. The distribution of frequencies is very uneven in our sample, which questions the practical usefulness of rare categories. The initial attempt to assess the inter-rater reliability in ten possible pairs formed by 5 judges (see Zhuykova et al., 2018), gives the mean value for Cohen's kappa of 0.68. For the purposes of our exploratory study the consensual decision of three authors was used. In order to improve reliability, short guidelines with samples of constructs were prepared [3]. The necessity for modifications of the content analysis system has to be further evaluated.

However, with the limited data currently available the method helps to get insights into important aspects of the adoption process from the parents' perspective. Moreover, it is enthusiastically received by the parents in most cases, who are intrigued by the possibility of getting a better understanding of their own emotional reactions and choices. Repertory grid completion offers the possibility of creating a shared space where these reactions are subjected to observations by both a parent and a psychologist and can be thought over and evaluated. So it has potential not only as an assessment tool, but also as an intervention tactic.

Eliciting and studying the constructs of adoption should be flexible and context-dependent. Completing a rank grid is not a

requirement. For counselling objectives, observation, comparison, sorting and discussion of children's photos in an informal manner may be beneficial. There are also some disadvantages to the proposed method – for example there is the question of whether a family member's evaluation falls in the range of convenience of constructs elicited with photographs, or whether for strictly dichotomous constructs (such as boys vs. girls in our example) the ranking procedure is suitable. Depending on the research or counselling objectives, modifications of the proposed procedure (such as omission of family elements, additional requirements for personal content of elicited constructs, attempts to elicit a particular type of construct by creating a role list, or a simplified, yes-or-no scoring grid form) are welcomed.

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