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Forming Family Concepts in Pre-Adolescents Living in Orphanages

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Abstract

This study explores how pre-adolescent children in orphanages develop their understanding of family, particularly as an idealized and spiritual concept, within specific socio-pedagogical contexts. The research identifies a tripartite model of family perception—comprising cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. The investigation was structured around evaluative criteria (knowledge-based, value-driven, and behavioral), with assessment across three levels of development: high, moderate, and low. The experimental design incorporated principles of spiritual development and personal transformation. Findings highlight the importance of tailoring educational efforts to the developmental stage, gender, and social background of children in institutional care. Effective strategies included fostering an educational environment that supports family-like connections and coordinating socio-pedagogical interventions to deepen personal engagement with the concept of family. The results underscore significant age and gender-related differences and affirm the efficacy of the proposed pedagogical approach in nurturing a spiritual ideal of family among preteen residents of orphanages.

Keywords: Family concept, Institutional care, Pre-adolescents, Spiritual development, Socio-pedagogical framework

Introduction

Human beings are inherently spiritual, carrying an innate tendency toward goodness from birth. The nurturing of spirituality in younger generations is a continuous process, passed on through meaningful interaction between educators and learners. An individual's spiritual development is closely tied to the spiritual atmosphere of their family, the nature of child–educator relationships, and the broader educational environment.

The formation of a spiritual ideal emerges at the intersection of individual potential and the collective spiritual context of society. It is within this dynamic that personal spiritual growth and inner transformation take place. According to the Concept of Spirituality proposed by Kievisas and Otych (2019), the notion of a spiritual ideal aligns with the evolving transformation of the individual [1]. The more a person aspires to such an ideal, the more pronounced their spiritual qualities become. Spirituality manifests in social behavior through the internalization of core values—such as self-awareness, respect for diverse perspectives, personal agency, and the pursuit of self-fulfillment.

In contemporary education, fostering the idea of the family as a spiritual ideal holds considerable importance. The family plays a vital role in meeting a child's need for spiritual growth. However, children in orphanages largely engage with collective societal narratives rather than individualized familial experiences. As a result, the degree of their spiritual development can

significantly shape how they conceptualize the family as an ideal. This article aims to explore and evaluate the effectiveness of socio-pedagogical strategies in cultivating such perceptions among pre-adolescents living in orphanage settings.

The theme of a happy family life is widely explored by both Ukrainian and international scholars. For instance, Buettner, Nelson, and Veenhoven (2020) argue that ensuring national happiness should be a priority for policymakers [2]. They advocate for political strategies that not only study the determinants of happiness but also support vulnerable populations and enhance the social environment. Among the most effective measures, they highlight the promotion of volunteerism, community engagement, social integration, meaningful activities, and health-related initiatives.

Contemporary socio-economic progress is inextricably linked to the spiritual well-being of individuals. This issue becomes particularly pressing in the context of children raised in orphanages. The absence of coherent socio-educational strategies aimed at nurturing spirituality and guiding children toward a spiritual ideal presents a significant obstacle to the implementation of systemic reforms in public life. Consequently, fostering a concept of family as a spiritual ideal among institutionalized children must rely on frameworks that substitute the role of parents or caregivers and are supported by an enriching educational environment.

Bekh (2015), in outlining the foundations of spiritual development, identifies thirteen guiding principles for a spiritually oriented life [3]. These include: the principle of personal agency in spiritual growth; the continuous expansion of self through the prioritization of values over needs; the pursuit of maximum spiritual fulfillment through altruistic acts; and the progression from basic spirituality to deep spiritualization via moral conscience and personal dignity. Additional principles emphasize consistency between motivation and values, the creation of spiritually responsive environments free from pedagogical stereotypes, the cultivation of openness while respecting inner personal complexity, and spiritual adaptability through overcoming fear and self-negation.

Moreover, Bekh highlights the risk of developmental paradoxes when the educational process fails to align with children's actual psychological and moral stages—resulting in a mere formal passage through age groups (e.g., preschooler to teenager), without true personal development. Other critical laws include the imperative to "Know Yourself," which encourages self-awareness through historical consciousness and value attachment, and the belief that education must translate knowledge into meaningful action. Finally, the overarching principle of universal spirituality encompasses love, reverence, and respect as fundamental values.

Given that educational processes are shaped by both objective and subjective factors, we draw on the insights of Kievisas and Otych (2019), who highlight key conditions under which a child's spiritual transformation occurs [1]. These include the role of the teacher as a spiritual guide; the child's own disposition—whether receptive, indifferent, or resistant to the teacher's influence; and the spiritual atmosphere of the educational environment, whether at the institutional level or in the context of interpersonal relationships within it.

In relation to the formation of the concept of family as a spiritual ideal among children raised outside of traditional family structures, we also consider the research of Vergara, Abigail, Pagkalinawan, and Villafranca (2018) [4]. Their work, focused on orphaned children in the Philippines, examines the cognitive, emotional, and spiritual-moral development of this vulnerable population. The authors propose a typology of orphans: "paternal orphans" (those who have lost their father), "maternal orphans" (those who have lost their mother), "double or full orphans" (those who have lost both parents), and "social orphans"—children separated from one or both parents due to circumstances such as poverty, substance abuse, or incarceration. These children often experience serious emotional deficits due to a lack of support, which makes life planning and decision-making particularly challenging.

