

**RESTRICTIONS OF ESTABLISHING SOCIAL BONDS AMONG
THE CHILDREN DEPRIVED FROM PARENTAL CARE
(on the Case of Children Sheltered at the Crisis Centre)**

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The article reflects the circumstances accompanying the process of child deprivation from parental care, which limits or restricts the formation of stable and fundamental social bonds. It particularly illustrates the findings of the study among 29 children deprived of parental care, sheltered at the Crisis Centre for the period of 2019-2021. The findings of the study are interpreted in the context of social relations by T. Parsons, T. Hirschi, and J. Chris. The study showed that positions, approaches, and aspirations of establishing and maintaining social bonds by children are conditioned by 1) the child deprivation from parental care; 2) the nature of the action of becoming deprived of care, 3) decision making on child's placement. The study also tackles the impacts of other accompanying circumstances within the discussed context.

Key words: *social bonds, attachment, deprivation of parental care, abandonment, social relations*

Theoretical background

The scientific discourse around the problem of child abandonment is usually run around the actual consequences of the phenomenon within the context of challenges related to child development. This reality is substantiated with the viewpoint that having a situation where the care of the child by the main caregiver is not possible firstly puts the satisfaction of the need for child development at risk¹. Child abandonment implications are usually discussed within the contexts of age development theories (Z. Freud, E. Erikson, J. Piaget, etc.) and J. Bowlby's concept on child attachment and deprivation in the light of the fundamental (base) trust². The latter is considered as a decisive factor both in terms of achievements in childhood and further in the period of adolescence. In other words, if a child has been able to establish a fundamental attachment with the main caregiver in earlier years, this creates prerequisites for establishing constructive and productive interrelationships within the environment.

It is obvious that in case of deprivation of care, we deal with a situation where the child has not been able to establish the necessary fundamental trust in line with his or her development stages or the stages that are the most favourable for that or has lost it. As a result, the absence of the main caregiver or

¹ Karapetyan, T., (2019) On terminology issues of the concept of deprivation of care of children, *Banber Yerevan University. Sociology, economy*. 3 (30), p. 85.

² Bowlby, J. M. (1982) *Attachment and Loss*, Vol. I, 2nd Edition, New York, Basic Books.

shortages in family care puts the formation of trust on himself/herself, in the environment directly related to him/her, as well as external environment and consequently challenges the changing and live process of establishing new social bonds and maintaining them at risk.

The issue studied within the context of sociological knowledge may be viewed within the context of Hirschi's theory on social relations. His main idea is that in the social control system the social bonds have a self-regulatory role. The author explains this by deferring between four interrelated elements of social bonds which are fused and are considered as non-formal mechanisms of social control. Those elements are:

- **Attachment** interpreted as a psychological bond between individuals and institutions,
- **Commitment**, which includes interrelations that are considered valuable for an individual,
- **Inclusion**, which includes possibilities for managing his/her time by a person aimed at implementation of "pro-social" activities,
- **Beliefs**, by virtue of which an individual remains loyal to social norms, values and follows thereto³.

The mentioned mechanisms are important within the context of promoting desirable forms of behaviour of children and enhancing thereof to the extent that the embezzlement of internal mechanisms of social control within the context of pro-social norms and beliefs are important prerequisites from the point of view of the formation of social capital. When discussing the case of children deprived of care, it is obvious that there are significant obstacles for formation and observance of social norms conditioned with the nature and qualitative features of attachment, the rareness of "valuable" relations, as well as value orientations, which are mainly anti-social, taking into consideration family and environmental factors. Within this context, it is interesting to refer to the approach proposed by James Chris⁴, who has developed further Hirschi's approaches⁵, comparing them with Parson's social systems AGIL schemes⁶. Specifically, J. Chris links each element of social bonds (*proposed by Hirschi*) with the relevant function (*in Parson's AGIL scheme*). Thus, it appears that attachment serves the function of integration, commitment – the function of the targeted activity, inclusion – the function of adaptation and beliefs – the preserving latent (hidden) samples of behaviour. This means that the integrity of the above-mentioned elements is also a necessary prerequisite for the social functioning of an individual.

