BY-NC-ND

ISSN 2029-2775 (online)
SOCIALINIS DARBAS
SOCIAL WORK
2018, 16(1), p. 6–21.

# I. SOCIALINIS DARBAS SOCIAL WORK

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS SOCIAL SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE FOR CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND IN LATVIA: GUARDIANS AND EXPERTS' APPROACHES

**Ulla Zumente-Steele**
Rīga Stradiņš University
Department of Welfare and Social Work
Anninmuizas bulv. 26a, LV-1067, Riga, Latvia
Telephone: 371 6 706 0830
E-mail: ullazumente@gmail.com

**Assoc. Prof. Dr. Svajonė Mikėnė**
Mykolas Romeris University
Institute of Educational Sciences and Social Work
Ateities str. 20, LT-08303 Vilnius, Lithuania
Telephone: 370 5 271 4710
E-mail: svajone@mruni.eu

*Submitted on 19 March 2018*
*Accepted on 2 May 2018*

*DOI:10.13165/SD-18-16-1-01*

***Abstract***

*The article focuses on the care arrangements for children left behind and interaction with social support services from the perspective of guardians and experts. The global migration trends are discussed, revealing that economic, social and political reasons in combination with perceived solutions and future prospects motivate parents to emigrate. Family and parental crisis before the act of emigration, restrictions and uncertainty in destination countries, support parents' decisions to leave children behind. Care and protection of children left behind are analysed with focus on concepts of transnational care arrangements and emphasis on the role and functions of guardians as an alternative care form. Rationale and selected examples of innovative practices of provided social support services and assistance are presented. Empirical research focuses on guardians' subjective perspectives on assuming the role and interaction with social environment providing services and assistance*


© Mykolo Romerio universitetas, 2018
© Mykolas Romeris University, 2018

*and on experts' attitudes towards interventions applied and on what social services are necessary and how available and accessible they are. Qualitative research approach was chosen; there were accomplished 12 semi-structured in-depth interviews with the guardians, experts and social mentors, selected using purposeful sampling strategy. The data has been analysed using thematic content analysis method. The results revealed that the guardians seem to prefer informal social support over state organized groups, while professionals value all support groups. Experts and social mentors see social mentoring as effective form of support for adolescents and affirm young people's testimonials of gained trusting relationship with the mentor and new social ties to peers. The experts pointed out inequality in access to social services and differences in social assistance nation-wide in Latvia.*

***Keywords:*** *guardians, children left behind, parental emigration, social support, Latvia.*

## Introduction

In the period of twenty-five years leading up to 2015, the international migration had increased by 60% with the highest numbers, almost 5 million people annually, in the decade of 2000-2010 (UN DESA, 2016). During the last two decades (1996-2016) the total population of Latvia has decreased by half a million people[1] (CSB, 2017, 7). People's movement from Latvia abroad reached unprecedented levels during the global crisis in 2008-2009, especially to other EU and OECD countries (Mieriņa, 2015, 7-8). According to Hazans' assessment, "in total Latvia lost 260 thousand people in 2000-2014 as a result of international migration" (Hazans, 2015, 20). The net emigration in this period composed 10,9% of the total population that was recorded in the beginning of 2000 (Hazans, 2015, 21). Of all emigrated persons 84% are in active working age and 76% migrated to another EU country in 2015 (CSB, 2017). In the period 2014-2016 information collected by the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (2018) on the family status of emigrated people indicates that in cases when both parents emigrate, 31,6% of children are left behind in Latvia, in cases when only mother emigrates – 47,6% of children but if father emigrates – 83,1% of children stay in the home country (p.3).

The outcomes of parental migration to the "children left behind" (as referred in the literature) attracted increased attention of the researchers. Studies about the children have focused on socio-economic effects (Andrioni, 2011), child development (Battistella and Conaco, 1998), academic performance and educational impacts (Battistella and Conaco, 1998; Lahaie et al, 2009; Antman, 2011; Cappelloni, 2011), emotional experiences and responses to "shifts in intimate family relations brought about by (re) configurations of their care" (Hoang et al, 2014; Battistella and Conaco, 1998; Dreby, 2014), behavioural changes (Lahaie et al, 2009), resilience, psychological well-being and psychosocial health (Graham and Jordan, 2012; Cappelloni, 2011; Jegelevičiene and Katkoniene, 2013; Mazzucato et al, 2014; Vanore et al, 2014; Graham et al, 2014), mental health and depression risk (He et al, 2012). Scientists in the Baltic countries have also addressed various aspects related to parental emigration and its consequences for the children left behind:

1 Population decreased by 500,6 thousand people in 1996-2016, according to the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (CSB) data.

the experience of separation difficulties by kindergarten children from the perspective of attachment theory (Malinauskas, 2006); school children's views on parental migration (Kutsar et al, 2014), the role of educational professionals in alleviating the repercussions caused by parental migration (Jegelevičiene and Katkoniene, 2013). In Latvia, the role of the state's social and migration policies had been analysed with regard to the impact on children left behind (Broka, 2009); notions of resilience and adjustment, fulfilment of family functions have been studied in the broader context of transnational families (Sebre and Krūmiņa, 2012; Masļeņikova, 2015).