We affirm the idea that children's prior life experiences significantly influence their future choices. In this context, educators must play a stabilizing and empowering role, recognizing the potential impact of their interactions on the lives of orphaned children. This position is also emphasized in the work of Taniguchi, Warren, Hite, Widmer, Zabriskie, Nsubuga, and Mugimu (2019) [5], who stress the necessity for orphans to experience a sense of belonging and emotional security. They argue that collective efficacy—founded on shared understanding and contextual awareness—can foster co-development. Their research underscores the critical importance of both emotional (e.g., guidance, coping strategies, problem-solving) and social support (e.g., affirmation of values, identity, and self-worth).

On this basis, we argue that the development of the concept of family as a spiritual ideal should be intentionally nurtured among preadolescents (ages 10–12) living in orphanages, as this stage is particularly formative for internalizing such values.

Methodology

This empirical study was conducted in two stages. The first stage aimed to assess the initial indicators related to the formation of preteen youngsters' perceptions of the family as a spiritual ideal. The second stage sought to examine the effectiveness of specific socio-pedagogical conditions in fostering these perceptions.

A total of 192 children aged 10 to 12 from orphanages in the Zaporizhzhya region participated in the research. Among them, there were 110 girls and 82 boys. Specifically, the 10-year-old group included 35 girls and 30 boys; the 11-year-old group had 35 girls and 32 boys; and the 12-year-old group consisted of 40 girls and 20 boys.

During the experimental phase, 682 observation sessions were conducted. In addition, 1,046 responses were collected through structured conversations with the children. A total of 1,125 questionnaires were processed, including 880 responses from 60 parents and 245 responses from 23 teachers.

This research recognized that children's spiritual ideals and moral values are typically established during early socialization within the family environment. These foundational experiences subsequently influence how children imagine and relate to their future families. Accordingly, the conceptual framework for understanding the family as a spiritual ideal was structured around three key components: informational, emotional, and behavioral. The informational component concerned knowledge about interpersonal relationships within marriage and the division of family responsibilities. The emotional component addressed the children's prospective emotional engagement with future offspring and close relatives. The behavioral component related to expected patterns of conduct during the premarital phase.

The study evaluated the development of ideas about the family as a spiritual ideal based on three interrelated criteria: informational-cognitive, motivational-value, and activity-based. The informational-cognitive criterion referred to the child's understanding of the social and normative foundations of family life, awareness of legal and moral responsibilities, and knowledge of personal development as a basis for family well-being. The motivational-value criterion focused on the child's desire to fulfill future social roles—such as husband, wife, parent—grounded in spiritual values, as well as their general attitude toward the family as a life priority. The activity criterion assessed the child's ability to visualize their future family life, make responsible decisions, and communicate effectively with the opposite sex.

To clarify these constructs, the research incorporated the notion of "matrimoniality," a concept in the scientific literature that refers to the set of ideas and expectations individuals hold regarding marriage and family life. Matrimonial representations are influenced by various factors including socio-economic status, cultural norms, religious background, intellectual compatibility, and social identity. These representations may be classified into moral (values associated with marriage and children), psychological (emotional knowledge and compatibility), pedagogical (parenting skills), sanitary (awareness of health and hygiene in family life), and economic-household (understanding of domestic and financial management) domains. Such perceptions are formed gradually during the socialization process under the influence of adults, educators, and peers. This framework was foundational in assessing how preteen children in orphanages form concepts of family as a spiritual ideal.

For the second indicator—children's awareness of their rights and responsibilities in forming a future family—it is important to draw on elements of folk pedagogy. These norms, deeply rooted in cultural traditions, reflect universal societal obligations related to family and communal life. Topics such as marriage, procreation, childbirth, child-rearing, and moral protection are considered essential across cultures, highlighting their foundational role in the development of a child's understanding of family.

The third indicator within the information-cognitive criterion concerns the child's knowledge of spiritual and moral self-improvement as a basis for future family well-being. This knowledge should be cultivated through deliberate integration of spirituality into the educational process. Kate Adams (2019) emphasizes the importance of spiritual space in children's development, noting its impact on their confidence, belief systems, and openness [6]. She recommends fostering this space through spiritual experience (often tied to tradition), multidisciplinary engagement, and enhanced self-awareness. Similarly, research by Rouholamini and colleagues (2017) on Persian orphans identifies key components of spiritual development, including the image of God, the personal relationship with God, and the search for meaning in the face of hardship [7]. These insights offer valuable lessons for Ukrainian orphanages, where the role of spirituality in education remains underdeveloped. Furthermore, the interpersonal dynamics within orphanages often resemble familial relationships, especially among children raised together despite age differences. This phenomenon can be viewed positively. As Pérez (2016) illustrates, historical examples from Spanish and Mexican settler communities show a broad and inclusive approach to family, where communal support and shared responsibilities created strong social bonds [8]. In the orphanage context, the constant interaction among children—beyond formal classroom settings—allows them to function as a cohesive unit. Participation in shared responsibilities, such as cleaning or maintaining the grounds, helps cultivate a sense of kinship and nurtures positive attitudes toward family values and relationships.