³ Pratt, T. C., Gau, J. M., & Franklin, T. W. (2011) Key idea: Hirschi's social bond/social control theory. In *Key ideas in criminology and criminal justice* (pp. 55-70). SAGE Publications, Inc., <https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781483388045.n5>

⁴ Chriss, J. J. (2007) The functions of the social bond. *Sociological Quarterly*, 48(4), 689-712. doi:10.1111/j.1533-8525.2007.00097.x

⁵ Hirschi, T. (2002) *Causes of Delinquency* (1st ed.). Routledge.

⁶ Parsons, T., Platt, G. M., Jackson, T. (2013) *The American University*, Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press.

Taking into consideration the significant role of the family in the life of a child within this context, it is necessary to view the social bonds inside and outside the family environment, and at the same time keep in mind that the scope of communication of the child is limited, yet perhaps manageable by the child's main caregivers. Therefore, social bonds inside and outside the family will promptly form the social capital for the child from the point of view of her/his development and adaptation to the new environment thereof, really growing significantly⁷. Touching upon the inside-family social bonds, Coleman promotes the idea of family social capital⁸, explaining it as the integrity of bonds existing between parents and children, where the following issues are important: What is the role, participation, and involvement of the parent in the life of the child? Does the parent invest sufficient resources and time into the relationship with the child? In fact, in the case of being deprived of care, the child is directly deprived of that major resource, especially if the alternative option for organizing the care thereof is the institution.

Methodological approach

Within the framework of the article, the key results of the research that were carried out, based on cases of 65 children sheltered in the "Children's Support Centre" Crisis Centre during the years of 2019-2021, indicated a result of care deprivation, are presented. It aims at identifying the restrictions for the formation of social bonds and the main circumstances impeding them among the children.

At the initial stage of the research, with the view to draw up a sample frame of the studied cases, 65-document files of children related to the case, particularly the data on social needs assessment, the social history of the case, and the summary sheet of the social history of the child have been reviewed. Correspondingly, 29 cases out of 65 reviewed were separated when the reason for the child being placed in the Centre was the deprivation of care (*the minimum duration of care deprivation was three months*). The children included in the same frame had the following sex and age aggregation (See Table 1.).

Table 1

Sex and age composition of the researched children

Sex/Age	5-6	7-9	10-12	13-15	16-17
Female	1	2	4	7	1
Male	1	3	6	2	2

⁷ Bianchi, S.M., Robinson J. (1997) What did you do today? Children's Use of Time, Family Composition, and the Acquisition of Social Capital, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 59, No 2, 332-344; Коулман, Дж. (2001) Капитал социальный и человеческий. *Общественные науки и современность*, 3, сс. 121-139; Dufur M. J., Parcel T. L., McKune B. A. (2013) Does Capital at Home Matter More than Capital at School? The Case of Adolescent Alcohol and Marijuana Use, *Journal of Drug Issues*, 43 (1), pp. 85-102; Herreros, F. (2015) Ties that bind: Family relationships and social trust, *Rationality and Society*, Vol. 27 (3), 334-357.

⁸ Coleman, J. (1998) Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital, *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 94, pp. 113-114.

Within the context of child abandonment, the researched cases have the following similar features⁹ (See Table 2 and Table 3).

Table 2

The main features of the studied cases related to child deprivation

The main reason of child deprivation		Previous experience of deprivation	Experience of being in the institution
<i>Parent death</i>	3	-	-
<i>Deprivation from parental care</i>	16	9	7
<i>Incapability</i>	8	5	3
<i>Impossibility</i>	2	1	1

Table 3

The main features of the researched cases related to child deprivation. The reason of action or abandonment for becoming deprived of parent care

	Number of cases
<i>Self-determined</i>	5
<i>Forced action</i>	6
<i>Chronically repeated</i>	14
<i>Inaction – indifference</i>	4

The research was carried out by comparing the methods, as a result of which it became possible to replenish and adjust the data collected due to analysis of documents where necessary:

- Document analysis within the scope of which, in addition to the above-mentioned materials, the diaries completed by the specialists having directly worked with children were reviewed, which contained daily data on the routine of children (behaviour, scope of communication, interests, accidents, events).