**Research problem**. Significantly less attention has been paid to the situation analysis of the guardians, formal and informal non-parent carers of children left behind, their perspectives about the complexities of caregiving relationships, providers of professional services and social assistance with the aim to enhance children's wellbeing.

**Research object –** perceptions of guardians who provide care for children of emigrated parents and opinions of the experts who provide relevant social services.

**Research goal** is to analyse social services and assistance provided for the children left behind from the guardians and experts' perspective.

**Research objectives:**

1. Analyse care forms and provided innovative social services and assistance for the benefit of children and guardians in Latvia.
2. Reveal attitudes of guardians and experts on practices of provided social support services and assistance for the children left behind.

**Research methods:** theoretical – analysis of scientific literature and legal documents, empirical – data collected performing 12 semi-structured in-depth interviews with: six experts working with guardians, children and families; social mentor to an adolescent left behind and mentor-coordinator of the regional mentoring programme in Latvia; four care-givers of kin and non-kin relationship (referred as "guardians") to the children left behind. Thematic content analysis method applied for empirical data analysis.

## 1. Care forms and social assistance for children in parental absence

The care forms in situation of parental absence, regardless of reasons, are generally categorized as out of family care. The United Nations, by adopting the "Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children" (2009) introduce another term "alternative care" which includes all forms of non-parental care and fills the gap otherwise imposed by other legal definitions. If children are not living with at least one of their parents for whatever reason and under whatever circumstances they are regarded as "without parental care", according to the UN Guidelines (2009). Alternative care may take the form of informal kinship or non-kinship care, any private arrangement provided in a family environment, whereby the child is looked after on an ongoing or indefinite basis by relatives or friends or by others in their individual capacity, at the initiative of the child, his/her parents or other person without this arrangement having been ordered by an administrative or judicial authority or a duly accredited body (ibid.). Alternative care can also be in the form of "formal care": in a family environment which has been ordered by a competent admin-

istrative or judicial authority, or care provided in a residential environment, including in private facilities, whether or not as a result of administrative or judicial measures (ibid.).

According to Latvian legislation, if custodial rights decision is made, the caregivers of children left behind become 'legal guardians' who take over parental responsibilities. More widespread are situations when parental responsibility does not need to be challenged, but "surrogate" caregivers are registered on the basis of notary proxy, they become under the law responsible carers for the child in the absence of parents. The placement of the child in "proxy care" for a period that exceeds 3 months is subject to approval by orphan's courts[2], based on individual assessment that it is in the interests of the child, and that the caregiver is able to undertake care duties, the court later on follows up the child's situation[3]. However, parents do not always seek the opinion of the orphan's court. It is estimated that in many cases caregiving relationships are not formalized at all and thus not overseen by children's protection and social services. Official data of the Latvian orphan's courts indicate that a total of 7281 and 6957 children were in formal out of home care in the years 2015 and 2016 respectively, of these 4620 and 4548 were in the care of legal guardians, 1232 and 1193 were living in foster families (The State Inspectorate for the Protection of Children's Rights, 2015, 3; 2016). Statistical information does not record the number of children who are placed in out of family formal care for the specific reason of parental emigration. Children's relatives comprise more than three quarters (76,9%) in the group of the total registered legal guardians in 2015 (ibid.). Grandparents are the majority of all relatives (66%) who uptake the task of guardianship. It is assumed that the majority of children left behind in Latvia fall within the scope of the common practice, that is, a carer assignment based on a notary proxy at the parents' request. The number of registered children with the orphan's court who were taken care of by another person for a period longer than 3 months (in parental absence) on the basis of the court's approval stood at 285 in 2015. In terms of children's age, higher number of registered powers of attorney are in the age group 4-12 years, lower in 13-17 years. The analysis of the orphan's courts practice stipulates that most often these are the cases when parents migrate abroad for work (The State Inspectorate for the Protection of Children's Rights, 2015, 46).

In the situation where parental care is not adequate, the family and the child has the right to state and municipal social assistance and social services. In the case of caregivers for children left behind it is required that they have a formal legal status. Availability of social assistance as material support is tightly linked to a specifically calculated family's income. The scope of social services are provided at the discretion of each municipality, most often the argument of available or limited funding is used to explain the differences in regions and counties. However, in the recent years there have been a number of innovative approaches initiated as pilot projects in Latvia that later on continue to be

2 Orphan's courts in Latvia are municipal institutions – "a guardianship and trusteeship institution established by a municipality or city local government" (Law on Orphan's Courts of 2006 (Ch.I, Art.2.(1)) under the supervision of the State Inspectorate for Protection of Children's Rights.

3 Law on the Protection of the Children's Rights, Art. 45(1) and (4).

offered by some providers and can be useful for the support of children left behind, their guardians and parents.

**Family assistant –** a new social service providing support to families with children when parents are unable to sufficiently meet children's needs. The assistance is directed at the family as a whole and the focus on the child is seen within the family system and environment, not separately. Family assistants promote well-being of the family through physical, emotional and educational, informative help[4]. The examples of assistance include helping to make and attend doctor appointments, help with grocery shopping and making meals, addressing children's emotional needs, school homework, handle paperwork with institutions and many other. This service has been initiated by few municipalities in Latvia, and made available for shorter or longer term (from 3 months to over a year) up to 15 hours per week (or 24 hours for people with mental health special needs) dependant on the family's situation and available resources of the particular local social service.