The findings of Stavrova and Luhmann (2016) support this view [9]. By identifying three types of individual attachment—close, relational, and collective—they highlight that each type can be linked to a high level of life satisfaction, which positively influences future family happiness. In our study, the relationships among children in orphanages are seen as a form of collective attachment, which facilitates the development of the concept of family as a spiritual ideal among preteen youngsters. Bryant, Smart, and King (2005) further emphasize the connection between life experiences—especially memories and emotions—and well-being, showing that frequent positive memories correlate with an enhanced ability to enjoy life [10].

Historically, the Ukrainian family has been characterized by long-standing community bonds and the development of a patriarchal structure, shaped by internal family dynamics and reinforced by the influence of the state and Christian church,

which introduced Christian norms regarding marriage and family behavior. This patriarchal family model persisted for an extended period.

Currently, Ukraine is witnessing a transformation of the patriarchal family model, alongside the rise of new family forms such as child-centered families, common-law marriages, and various "quasi-family" arrangements including homosexual partnerships, trial families, and single-parent households. These changes have also altered family functions, with increasing individualism, shifting family roles, and a stronger focus on success outside the family sphere. As a result, traditional reproductive and educational functions have narrowed, leading to social challenges such as depopulation, the emergence of "social orphanhood," and difficulties in socializing the younger generation.

Moral development begins in childhood through processes of self-discovery and spiritual growth. However, in orphanages, the role of parents as primary socialization agents and spiritual mentors is often absent or inadequate. In these situations, the "substitution factor"—including pedagogical staff, representatives of public organizations, and volunteers—must step in, possessing the necessary skills and competence to provide spiritual and moral education, and to prepare children to embrace the family as a spiritual ideal.

Let us now describe the second criterion. The motivation to fulfill social roles such as husband, wife, father, or mother, grounded in the spiritual values of the family, plays a crucial role in shaping the idea of the family as a spiritual ideal. Every activity is driven by some form of motive. Scientific literature distinguishes two types of motives: conscious motives, which include interest, ideals, and convictions, and unconscious motives, such as suggestion, desire, and predispositions. Unconscious motives tend to exist only in uncontrolled, intense cravings. Among the most common motivations for marriage are love, spiritual closeness, psychological compatibility, moral reasons, and practical considerations.

The concept of choosing a marriage partner is well illustrated by the "filter theory" proposed by Kerckhoff and Davis (1962) [11]. According to this theory, selecting a partner is a sequential process in which a series of filters progressively narrows down individual choices. A key point is understanding what these filters represent. The first filter is geographic location, which eliminates potential partners that a person is unlikely to meet. The next filter, homogamy, excludes those who do not match social criteria, such as class, religion, or education. At this stage, the individual begins contact with those they find attractive. Later stages assess the similarity of values and the compatibility of role expectations. Marriage is viewed as the successful passage through all these filters.

Centers (1975) developed the instrumental theory of spouse selection, emphasizing the fulfillment of needs. He argued that some needs are more significant than others and may vary between men and women [12]. According to Centers, individuals are attracted to those whose needs complement or resemble their own.

Murstein's "stimulus-value-role" theory (1970), also known as the "exchange and maximum benefit" theory, is widely accepted among spouse selection theories [13]. This theory rests on two main points: first, the strength of a relationship at each stage depends on the balance of positive and negative traits exchanged between partners. Second, marital choice progresses through a series of stages. The first stage, called "stimulus," involves the initial impression when partners first see each other, which includes assessing physical appearance, intelligence, social compatibility, and other appealing qualities. If there is mutual attraction at this stage, the relationship moves to the second stage: "value comparison," where partners discuss their views on life, marriage, gender roles, and child-rearing. If they find significant differences, the relationship usually ends here. If, however, the initial attraction is supported by shared values, the relationship proceeds to the third stage: "role," during which partners evaluate if each other's role behaviors align with their expectations. The choice of a marriage partner is important at all three stages, and hasty decisions rarely guarantee a successful marriage.

Similar concepts are reflected in Reiss's Wheel Theory of Love (1976), which outlines the process of selecting a marriage partner through four interconnected, sequential stages: establishing a relationship, self-disclosure, developing interdependence, and fulfilling basic individual needs such as trust and encouragement of ambitions. According to Reiss, love develops gradually through these stages, and the absence of any one stage can negatively impact the growth or stability of the relationship.

Winch's theory of Complementary Needs (1958) focuses on partner interaction, suggesting that lovers should share similar social characteristics while also psychologically complementing one another [14]. However, we emphasize that while this theory helps identify the most attractive partner—such as a gentlewoman being attractive to a powerful man—it does not guarantee a successful family life.

Additionally, Bronfenbrenner's (1986) work on the environmental influences on family functioning is relevant [15]. He identifies two key systems affecting families: the mesosystem, which includes factors like parents' lifestyles and living conditions, and the external environment system, involving influences from parents' acquaintances and friends. Bronfenbrenner also proposed three models explaining personality development and readiness for adulthood: the chronic system, the social address model, and the process context model. The chronic system distinguishes between normative events (such as school, puberty, marriage) and non-normative events (such as parental divorce or illness). The social address model considers all family aspects and is practical for quickly assessing readiness for family life. The process context model

highlights the mother-child relationship, emphasizing social class differences in upbringing, the mother's central role as a tutor, and the importance of time in personality development. We believe that the interplay between these models serves as significant motivation for personal growth and preparedness for family life. Of particular interest is Bronfenbrenner's observation that children facing adversities may make more mature decisions than their peers.