- Key-informant interviews were conducted with the specialists directly working with children (*team leader/supervisor, social worker, social teacher (6 specialists)*),

- *Open interview with children was conducted (17 individual and 3 group interviews) (with children above 7, with the participation of 21 children in total).*

The Main Results

The analysis of the data, collected within the scope of the research, showed that when talking about the possibilities and restrictions of formation of social bonds of children deprived of parental care, we can differentiate and discuss the following circumstances related to social bonds that have been significant in all

⁹ Karapetyan, T. (2021). Qualitative measures of family functions affecting child deprivation, *Katchar Scientific Periodical*, 2021/1, RA NAS, International Scientific-Educational Center, Yerevan, 165.

cases. Those circumstances include the following:

- The scope of formal and non-formal relations available for the child having appeared under alternative care outside the family, the intensiveness,
- The possibilities for keeping the former relations in the course of transferring from one to another option of care and thereafter.

The scope of formal and non-formal relations available for the children having appeared in the system of alternative care outside the family.

Given the current practice in Armenia, at least at the initial period of deprivation of care, the children are placed in a kind of institution (*crisis centres*), where the duration of the stay shall correspond to the terms established for short-term social service, and then it shall be followed by a discussion on the permanent option for childcare and selection of the likely stable option for placement. However, the delays in decision-making, the lack of sufficiently diversified services result in a longer-term "residence" of children within the borders of crisis institutions. It means that having appeared in the first circle of alternative care, formal relations around the child automatically grow, like child protection specialists (*social workers, psychologists, police officers, etc.*). At the same time, the child is often not attached to any specialist so that it is possible to a more or less extent maintain stability at least in formal relationships, so in the conditions of such a variety of formal relations no stable relationship is established. Very often the children establish non-constructive rather than constructive bonds (*which Hirschi refers to as "pro-social" interests*).

At the same time, as a result of frequent changes in the staff of temporary crisis centres, neither the constructive nor non-constructive social bonds of children are stable. Moreover, it is hard to talk about stability here conditioned by the fact that the pace of mobility of children in these centres is high. On the other hand, it should be noted about the key idea promoted by key-informants that not even being in the same area some children continue keeping relations with specialists having worked with them, also with the children of the same institutions by applying various digital technologies. This thought was confirmed in the interviews with children. One should bear in mind that there are situations where children do not have stable access to technologies or they are not allowed to use them (*conditioned with certain circumstances related to the case, for example, criminal prosecution*), so in the given case those are not reliable means for children in terms of maintaining social bonds (*here we discuss only the issue of the availability and not the qualitative features of the bonds*).

The stay in institutions providing crisis intervention services is problematic also from the point of view of formal relations, here the scope is mainly limited with children having sheltered in the same centre, who have similar problems. When talking about the scope of relations, the school, extra-curricular activities, and other institutions ensuring the occupation of the child, in case of which the duration also plays an important role, are worth mentioning.

Possibilities of keeping former relations when being transferred from one option of care to another and afterwards. Another important issue is the possibility of keeping the bonds when shifting from one option of care to another. As a rule, there are three possible scenarios. 1) the service encourages keeping former relations considering it as an opportunity for returning the child to his/her family; 2) certain restrictions are put on these relations both by legal force (*Court order*) and as a result of the decision made due to professional discussions considering them non-constructive and harmful for the child; 3) the child rejects any attempt for keeping any former relations (*a situation that happens most rarely*).

In terms of the quality of relations, the results are not definite in all three cases. Where the child/family chooses “encouragement” and keeps systematic relations, the equality of these relations depends on the level of meeting mutual expectations taking into consideration the weakened situation of emotional ties. As a rule, the possibility of mutual visits at least allows the child not to lose the bonds he/she has, however, there is no guarantee that they will be constructive.

In the second case, the nature and the level of restrictions connected with the new social bonds proposed to the child and the parents are mainly individual and derive from peculiarities of each individual case, as well as the peculiarities of the newly established social relations.

In the third case, where the restrictions are set by the child and not the institution, the results depend on the reason for rejection, the number of children in the family, and the position of the child against other children (elder, middle, younger), the responsibility taken against others, as well as the position of the “rejected” party and the feedback provided by the child. Thus, the proposed restrictions in the context of weakened emotional ties, as a rule, reduce the possibilities of keeping the former relations.