**Social mentoring.** Since 2010 in Latvia a new form of social service and social support – social mentoring – has found its place in the community, initially started by non-governmental sector and aimed at helping young adolescents from vulnerable backgrounds, including children left behind due to parental emigration. In the programme of NGO "Mentor Latvia"[5] adolescents mostly, but not exclusively, come from 'alternative care' (guardianship, youth homes, special boarding schools, state institutions) where, by its function, one of the main tasks is to prepare the young person for independent life. By 2017 five cities had engaged as partners providing social mentoring to 70 young people yearly of age 15-19. Mentoring as a resource and "mediating factor in the support system" for the children living in kinship and foster home placements has been recognized in literature (see for example, Webb, 2011, 230). Young people without parental care or with insufficient support from their family adults suffer from the lack of life-skills, social and communication skills, and guidance in relation to further education and profession. Based on individual intake interviews and questionnaires, as well as background check (for adults it is absent criminal record and required 2 reference letters), social worker and programme manager "matches" *mentor-couples* – mentor and mentee. One of the most important aspects of the programme is individual, regular meetings of mentor-couples (the minimum requirement is twice per month). The organization provides in-service training (and later on group supervision) for mentors, signing official contracts, joint introductory event for all participants, following which the year-long project journey begins. Group workshops apply non-formal education approach and include inter-active sessions related to enhancing self-awareness, career guidance, personal and internet safety, nutrition and health as well as a variety of outdoor and indoor creative events and games.

4 Sabiedrības integrācijas fonds (Metodiskais materiāls *'Ģimenes asistenta pakalpojuma attīstība Lielvārdes novadā'*, 2015.g. *Methodical material "Development of family assistant service in Lielvarde county")* http://www.sif.gov.lv/nodevumi/nodevumi/6288/metodiskais_materials.pdf

5 Mentor Latvia website: http://mentor.lv/ Information here is based on information obtained from the director and regional coordinator.

This form of empowerment is effective not only for the youth who take part, but also for community development. In addition the transformation of participants as well as engagement of staff in schools and youth homes has increased the interest for cooperation from municipalities, project sponsors, entrepreneurs as well as policy makers.

**Social support groups and socio-cultural work with guardian and foster families**. Non-governmental organization "Social Service Agency" in Latvia for several years organize weekly "meeting circles", support groups and summer/winter holiday camps for adolescents 13-17 years old, specifically targeting children of guardian and foster families. The organization also provides support groups and individual counselling services to adults – foster parents and guardians. They have expanded their activities in regions (geographically) and also have started to work more and more with combined groups, that is, children who do not have this 'specific' background are also accepted in camp activities. They have a drama group of young actors in the capital, and they also use for the group meetings and workshops methods of improvisation and social drama, modern dance sessions.

The described services and programmes are just a fraction of available resources for the children of emigrated parents. Yet the explored examples were selected as they have been used by transnational families and continue to be valuable resource, particularly, for caregivers and children left behind. The fact that most of them are implemented by non-governmental sector can be seen as both positive and negative at the same time. Availability of professional and creative non-formal programmes, located in informal settings, delivered at flexible and suitable schedules for the clients are some of the pull factors for guardians and youth to get engaged. The downside can be organizational vulnerability to short-term funding, project-based planning and funding cycles and dependency on political will and other factors.

## 2. Research methods

A qualitative research approach was chosen in order to capture complexities and in-depth perspectives of the research participants. Patton (1990, 15) has stated that qualitative methods are used for generating wealth of detailed information about smaller number of people and the researcher becomes the instrument of data collection. Information-rich studies, albeit fewer by number, increase in depth understanding of human experiences and situations. They reveal uniqueness and idiosyncrasies of research participants' lived experiences.

As data collection method semi-structured in-depth interviews were selected for these main advantages: 1) the suitability to explore participant's personal experience, emotions and feelings and other (Carey, 2013); 2) the degree of discretion and flexibility on the part of researcher when the order of questions can be changed and additional, unplanned questions introduced in order to explore participant's responses in depth or clarify unclear aspects (Whittaker, 2012; Carey, 2013).

**Research sample**. In order to reveal subjective perspectives of the guardians, "purposeful sampling" was chosen as an appropriate approach. The logic and power of pur-

poseful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth (Patton, 1990, 169). Moreover, it was combined with the strategy of "maximum variation sampling" to disclose any similarities, common patterns that may emerge and capture core experiences and shared outcomes (ibid: 172). The guardians interviewed had diverse backgrounds geographically, socio-economically, linguistically, by marital status, by formal status in relation to the children, by age, by number of children in their care, by duration of caregiving responsibilities. All of them had several years of experience in the formal or informal guardian's role: two of them had 9 years of experience, while one had 2 years of experience and one had performed the caregiver's role for several children of emigrated parents in various forms such as "formal guardian", "foster parent", or "informal guardian" for more than 15 years. "Purposeful sampling" was also used for selecting experts, specialists as well as social mentoring volunteer working in different capacities in relation to guardians and children left behind. The aim was to obtain a wide range of professional and practical outlooks and experiences. Experts had variable duration of experience in the researched field – some almost 20 years while some 2-4 years, they were all females and worked in state, municipal, non-governmental sector or in private practice. Mentor was also "purposefully" selected to ensure access to experience with mentee who is a young person left behind by emigrated parent, and to hear perspective by the multiple location programme coordinator with mentoring experience herself and direct knowledge about the benefits of social mentoring to adolescents as well as to their families, mentors and community.