Pillay (2011) examined how psychological and pedagogical support within schools influences children's attitudes toward living independently [16]. The study highlighted love, attention, and care as crucial factors driving positive change. In a related vein, Gentzler, Palmer, Yi, Root, and Moran (2018) investigated how mothers' values shape the emotional socialization of their children, showing that mothers often project their own desires and ideals onto their offspring [17]. This suggests that the motivation to form a family develops gradually over time, rather than being a fleeting decision.

Another important driver in marriage and family formation is the motive of deficiency, which operates unconsciously. This includes feelings such as fragile self-worth that stirs strong urges, a sense of inferiority combined with gratitude or desperation, and scenarios where marriage is viewed as a refuge from personal difficulties or fears. Growing up in a family influences future partner choices in subtle, unconscious ways, often complicating these decisions. Both conscious and unconscious motives play a role in shaping children's behaviors, influenced by factors like their social standing, gender, age, and personal values.

In orphanages, Ganga and Maphalal (2013) emphasize the pivotal role of educators in helping children overcome feelings of oppression by fostering hope for a more just society [18]. Public organizations can also contribute positively by facilitating meaningful interactions between children and their caregivers, thereby promoting stronger bonds and helping shield children from risky social contacts.

Our own research found that many orphaned children struggled to answer questions about spiritual ideals, family life, marriage, and love. Some expressed a reluctance to form families, often citing family conflicts as a deterrent. Others gave reasons based on external influences or material gain, such as wanting a wealthy spouse. These findings suggest a lack of motivation and emotional connection to family life among many children, who often do not see their current or future families as spiritual or moral models.

Children enter orphanages for a variety of reasons, and this often results in multiple layers of deprivation — sensory, emotional, maternal, cognitive, psychological, and social [19–22]. Life in such institutions tends to limit children's opportunities to engage in diverse social roles, which hinders the natural development of gender identity. This restricted self-identification with same-sex adults often leads to confusion around gender roles and contributes to difficulties in understanding and assuming the future responsibilities of motherhood or fatherhood.

We believe that fostering moral alignment between future spouses, and later between parents and children, is crucial in shaping the family as a spiritual ideal. As such, our research identifies "motivation for starting a family and embracing responsible parenting" as a key indicator. In line with this, we reference the study by Yi, Gentzler, Ramsey, and Root (2016), who explored how mothers sometimes respond negatively to their children's positive emotions — a behavior often rooted in their own upbringing [23]. These reactions can create discomfort and emotional repression in children. The researchers stress the importance of cultivating emotional regulation skills in children, which our study will address through targeted training exercises and structured project-based activities.

The relationship between early emotional experiences and lifelong wellbeing is highlighted in the work of Bryant, Smart, and King (2005), who argue that the ability to enjoy life is shaped by a bank of positive memories. Hence, childhood experiences not only affect emotional health but also influence a person's vision of an ideal family, fostering the desire to replicate such ideals in the future [10].

Children today are socialized in diverse and often unpredictable environments. In this context, fatherhood and motherhood emerge from specific life circumstances. It is crucial for children to experience the emotional presence of caregivers who are empathetic, attentive, and responsive. These early connections lay the groundwork for their future capabilities as parents. Role models play an indispensable part in this development. Additionally, children should be guided to understand the reasons behind social norms and the importance of adhering to them. For this reason, we emphasize implementing social and pedagogical strategies that encourage children to perceive the family as a spiritual and moral anchor. One such concept we advocate is "autonomy within interdependence."

The significance of positive interpersonal relationships is further underscored in the work of Grusec (2011), who examines how trust and belief in others' good intentions — values found across cultures — nurture children's self-worth and emotional resilience. These values, if internalized early, can shape the family ideal in adulthood [24].

Finally, when evaluating the third indicator of the motivational-value framework, we consider it essential to examine how parental family environments influence the development of family-related values. In our research, we categorized family traditions into several domains: interaction with nature; daily routines, work, and leisure activities; interpersonal communication and rituals; and engagement with the arts and creative expression. These domains contribute significantly to children's understanding of family life and help construct a well-rounded ideal of what a future family should be.

Let us now turn our attention to the third criterion — the activity-based dimension — which is characterized by several key indicators: the ability to envision and model future family life, the capacity to make decisions and accept responsibility for their consequences, and the competence to communicate effectively with members of the opposite sex. The process of forming an image of one's future family is deeply rooted in the ideological patterns acquired from the parental family, the satisfaction of personal needs, and the internalization of values, norms, and communication styles experienced during childhood.

This model of family life includes one's concept of role distribution within the family, the perceived qualities of a suitable marriage partner, and the structure of family hierarchy. The child's needs, along with the conditions that support their personal growth and development, play a fundamental role in shaping these views. In the absence of love, emotional warmth, and a nurturing environment, a child's development is significantly hindered. A useful classification of needs relevant to this discussion includes biological needs, such as physical well-being and a healthy lifestyle; social needs, including emotional security, family harmony, affectionate bonds, friendships, and self-worth; and psychological needs, encompassing intellectual curiosity, aesthetic sensibility, emotional maturity, self-awareness, and the ability to self-regulate.

The work of Hicks and King (2009) is significant in this regard, as they underscore the importance of satisfying family relationships and how such relationships contribute to one's overall sense of life meaning [25]. Their findings suggest that meaningful social connections provide individuals with purpose, which is particularly relevant when considering how to foster among children in orphanages a vision of family life as a spiritual ideal.