In addition to the above-mentioned, it is necessary to touch upon and discuss the positions of the children on social bonds in terms of willingness and the responsibility to keep former relations, the aspiration to establish new social bonds, and ascribing importance to establishing and keeping new social bonds. The mentioned positions are significantly affected both by the reason of child deprivation and the nature of abandonment action, moreover the degree of the “damage” of relations between the child and the biological parent as a result of depriving the child of care, non-justified expectations, and disappointment of the child, somehow limit the possibilities of having positive nature of the above-mentioned positions.

When talking about the **willingness to keep former relations with the child**, we deal with two scenarios. In the first option “former relations” include the family and/or relative/neighbour relations of the child, while in the second one – the relationships established in other circles of the care system, i.e. both with the specialists and the children they came to know in the same circle

(mostly the childcare institutions). At the same time, it should be emphasized that the impact on the position in regard to keeping the relations is more conditioned with the nature of the interrelations mentioned in the first option, as those were fundamental from the point of view of the formation of the imagination of the child and the value orientation. Moreover, if the reason for abandonment was the refusal by the parent to take care of the child (voluntary, forced, *repeated, indifferent*), a wish to "reject" the former relations are formed. Former relationships include not only the parent or the caregiver but other people as well. Here the issue is twofold: on the one hand, the child views them as the "agent" of his/her parent (*especially in case if sometime later the parent expresses willingness to return the child*), on the other hand, as people "who did not give a hand when he/she needed".

The wish to keep the former relations is more vividly expressed in the cases where we deal with the first attempt to abandon the child and the child fully realizes the circumstances for not caring or taking care of himself or herself by the main caregiver or in other words the abandonment is the result of incapacity mainly conditioned with health issues.

Within the context of a strive to establish stable social bonds, "stability" is a fundamental concept. The reason is that given the current system of child protection when the decisions on placement of the child are often delayed, require a long time, which is conditioned with procedural issues, a small range of services and limited diversity, etc.; they cause a situation of stable "temporariness" in case of children waiting for permanent placement, final solutions. Being in a crisis institution, on the one hand, the child knows that he/she will not be able to "reside" there permanently, on the other hand, the decisions are constantly delayed, postponed, as a result of which it happens so that instead of a stay of the maximum six-month period, the child continues staying in such an institution for several years. When negative beliefs and value orientations connected with the former relations add up to the above-mentioned situation, the aspiration of the child for the formation of stable social bonds fades away. This is also a kind of "protective" function, particularly when it comes to relations with the elderly. The child escapes stability as it assumes trust and devotion: and this increases the risk of potential disappointment and the possibility of being "cheated" once again. Correspondingly, the child demonstrates fewer attempts for either establishing social bonds or does not demonstrate it at all if the nature of the action of being deprived of parental care or abandonment was the voluntary-intentional action of the parent, a chronically repeated case, or a result of inaction-indifference of the parent.

The negative beliefs on bonds, value orientations, and the sense of temporariness are important factors in terms of **attaching importance to establishing and keeping social bonds**. It is common when we deal with chronically repeated cases, or those conditioned by incapacity-indifference of the parent, the

social bonds on the child's side are important if those are associated with the nearest future, assume short-term, available and realistic interest and the role and scope of responsibility of each side of social bonds are clear. Correspondingly, it appears that when establishing social bonds, the child views them rather within a short-term perspective together with possibilities for realization thereof.

Discussion and Conclusions

Summarising the results of the studied cases, we can identify the following major factors that are significant in terms of willingness, positions, and approaches to establishing social bonds by children.

- Regardless of the fact as to what extent the social bonds of the child are limited or manageable (both old and new), they are nevertheless established, changed, strengthened, or decayed. It means that they are part of a dynamic process, that may vary significantly in terms of duration, as the duration of relations is a weighty factor in terms of stability.

- The children under alternative care or having appeared in child protection institutions often appear in a chain where they may be transferred from one care institution and even a type of institution to another one or other types of care. Moreover, these transfers, as a rule, are not guided. Thus, the child is not able to reach the logical end of constructing his/her social bonds, which could allow her/him to establish new relations at a new place or understand how to continue them in a "new environment". As a possible result, the child may voluntarily adapt to the new "rules" of the new places, sometimes losing forever the skills of digesting the relations.