The following coding system was used: codes E1-E6 for the experts, G1-G4 for the guardians, and M1-M2 for mentors.

There were set following research questions that were expected to be revealed performing interviews with the guardians: (1) how did guardians assume and view the role? (What circumstances the families and children had and what motivated this particular caregiver to step in, how do they view the 'mission'?); (2) How did they experience 'guardianship', the relationship with children, the parents, other relatives, and what difficulties and positive aspects they had encountered?; (3) How did guardians overcome hardships and what resources have they needed and used for assistance and support? In this article we will present the analysis of interview data related with the last aspect of assistance and support needed and use. The research questions that were expected to be revealed in the interviews with the guardians: 1) What specific experience and observations did experts have in working with guardians and/or children of emigrated parents? 2) What interventions were applied and what social services were necessary and how available and accessible were they?

Research was implemented by respecting the rights of the participants in accordance with the principles of **research ethics**. All interviews were carried out with voluntary consent of participants who gave explicit verbal permission to be interviewed, to record the interview and use information for the research purposes. The research participants were informed before the interview about the purpose of the research and the data collection methods used. Confidentiality was a guiding principle and participants were informed that in order to ensure the confidentiality of the research participants, their

names, geographical locations, and specific work places or other identifiable data will be coded. All interviews were audio recorded with the verbal consent of the participants; afterwards they were fully transcribed verbatim, stored in password protected digital storage and coded so that no names or geographical locations can be identified from the audio records.

## 3. Social support and assistance for children left behind: guardians and experts' approaches

The interviewed guardians are aware if they need help, support or concrete assistance. It is a different matter whether they will ask for help and use offered support. One guardian mentioned that she feels *'understood and very much helped'* by the **family assistant**, provided by municipal social service (G.4.). Expert reinforces the concept of strengthening family, including that led by the guardian, with additional support from family assistant (E.1):

*"…Direct that [state] money to families, support for families, assign family assistant, two assistants…it will be cheaper than paying institutions. Even if one assistant and doesn't go [there] every day, he will still lift up, will help… As a foster parent I saw that if the family would have been supported, if they would have received half of what I was paid for child support, they would have pulled it through and the children would not have been removed".*

Another guardian G.3 has not used support services in her two-year guardianship path, feeling that they sufficiently manage social and material resources of the extended family, and feels strongly about **not seeking support** or help:

Researcher: As a guardian, have you ever needed support that you longed for?

Guardian 3: Of course! But I will not speak about that... To be a woman – puller, of course, I get tired... I want more easiness... If I needed help... God, protect me from that extreme situation that I would have to start asking for help... I don't know... G.3.

**Inequality of available services** within the country is highlighted by expert (E.3):

*'I know quite well the situation in Latvia, in one social service department the client can receive really full…starting from social assistance, all specialists and on top a 'case manager', but in another only material help.…Unbelievable … unbelievable, simply unbelievable. Yes, yes, yes, it is absolute inequality of receipt of social services".*

Formal foster parents receive financial support by far more than parents from social assistance (Harnett et al, 2012). Provided support of any kind should be geared towards "multiple domains of family functioning" and be relevant for the individual needs of the caregivers (ibid.).

Guardian G.1 has benefited from attending provided **consultations with psychologist**; it has helped her to maintain 'emotional health' during turbulent periods in her guardianship experience.

*"… and I believe in psychologist because when I feel that I am very stressed, very angry [...] it feels like I lost my emotional health, and I believe that if I go to psychologist, you know, I can tell about feelings... it, of course, helps...[...] My husband and I would like [to get] help here to [...] to look a little bit from a distance at a situation..." G.1.*

Although the guardian G.1. appreciates and uses support services, she admits it being uneasy to open up about personal problems with raising the child in guardianship situation.

*"You know, different… how to say…. practitioners ....you know, I always must talk - what happened in your family that your child drinks, and that… it's not easy to always explain... explain to police, to child protection, to psychologist... ahhh (sigh), you know, what happened, how you feel, what happened... It's not easy to tell everyone: "I need help, I need help". Because at the same time you feel you can't manage. And everyone must know that you…haven't ability to manage…" G.1.*

The same guardian is aware of **the limits of this kind of help** and the responsibility of taking action herself.

*"... and I explain to everyone the situation and, of course, it helps me, but what to do? (pause) What to do?" G.1.*

The services of psychologist can be available also for the children, yet they can be refused by them:

*"She doesn't want to go to psychologist, she doesn't want to speak, she… doesn't want to… (raises voice) try to explain what happened, what is happening with you, what this means - your behaviour, why you are doing .. no … (quietly) she doesn't want to explain" G.1.*

Guardian G.2. illustrates instances of teenagers in her guardianship manipulating support services when they are not in position to refuse them. The girl (15) had been living all by herself, following conflict and moving out from the house of her initial legal guardian - an uncle, while her mother and grandmother were working abroad for several years. She became suicidal and was hospitalized prior to being placed in the guardianship with Guardian G.2.