In our study, Maslov's classical hierarchy of needs (1954) provides a foundational theoretical framework [26]. His model includes five levels: physiological survival, safety and security, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Each level represents a different domain of human motivation, ranging from basic survival to the fulfillment of personal potential. However, in the context of cultivating a child's perception of the family as a spiritual ideal, we also find Pomytkin's reinterpretation of Maslov's framework (2007) to be especially meaningful [27]. Expanding on Maslow's dual concepts of the biological and social self, Pomytkin introduces the notion of the spiritual self — a higher motivational structure that governs human behavior through moral and existential aspirations.

According to Pomytkin, spiritual motivation is grounded in several ascending levels: the desire for spiritual self-improvement through personal refinement and the pursuit of inner beauty; devotion expressed through altruism and compassionate action; the quest for wisdom through the search for truth and moral clarity; a commitment to righteousness through adherence to ethical principles and personal harmony; and ultimately, the pursuit of holiness, which involves embracing and realizing one's spiritual mission. The culmination of this journey is the enrichment of the individual spirit, which gains depth and meaning through the integration of biological, social, and spiritual experiences.

What distinguishes spiritual development from personal development is its source: whereas personal development is shaped largely by socialization and education, spiritual development arises from the awakening of higher consciousness, which may transcend or even challenge societal norms. This perspective is essential for forming a truly holistic vision of the family as not merely a social institution but as a space for moral, emotional, and spiritual growth.

At the highest level of development, a young person demonstrates a well-rounded and stable understanding of what constitutes a healthy and functional family life. They are not only familiar with the social norms surrounding family formation, but also possess a clear sense of legal and ethical responsibilities tied to starting a family. Their motivation to embrace roles such as spouse and parent is guided by a strong appreciation of the family as a central value in life. These individuals show maturity in envisioning future family dynamics, making considered decisions, accepting responsibility for their actions, and engaging in confident, respectful communication with the opposite sex. Their grasp of family values is rooted in both rational understanding and emotional readiness.

At a moderate level, these perceptions exist but are less integrated. The young person might express positive attitudes toward forming a family, but their understanding tends to be fragmented. While they may recognize some duties associated with marriage or parenthood, this knowledge is often superficial or inconsistent. Their motivations for family life are present but lack direction or depth, often shaped by vague ideals rather than firm principles. They may encounter difficulty when attempting to imagine what their future family would look like or how to take active steps toward it. Their interactions with the opposite sex can be appropriate in certain settings but are often unbalanced or uncertain, revealing a need for further social development.

In contrast, a low level of development is marked by confusion or apathy toward the concept of family. These individuals often have little or no awareness of the responsibilities involved in family life and lack even basic knowledge of their rights or the roles they might one day fulfill. Motivation to become a spouse or a parent is weak or altogether absent, and the family is not viewed as an essential or meaningful goal. They tend to struggle with personal responsibility, cannot articulate a vision of what they want from family life, and find it difficult to build healthy relationships with the opposite sex. This absence of foundational understanding creates significant barriers to forming stable, fulfilling relationships in the future.

To investigate these differences, fieldwork was conducted in orphanage settings, incorporating both observational and participatory methods. Researchers observed the children during a variety of daily situations—formal learning, casual

interactions, and leisure periods. Detailed logs were maintained to document emotional responses, behaviors in peer interactions, and signs of value formation. This allowed for a more nuanced reading of how children understand and relate to the idea of family.

In addition to observation, conversations were held to explore the children's attitudes toward ideals such as kindness, closeness, and support within human relationships. These dialogues offered insight into their personal beliefs and emotional associations with the concept of family. To gain a broader perspective, surveys were also distributed to guardians and educators. The questions were designed to assess the influence of home life, peer interactions, and media exposure on the children's family ideals.

For this purpose, an adapted version of L. Moskalyova's tool—"The House is Called 'Light'"—was employed. This questionnaire was modified slightly to suit both parental figures and teachers who work with children on a regular basis. Participants responded to fifteen structured items, offering reflections on issues such as household atmosphere, emotional connection, and the perceived impact of stories, cartoons, or conversations with peers. Sixty parents or guardians and twenty-three teachers took part. All identifying information was kept confidential, in accordance with ethical guidelines agreed upon with orphanage administrators.

Results and Discussion

Empirical study (diagnostic stage) of the main indicators of the formation of the idea about the family as a spiritual ideal in preteen youngsters allowed to state several features. For example, the distribution of the obtained results by age and gender is presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. The results of the diagnostic stage of studying the state of formation of children's ideas about the family as a spiritual ideal (by age and gender)

Criteria	Levels		
	High	**Average**	**Law**
Information-cognitive	**15% (28)**	**25% (48)**	**60% (116)**
	10 years old		
	4 girls	6 girls	25 girls
	2 boys	2 boys	26 boys
	11 years old		
	12 girls	18 girls	5 girls
	4 boys	10 boys	18 boys
	12 years old		
	6 girls	10 girls	24 girls
	0 boys	2 boys	18 boys
Motivational-valuable	**12% (23)**	**20% (38)**	**68% (131)**
	10 years old		
	2 girls	5 girls	28 girls
	2 boys	2 boys	26 boys
	11 years old		
	9 girls	13 girls	13 girls
	4 boys	**10 boys**	**18 boys**
	12 years old		
	6 girls	6 girls	28 girls
	0 boys	2 boys	18 boys
Activity	**9% (17)**	**59% (113)**	**32% (62)**
	10 years old		
	2 girls	13 girls	20 girls
	2 boys	22 boys	6 boys
	11 years old		
	6 girls	16 girls	13 girls
	2 boys	22 boys	8 boys
	12 years old		
	5 girls	23 girls	12 girls
	0 boys	17 boys	3 boys
Total results	**12%**	**36.6%**	**53.4%**