- When we discuss the issue as to what extent the child is deprived of parental care to establish stable social bonds, which would have at least four elements described by Hirschi, it is necessary to discuss the issue in the context of the balance of the sense of "temporariness" and "stability". Where the child is aware that the place where he/she is placed at the given moment is not the final solution for him/her, it will end in the "nearest" future, he/she does not make efforts to establish strong and stable social bonds at the place. The point is that "it makes no sense" as those relations are going to the end. It is particularly relevant in cases where the decision regarding the child, is constantly delayed. Correspondingly the relationships stop being significant, as they are not linked to the future.

- The beliefs of the child regarding social bonds are also important. In particular, it is important to know the values the child is guided by when establishing social bonds with others. It is also connected with the recognition of "attaching importance" to social bonds and interrelations, something that children deprived of care, come from families with different "experiences". As a result of this, the importance or significance of social bonds depends on circumstances as to what benefits the given relation would bring at the given moment

or at a certain time "very close" to the given moment.

However, it is necessary to elaborate the discussions on restrictions for establishing social bonds by children deprived of parental care and viewing the issue in the context of each option for the alternative care of children, particularly when identifying the peculiarities of the institutional and family-based care.

ՏԱԹԵՎԻԿ ԿԱՐԱՊԵՏՅԱՆ – Խնամագուրկ երեխաների սոցիալական կապերի ձևավորման սահմանափակումները (ճգնաժամային կենտրոնում ապաստանած երեխաների օրինակով) – Հոդվածի շրջանակներում քննարկվում են երեխայի խնամագրկության գործընթացն ուղեկցող մի շարք գործոններ, որոնք խոչընդոտում կամ սահմանափակում են երեխաների կողմից կայուն և հիմնարար սոցիալական կապերի ձևավորումը: Մասնավորապես, սոցիալական կապերի՝ Թ. Պարսոնսի, Թ. Հիրշի և Ջ. Քրիսի մեկնաբանությունների հիման վրա հոդվածում վերլուծվել են 2019-2021 թթ. երեխաների ժամանակավոր ճգնաժամային կենտրոնում խնամագրկության հիմքով 29 երեխայի ապաստանելու դեպքերը: Համաձայն արդյունքների՝ երեխաների կողմից սոցիալական կապեր ձևավորելու և պահպանելու ձգտումները, դիրքորոշումներն ու մոտեցումները պայմանավորված են՝ 1) երեխայի խնամագրկությամբ, 2) խնամագուրկ դառնալու գործողության բնույթով, 3) երեխայի տեղավորման վերաբերյալ որոշումների կայացմամբ: Ուսումնասիրությունը ներառել է նաև այլ ուղեկցող հանգամանքների ազդեցությունը քննարկվող երևույթի վրա:

Բանալի բառեր – սոցիալական կապեր, կապվածություն, ծնողական խնամքից զրկում, լքում, սոցիալական հարաբերություններ

ТАТЕВИК КАРАПЕТЯН – Ограниченность социальных связей у лишенных родительской опеки детей (на примере детей, размещенных в кризисном центре). – В статье рассматриваются обстоятельства, сопровождающие процесс лишения детей родительской опеки, сдерживающие или ограничивающие формирование стабильных базовых социальных связей среди детей. В частности, на основе интерпретаций социальных связей Т. Парсонсом, Т. Хирши и Дж. Крисом, в статье описаны результаты исследования, проведенного на основе случаев 65 детей, которые в течение 2019-2021гг. были размещены в кризисном центре по причине лишения родительской опеки. В результате исследования выявились стремления, позиции и подходы к установлению и поддержанию социальных связей детьми, основанные на: 1) причинах лишения ребенка родительской опеки, 2) характере действия по лишению опеки, 3) принятии решения о размещении детей в семьях. В исследовании также рассматривается влияние других сопутствующих обстоятельств в обсуждаемом контексте.

Ключевые слова: социальные связи, привязанность, лишение родительской опеки, отказ от ребенка, социальные отношения