*"...When the girl had to go to psychologists and other specialists...it is funny how they think they will work with her...This girl understands everything...what they want from her, what she has to say... „When will I get out of all this? I have to go again, what can I say so that they write papers and I get out"... [She is] manipulating. The child knows what she can say to me, what she can say to others, she reads expectations of adults" G.2.*

When it comes to **support groups for guardians**, participants' views are cautious. Having attended two group meetings, one guardian says she feels 'guarded' (G.4):

*"I can talk eye-to-eye…with one [person]…in pair…like with you right now…but when other people…I am uncomfortable…I have big problems with my big boy at school…It is hard for me to speak in a group".*

Reluctance to take part in organized support groups at social service is expressed by another guardian (G.2), too:

*"We have consciously kept…we wish that all assistances, friendships are simple and unforced, we very much abstain from organized groups…" G.2.*

Availability, distance and logistics of attending support groups are also factors affecting the attitudes of guardians (G.4):

*"...they from the social services organize such meetings, twice I could not make it... It's not like I sit at home doing nothing... I had to help my neighbour to sit with her [old and ill] parent, she helps me at other times. ...There is support group for guardians in X [closer*

*district of the city] but social services also formed support group... We mixed up the times... you have to go there somewhere quite far by bus... I went to support group twice [at X district] but I did not attend the group by social services..." G.4.*

Variety of offered services, long-term and tailored for individual needs are the desired characteristics of social work practice with guardians as specific target group, states the expert (E.3).

The importance of **informal support networks** is emphasized by several guardians (G.1, G.2. and G.4.). Guardian (G.4) appreciates long-term non-formal assistance provided by the church she attends: some 7 years she has been receiving financial aid as well as practical help, and she enjoys attending church-organized events together with her children and grandchildren.

Guardian G.1. feels 'understood' and listened to when informally talking to the guardian of her brother's other children, as they share similar experiences. When asked about what did she wish she knew before becoming the guardian nine years ago:

*"... it is always good to know who will be your support people around, services or network, doesn't matter if formal network or informal network. Of course, I couldn't imagine that I will have such a big challenges during these 9 years, yeah but…and…but…now [as] „expert" (emphasizes this word) …I can see that non-formal and formal support around… it's it's…what can help persons to be guardians" G.1.*

Guardian G.2 is certain that her greatest supporter is her husband as they "*talk over all these matters*". But the next most important factor is the „*feeling of community*" as her family unites many guardian and foster families in a network:

*"There have been situations where we had to call [group meetings] ... but more that we are available at that moment for that [particular] person when something is topical for them… When they call me and ask: „Can I come to you tonight to talk? I will bring children along, let them run around outside..." And my consciousness is that, of course, I have to find the time in order to share [experiences] because I understand that [guardians] often lack understanding from the surrounding people" G.2.*

The guardian stresses that they „*are not a group organized by the social service department*" but more „ *friends who... children have made us friends. And that is the only format where we can maintain our sanity.*" G.2.

However, support groups are highly evaluated by providers and leaders of those groups. All social work and service experts praised the benefits of groups where they had witnessed psycho-social transformations of guardians (E.1., E.3., E.4.). Expert E.1 states:

*"Groups are effective form because [people] themselves are sharing and speaking, and sometimes scolding each other for saying foolish things...[...] guardians make conclusions about what [skills] they lack..." E.1.*

The help-line for children is regularly used by parents, caregivers, and sometimes teachers (E.4):

*"[Guardians] they want to be listened to. It is primary need to be listened to and get confirmation that what you feel is normal or assurance that you are doing the right thing… or acknowledgment that I hear that you care about what is happening to your grandchild".*

**Social mentor is a resource** not only for adolescents but also for their families, caregivers, be they foster parents or guardians (M.2. and M.1.). This is another adult who can help develop social and life skills for young people who either do not have the parent or parent is absent temporarily (M.2):

*"…Cool, you have something to give", said my daughter […] My vision was that I will show [to the mentee] – how things can be...that it can be different… For me it is satisfaction […] to show what is good… that is my point of view… not that someone lives worse but that someone lives better… strive for the better… that it can be better than it is… that is my perspective".*

Additional caregivers in children's lives can be positive and protective factor in parental absence (Rodriguez and Margolin, 2015). Adolescents can develop trusting relationship with mentor and be open about sharing information on their private life: mentor feels that her mentee trusts her and shares personal information: the fact that he has a girlfriend who is a few years older than him, that they spend time together, and he has also told about smoking habit (interview with M.2.). According to the mentor, her young female mentee had discussed with mentor her intimate sexual relations and contraception (M.2.).

Mentor performs a different adult role than at-home caregiver although it "*intersects to some extent with parental substitution"* (M.1.). The value of mentor-adolescent relationship has been reflected in written anonymous exit-feedback by programme participants:

*"When asked to list three things they most liked in the programme, in the first place they mention relationship with mentor or opportunity to get new friends and mentor as a friend… It is contribution…a big contribution, M.1.*

Moreover, Guardian G.1. feels that even the attention and expressed interest and caring by adults in official capacities can be beneficial for the child left behind:

*"...I imagine that they need to come to my house from time to time and talk with her..."How is it, [name of a girl]?" Not like police but person responsible for youth. Why can't they come from time to time? And to...just to check that everything is OK. (pause) [...] It will be good for child...you know... more adults she would feel that they care about her..." G.1.*

Expert (E.1.) affirms that mentors are important in providing support and teaching skills to „*strengthen the children for social life*", in particular, during adolescence.