Figure 1 shows a diagram of the distribution of levels of perceptions of the family as a spiritual ideal.
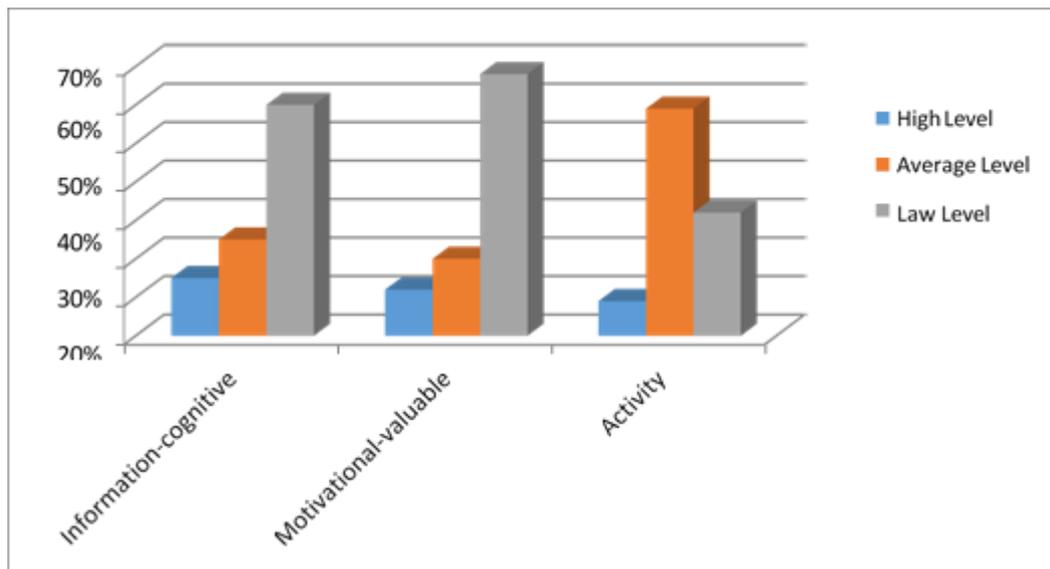
Figure 1. Diagram of the distribution of levels of ideas about the family as a spiritual ideal according to each of the criteria

To further develop the study, we proposed revisiting and evaluating the effectiveness of specific socio-pedagogical conditions designed to support the formation of preteen orphanage residents' conceptions of the family as a spiritual ideal. Three major conditions were emphasized. First, it is essential to consider the age, gender, and social characteristics of these children, as these factors significantly influence how they form ideas about family. Second, an effective educational environment must be fostered through the creation and reinforcement of familial connections—real or symbolic—which serve as vital foundations for internalizing positive family models. Third, the integration of socio-pedagogical interventions should aim to enrich children's personal experiences and internal resources, allowing them to gradually form and refine their own notions of family as a moral and spiritual construct.

The developmental trajectories of orphans and children deprived of parental care are deeply shaped by various forms of deprivation. Among the most prominent outcomes are difficulties in forming healthy interpersonal relationships, an overreliance on external instructions, and disturbances in self-awareness, all of which may contribute to a heightened sense of inferiority and even an increased risk of antisocial behavior. These children frequently exhibit behavioral challenges, emotional instability, and impaired identity development, stemming largely from the absence of consistent, unconditional parental affection.

Age-specific traits of children raised in orphanages are often linked to what is referred to as "deprivation retardation." This manifests in delayed physical, cognitive, and emotional development. Common psychological characteristics include heightened anxiety, a pervasive sense of social hostility, mood instability, and an underdeveloped sense of self. Many of these children have either never lived within a stable family unit or have experienced deeply negative familial environments. As a result, their psychological identity is often marked not by a clear and individualized "I," but rather by a collective and impersonal "we," tied to the institutional group setting. This internal void fosters feelings of abandonment, loneliness, and personal inadequacy, often expressed through aggression, teasing, or loss of emotional control.

In this context, the role of sex education gains particular importance. A concerning shift has been noted in recent years: where once the moral framework of sexual behavior and the mutual responsibilities of partners were emphasized, now there is a growing cultural trend toward permissiveness and the uncritical validation of sexual freedom. Against this backdrop, both the family (where available) and the school must work collaboratively to educate children on the consequences of early sexual activity. Topics such as the risks of unintended pregnancy, societal stigmatization of young motherhood, the psychological toll of abortion, and the rising number of single mothers or children who are ultimately abandoned must be addressed in a responsible and age-appropriate manner. These discussions should aim to restore a sense of responsibility and moral reflection to intimate relationships.

Furthermore, understanding the unique social characteristics of children in orphanages is imperative. Scholars define "sociality" as the set of attributes through which an individual relates creatively and responsibly to the larger social fabric—be it familial, ethnic, regional, national, or global. It encompasses one's values, behavioral tendencies, and commitment to social cohesion and shared well-being. However, studies indicate that children raised in institutional care often function predominantly on a biological or physical level of sociality. This is reflected in the limited variety and depth of their interpersonal relationships, a factor that contributes to chronic emotional and social isolation.