## Conclusions

Scientific sources reveal that international migration continues to increase and is driven by economic inequalities, conflicts and natural disasters. The Baltic countries, in particular, Lithuania and Latvia, continue to be affected by high-level emigration, and reasons for parental emigration are economic, political and social. Parental aspirations for improved life conditions and future prospects are motivating factors driving critical decision to emigrate.

Alternative care arrangements for children left behind are formed on informal or formal grounds with kin or non-kin caregivers. Formalized status involving contact and supervision by the authorities in Latvia usually are in the form of 'legal guardian', 'foster parent' or 'responsible carer for the child in the absence of parents'.

The quality of informal alternative care and children's protection remain of concern in many countries, including Latvia, and one of the identified issues are gaps in implementation of laws by parents, notaries and caregivers, despite legal norms being in line with international principles for child protection.

Literature suggests that caregivers and children can benefit from a wide variety of offered and accessible services, long-term and tailored to individual needs. Selected examples of social services and programmes disclose new initiatives appreciated by the transnational families and youth. Guardians and children are likely to be motivated to participate in creative support programmes of non-governmental organizations that are accessible due to their non-formal setting and affiliation, while formal referral system is applied for professional counselling services and family assistance. Social mentoring is seen as an effective form of support for adolescents without parental care. The downside of NGO programmes can be organizational vulnerability to project-based funding cycles and dependency on welfare policy changes.

The evidence from empirical research reveals that guardians seem to prefer informal social support networks and self-organized support groups over state organized groups, while professionals value all support groups aimed at this client group. The experts point out inequality in access to social services and differences in social assistance nation-wide in Latvia.

Social mentoring is confirmed by the experts and social mentors as an effective form of adult support for adolescents who lack parental support due to parental emigration or their absence for other reasons; and affirm young people's testimonials of gained trusting relationship with the mentor and new social ties to peers.

## References

Andrioni, F. (2011). The Socio-Economic Effects of Romanian Parents' Emigration on Their Children's Destiny. *Annals of the University of Petrosani, Economics*, 11(4), 5-12.

Antman, F. (2012). *Gender, educational attainment, and the impact of parental migration on children left behind*. Published online by Springer-Verlag, 1187-1214.

Battistella, G. and Conaco, Ma. C. G. (1998). The Impact of Labour Migration on the Children Left Behind: A Study of Elementary School Children in the Philippines. *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia,* 13(20, 220-241.

Broka, A. (2009). *Impacts of Labor Migration on Children Left-behind in Latvia: The Role of the State.* Master Thesis, Faculty of Social Sciences, Oslo University College.

Cappelloni, C. (2011). Going Beyond Material Well-being: Looking at the Hidden Costs of Migration and Children Left Behind. *PRAXIS, The Fletcher Journal of Human Security*, XXVI, 24-37.

Carey, M. (2013). *The Social Work Dissertation. Using Small-Scale Qualitative Methodology*. 2nd edition. Open University Press.

Centrālā statistikas pārvalde. (2017). *Latvija. Galvenie statistikas rādītāji 2017. (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. Latvia. The main statistical indicators 2017.*) Retrieved from: http://www.csb.gov.lv/sites/default/files/nr_03_latvija_galvenie_statistikas_raditaji_2017_17_00_lv.pdf.

Centrālā statistikas pārvalde. (2018). *Emigranta portrets 2014.-2016.gadā. (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. The portrait of emigrant in 2014-2016).* Retrieved from: *http://www.csb.gov.lv/sites/default/files/emigranta_portrets_2014_2016_gadaa.pdf*

Dreby, J. (2014). U.S. immigration policy and family separation: The consequences for children's well-being. *Social Science & Medicine*, 132, 245-251.

Graham, E., Jordan, L. P. (2012). Resilience and Well-Being Among Children of Migrant Parents in South-East Asia. *Child Development,* 83(5), 1672–1688.

Graham, E., Jordan, L. P., Yeoh, B. S. A. (2014). Parental migration and the mental health of those who stay behind to care for children in South-East Asia. *Social Science & Medicine,* 132, 225-235.

Harnett, P., Dawe, S. and Russell, M. (2014). An investigation of the needs of grandparents who are raising grandchildren. *Child and Family Social Work*, 19, 411-420.

Hazans, M. (2015). *Emigration from Latvia in the 21st century by regions, cities and territories.* In Mieriņa, I. (ed. 2015) Latvijas emigrantu kopienas: cerību diaspora. (Emigrant Communities of Latvia: Diaspora of Hope). Latvijas Universitātes Filozofijas un socioloģijas institūts. 11-25.

He, B., Fan, J., Liu, N., Li, H., Wang Y., Williams, J. and Wong, K. (2012). Depression risk of 'left-behind children' in rural China. *Psychiatry Research* ,200, 306-312.

Hoang, L., Lama, T., Yeoha, B., Graham, E. (2014). *Transnational migration, changing care arrangements and left-behind children's responses in South-east Asia*. *Children's Geographies*, 13 (3), 263–277.

Jegelevičiene, V., Katkoniene, A. (2013). *The Peculiarities of Social and Educational Assistance (Services) for Children of Emigrated Parents. Lithuania Study Case*. In Rodzina. Przeobrazenia-Problemy-Pomoc, eds. Kijowska, I. M., Przybysz-Zaremba, M., 265-278.

Kutsar, D., Darmody, M. and Lahesoo, L. (2014). *Borders separating families: children's perspectives of labour migration in Estonia*. In Spirou, S. and Christou, M. (eds) "Children and Borders", 261-275, Palgrave Macmillan.

Lahaie, C., Hayes, J., Piper T. M. and Heymann, J. (2009). Work and family divided across borders: the impact of parental migration on Mexican children in transnational families. *Community, Work & Family*, 12 (3), 299-312.

*Law on Orphan's Courts* (22 June 2006), adopted by *Saeima,* the Latvian Parliament. Retrieved from: www.likumi.lv, last accessed on 18/12/2017.

*Law on the Protection of the Children's Rights* (19 June 1998), adopted by *Saeima,* the Latvian Parliament). Retrieved from: www.likumi.lv, accessed on 11/03/2018.

Malinauskas, G. (2006). Researching the Impact of Partial Labour Migration on a Child: Failure of Attachment Theory. *Social Work & Society*, 4 (2), 292-300.

Masļeņikova, L. (2015). Ģimenes *funkciju realizēšana transnacionālās* ģimenēs *(Realization of family functions in transnational families)*. Master thesis research within the framework of State research project "Reflection on values and models of action during the time of social and economic change" (EKOSOC-LV Nr.5.2.5). Riga Stradiņš University.

Mazzucato, V., Cebotari, V., Veale, A., White, A., Grassi, M. and Vivet, J. (2014). International parental migration and the psychological well-being of children in Ghana, Nigeria, and Angola. *Social Science & Medicine*, 132, 215-224.

Mieriņa, I. ed. (2015). *Latvijas emigrantu kopienas: cerību diaspora. (Emigrant Communities of Latvia: Diaspora of Hope)*. Latvijas Universitātes Filozofijas un socioloģijas institūts.

Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* (2nd edition). Sage Publications.

Rodriguez, A., Margolin G. (2015). Parental Incarceration, Transnational Migration, and Military Deployment: Family Process Mechanisms of Youth Adjustment to Temporary Parent Absence. *Clinical Child & Family Psychology Review*, 18, 24-49.

Sebre, S. and Krūmiņa, I. (2012). *"Dzīvesspēks" kā resurss Latvijas laukos ("Resilience" as a Resource in the Latvian Countryside)*. In Cimdiņa, A. and Raubiško, I. (eds) Dzīve. Attīstība. Labbūtība Latvijas laukos. (Life – Development and Well-Being in the Latvian Countryside.). Riga: "Zinātne" Publishers, p. 55-66.

The State Inspectorate for Protection of Children's Rights. (2015). *Bāriņtiesu statistika par 2015.gadu*. (Statistics of Latvian Orphan's Courts for 2015). Retrieved from: http://www.bti.gov.lv/lat/barintiesas/statistika/?doc=4345

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA, 2016). *International Migration Report 2015*. ST/ESA/SER.A/384. September 2016.

*United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children* (2009). UN General Assembly A/RES/64/142, adopted on 18 December 2009.

Vanore, M., Mazzucato, V. and Siegel, M. (2014). 'Left behind' but not left alone: Parental migration & the psychosocial health of children in Moldova. *Social Science & Medicine*, 132, 252-260.

Whittaker, A. (2012). *Research Skills for Social Work*. 2nd edition. SAGE

Webb, N. B. (2011). *Social Work Practice with Children*, 3rd edition. The Guilford Press.

# GLOBĖJŲ IR EKSPERTŲ POŽIŪRIAI Į SOCIALINĘ PARAMĄ IR PAGALBĄ EMIGRAVUSIŲ TĖVŲ VAIKAMS LATVIJOJE

**Ulla Zumente- Steele**
Rygos Stradinio universitetas, Latvija
**Doc. dr Svajonė Mikėnė**
Mykolo Romerio universitetas, Lietuva

***Santrauka***

*Tėvų emigracijos pasekmės paliktiems vaikams yra plačiai tyrinėtos įvairių mokslininkų įvairiais aspektais: analizuota tėvų emigracijos įtaka vaiko raidai, elgsenai, psichologinei gerovei, psichosocialinei sveikatai, ir įvairūs kiti aspektai, tačiau ženkliai mažiau dėmesio buvo skiriama formalių ir neformalių paliktų vaikų globėjų situacijos analizei, globėjų požiūriams į globos santykių sudėtingumą, profesionalių paslaugų ir socialinės pagalbos tiekėjus, siekiančius prisidėti prie vaiko gerovės užtikrinimo.*

*Tyrimo objektas- globėjų, teikiančių paramą emigravusių tėvų vaikams, ir ekspertų, teikiančių atitinkamas socialines paslaugas, požiūriai.*