Such forms of deprivation not only hinder the development of meaningful social connections but also severely restrict the ability to form complex, empathetic ideas about family. The notion of the family as a spiritual ideal—based on mutual respect, sacrifice, and emotional reciprocity—can scarcely take root in environments where relationships are shaped more by institutional structure than by affection, trust, or shared experience.

In developing the content, forms, and methods for implementing the first socio-pedagogical condition, we considered the specific nature of deprivation experienced by students in orphanages. One of the key strategies employed was media-reflective training—a method aimed at reintegrating deprived children into normative social structures. This approach is rooted in a structured mediation process involving a third party who facilitates the identification of conflicts and guides the participants toward resolution and harmonious coexistence. Mediation, in this context, serves as a purposeful intervention that addresses the internal conflict between the adolescent's developing identity and the restrictive environment of deprivation.

To operationalize this condition, we designed a targeted training program titled *"Family Happiness is My Spiritual Ideal,"* which comprises seven thematic modules: "Palette of Family Life," "Love Around the World," "Birthday of Trust," "On Mutual Respect and More," "In the Country of Health," "From Remarks to Dialogue," and "The Road to Family Happiness." The overarching aim of this training, also referred to as *"Family Happiness – Let's Walk Together,"* is to prepare students for future family life by engaging them in the analysis and interpretation of core family values such as trust, mutual respect, health, dialogue, and family cohesion.

The specific objectives of the training sessions include: assessing participants' levels of awareness regarding particular family values; deepening their understanding of these values; sparking interest in the complexities of family life; and facilitating the internalization of the concepts introduced. A diverse range of methods was employed to achieve these goals, including group discussions, diagnostic testing, role-playing scenarios, brainstorming sessions, and strategies aimed at fostering critical thinking.

The second socio-pedagogical condition involves the organization of an effective educational space that fosters the establishment of family-like bonds. This environment plays a crucial role in helping preteen children develop a perception of the family as a spiritual ideal. The rationale for emphasizing this condition is supported by contemporary research that conceptualizes educational space as a temporal and informational continuum, shaped by past experiences, current interactions, and future aspirations. Within this framework, educational space is seen as a dynamic social domain specifically designed to support personal development.

For children living in orphanages—both social and biological orphans—such institutions serve as their primary educational environment. While traditional perspectives may characterize orphanages as settings prone to behavioral problems, we challenge the notion that these institutions are socially or pedagogically deficient. The foundational stages of a child's socialization typically occur within the family. However, in the absence of this unit, orphanages bear the responsibility of fostering healthy developmental conditions.

Research by Buschgens, van Aken, Swinkels, Ormel, Verhulst, and Buitelaar (2010) highlights the profound influence of parenting styles—emotional warmth, rejection, and overprotection—on children's behavioral outcomes [28]. Adolescents deprived of emotional warmth and exposed to high levels of rejection tend to exhibit inattentiveness, aggression, and antisocial behavior. These findings underscore the interplay between genetic predispositions and environmental influences, given the shared genetic heritage between parents and children. A family's behavioral history may thus contribute to the child's genetic and emotional vulnerability, shaping their views on family dynamics and increasing susceptibility to behavioral challenges. This further illustrates the importance of constructing a positive, supportive educational space that can mitigate negative influences and promote the formation of idealized family perceptions.

Instead, scholars such as Buschgens *et al.* (2010) emphasize that using community-based models that encompass a diversity of environments and parenting styles can mitigate the negative impacts of adverse upbringing [28]. In this context, the work of Şahin (2017) offers valuable insights—particularly the incorporation of spiritual genograms within family therapy [29]. A spiritual genogram serves as a map that illustrates religious and spiritual relationships within a family, highlighting generational patterns of conflict, connection, and significant events. We support the scholarly view, also articulated by Willow *et al.* (2009), that spiritual genograms are a powerful tool for assessing a family's spiritual and religious strengths [30].

In our study, the spiritual genogram is adopted as a supplementary instrument within the broader framework of socio-pedagogical conditions designed to shape children's perceptions of the family as a spiritual ideal. This tool provides insight into the spiritual heritage of the family, allowing for a deeper understanding of the child's past experiences and how these inform their current spiritual worldview.

To implement the second socio-pedagogical condition—establishing an effective educational space through the cultivation of family ties—we developed a series of socio-pedagogical projects focused on mitigating the effects sf family deprivation. One such initiative was the project *"The Family Begins with Good."* This program included a variety of training activities designed to instill family values, such as the exercise *"Values of My Family Life,"* and several interactive formats: role-playing games (e.g., *"Social Role Studio: Fitting,"* *"Rules of Life,"* *"Marriage and Family,"* *"Traditions of Marriage in Different*

Countries”), debates (*“Official Marriage: Pros and Cons,” “Age for Marriage,” “Marriage, Family, Law”*), and creative tasks like modeling problem situations or participating in the collage contest *“Happiness is Near.”*

In addition, the project featured structured parent-child dialogues such as *“Commandments of Fatherhood,” “Father, Mother, Children—A Happy Family,”* and *“Criteria of Adulthood.”* A key element of the initiative was the organization of collaborative events—*“Happy Family Day,” “Happy Family Week,”* and *“Happy Family Month”*—intended to promote interaction between children and their guardians, thereby reinforcing the value of shared experiences and intergenerational support.