*Tyrimo tikslas – išanalizuoti socialines paslaugas ir paramą, teikiamą be tėvų priežiūros likusiems vaikams iš jų globėjų ir ekspertų pozicijų. Tyrimo uždaviniai: 1) Išanalizuoti priežiūros formas ir teikiamas inovatyvias socialines paslaugas bei pagalbą vaikui ir globėjams Latvijoje; 2) Atskleisti globėjų ir ekspertų požiūrius į teikiamų socialinės paramos paslaugų ir pagalbos tėvų paliktiems vaikams praktikas.*

*Tyrimo metodai: teoriniai - mokslinės literatūros ir teisinių dokumentų analizė; empiriniai- pusiau struktūruoti interviu. Atlikta 12 giluminių interviu su: 6 ekspertais, dirbančiais su globėjais, vaikais ir šeimomis; socialiniu mentoriumi ir mentoriumi-koordinatoriumi bei su 4 globėjais, susijusiais ir nesusijusiais giminystės ryšiais su paliktais vaikais. Empirinių duomenų analizės metodas- teminė turinio analizė.*

*Literatūros analizė parodė, kad tarptautinė migracija vis intensyvėja, ją skatina ekonominės nelygybės, konfliktai ir gamtinės nelaimės. Baltijos šalys, ypač Lietuva ir Latvija, ir toliau pasižymi dideliais emigracijos mastais; tėvų emigracijos priežastys- ekonominės, politinės ir socialinės, tačiau dominuoja ekonominės priežastys. Emigravusių tėvų vaikai yra paliekami tiek oficialiems, tiek neoficialiems globėjams- ir giminaičiams, ir nesusijusiems kraujo ryšiais. Oficialus globėjo statusas Latvijoje gali būti „teisėtas globėjas", „globėjas" arba „atsakingas vaiko globėjas nesant tėvų". Neoficialios alternatyvios globos kokybė ir vaiko apsauga išlieka rūpesčiu daugelyje šalių, įskaitant Latviją. Viena iš nustatytų problemų yra su globa susijusių įstatymų įgyvendinimo spragos, nors teisės aktuose ir įtvirtinti tarptautiniai vaikų apsaugos principai. Teorinė analizė rodo, kad globėjams ir vaikams siūlomos ir prieinamos įvairios ilgalaikės paslaugos, pritaikytos individualiems poreikiams. Straipsnyje apžvelgtos socialinės paslaugos ir programos atskleidžia naujas iniciatyvas transnacionalinėms šeimoms ir jaunimui. Globėjai ir palikti vaikai, tikėtina, galėtų būti motyvuoti dalyvauti kūrybiškose NVO siūlomose paramos programose, prieinamose dėl jų neformalios aplinkos ir narystės, tuo tarpu oficiali sistema taikoma profesionalioms*

*konsultavimo paslaugoms ir pagalbai šeimai teikti. Socialinė mentorystė traktuojama kaip efektyvi paramos forma tėvų paliktiems paaugliams. NVO programų trūkumas- programų tęstinumo užtikrinimo sunkumai, kylantys dėl finansavimo tik projekto įgyvendinimo laikotarpiui ir priklausomybės nuo gerovės politikos pokyčių.*

*Empirinio tyrimo duomenų analizė atskleidė, kad globėjai teikia prioritetą neformaliems socialinės paramos tinklams ir savipagalbos ir paramos grupėms, o ne valstybės organizuotoms grupėms, tuo tarpu profesionalai vertina visas paramos grupes, orientuotas į pagalbą šiai klientų grupei. Ekspertai pabrėžia, kad Latvijoje egzistuoja nelygybė socialinių paslaugų prieinamumo ir paslaugų spektro atžvilgiu. Ekspertai ir socialiniai mentoriai laikosi nuostatos, kad socialinė mentorystė yra efektyvi suaugusiųjų paramos forma paaugliams, kurie stokoja tėvų paramos dėl jų emigracijos ar nebuvimo dėl kitų priežasčių; jie tvirtina, kad jauni žmonės užmezga pasitikėjimu paremtus santykius su mentoriumi ir naujus socialinius ryšius su bendraamžiais.*

***Reikšminiai žodžiai:*** *globėjai, palikti vaikai, tėvų emigracija, socialinė parama, Latvija.*

---

**Ulla Zumente-Steele,** Rygos Stradinio universiteto Gerovės ir socialinio darbo katedros lektorė. Mokslinių tyrimų kryptys: socialinis darbas su vaikais ir jaunimu; judumo studentų ir studentų migrantų socialinė integracija ir gerovė; mediacija mokyklose ir socialiniame darbe.

**Ulla Zumente-Steele,** Riga Stradiņš University, Department of Welfare and Social Work, Lecturer. Research areas: social work with children and youth; social integration and well-being of mobile and migrant students; mediation in schools and social work.

---

**Svajonė Mikėnė,** socialinių mokslų (sociologija) daktarė, Mykolo Romerio universiteto Edukologijos ir socialinio darbo instituto docentė. Mokslinių tyrimų kryptys: lyčių nelygybė; socialinė atskirtis, socialinė integracija, socialinių tyrimų metodologija.

**Svajonė Mikėnė,** Doctor of Social Sciences (Sociology), Mykolas Romeris University, Institute of Educational Sciences and Social Work, Assoc.Professor. Research areas: gender inequality; social exclusion; social integration; social research methodology.