The third socio-pedagogical condition focused on integrating various socio-pedagogical influences to enrich each child's individual experience in developing their conceptualization of the family as a spiritual ideal. It must be acknowledged that socio-pedagogical work in orphanages is often reduced to the mere collection of data and the administration of diagnostic tools, without any subsequent corrective or developmental interventions—largely due to systemic constraints in institutional planning. This static approach fails to facilitate meaningful developmental progress.

To address this issue, it is essential for orphanage staff to adopt more dynamic and reflective pedagogical practices. Beyond transmitting knowledge and skills, educators should guide children in observing and analyzing their own behaviors, actions, and emotions, as well as cultivating empathy and the ability to recognize positive emotional states in others.

In line with this goal, we developed a comprehensive social and educational program titled *“Spiritual Treasure”* for children aged 10–12. The program spans nine topics over 36 hours and is designed to foster a holistic understanding of family values and personal development. The topics include:

- *“Matrimonial Behaviour as a Construct of the Ideal Family Life”*
- *“World of Family Emotions”*
- *“Motive and Awareness as a Strategic Reference Point for Family Life”*
- *“Foundation of the Future Family”*
- *“Family Life in the Context of the Legal Aspect”*
- *“Spiritual and Moral Self-Improvement in the Socio-Pedagogical Range”*
- *“Construct and Result of the Image of Future Family Life”*
- *“Responsible Behaviour of Girls and Boys as a Component of Family Harmony”*
- *“Action Invariants: Today is Equal to Tomorrow”*

This program represents an integrated, action-oriented approach that reinforces children's internalization of family as a spiritual and moral ideal, grounded in self-awareness, empathy, and social responsibility.

The program provided for the organization of meetings of children with specialists in various fields (center of social services, volunteer associations, medical and legal spheres, religious denominations, etc.) to get acquainted with important aspects of the modern family, its functions, spiritual and moral foundations. Based on the generalized results of this experiment, we re-processed the methods and found positive changes in the levels of formation of ideas about the family as a spiritual ideal in preteen youngsters, which are presented in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Comparative results of the formation of ideas about the family as a spiritual ideal in childr en at an orphanage

Criteria	Before the introduction of social and pedagogical conditions			After the introduction of social and pedagogical conditions		
	Levels					
	High	Average	Low	High	Average	Low
Information-cognitive	**15% (28)**	**25% (48)**	**60% (116)**	**23% (44)**	**29% (55)**	**48% (93)**
	10 years old					
	4 girls 2 boys	6 girls 2 boys	25 girls 26 boys	9 girls 3 boys	1 girl 21 boys	25 girls 6 boys
	11 years old					
	12 girls 4 boys	18 girls 10 boys	5 girls 18 boys	12 girls 4 boys	18 girls 10 boys	5 girls 18 boys
	12 years old					
	6 girls 0 boys	10 girls 2 boys	24 girls 18 boys	6 girls 10 boys	5 girls 0 boys	29 girls 10 boys
Motivational-valuable	**12% (23)**	**20% (38)**	**68% (131)**	**19% (37)**	**23% (44)**	**58%(111)**
	10 years old					
	2 girls 2 boys	5 girls 2 boys	28 girls 26 boys	2 girls 2 boys	15 girls 2 boys	18 girls 26 boys
	11 years old					

	9 girls	13 girls	13 girls	19 girls	3 girls	13 girls
	4 boys	10 boys	18 boys	4 boys	20 boys	8 boys
	12 years old					
	6 girls	6 girls	28 girls	10 girls	2 girls	28 girls
	0 boys	2 boys	18 boys	0 boys	2 boys	18 boys
	9% (17)	**59% (113)**	**32% (62)**	**24% (46)**	**64% (122)**	**12% (24)**
	10 years old					
	2 girls	13 girls	20 girls	12 girls	18 girls	5 girls
	2 boys	22 boys	6 boys	20 boys	4 boys	6 boys
	11 years old					
Activity	6 girls	16 girls	13 girls	7 girls	24 girls	4 girls
	2 boys	22 boys	8 boys	2 boys	26 boys	4 boys
	12 years old					
	5 girls	23 girls	12 girls	5 girls	33 girls	2 girls
	0 boys	17 boys	3 boys	0 boys	17 boys	3 boys
Total results	**12%**	**36.6%**	**53.4%**	**22%**	**38.6%**	**39.4%**

Conclusion

The conducted study has empirically confirmed the effectiveness of the proposed socio-pedagogical conditions for fostering the perception of the family as a spiritual ideal among preteen children in orphanage settings. These findings substantiate the significance of targeted pedagogical strategies that address the complex emotional, social, and developmental needs of children deprived of parental care.

However, the present study does not claim to have exhaustively explored all dimensions of this multifaceted issue. Future research should focus on the development and systematic implementation of spiritual and moral educational programs not only for children in orphanages but also for their biological or substitute caregivers. Moreover, an important avenue for continued investigation lies in the active engagement of socio-pedagogical and psychological specialists through workshops, seminars, and training sessions designed for educators and orphanage staff. Such collaborative efforts will enhance the capacity of educational institutions to provide a nurturing environment that supports the spiritual and emotional development of vulnerable children.

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