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Post-Institutional Period: Social Adaptation of Orphanage Graduates with Varying Levels of Hardiness

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Abstract

The transition to independent living presents substantial challenges to social adaptation for orphanage graduates, necessitating effective socio-psychological support. Focusing on the diagnosis and potential of key psychological personality resources – such as hardiness and its associated activity self-organization and volitional self-regulation – represents a novel contribution to research addressing this issue. The aim of this study is to examine the characteristics of activity self-organization and volitional self-regulation among orphanage graduates exhibiting varying levels of hardiness, and to identify the interrelationships between these factors and social adaptation during the post-institutional period. The study involved 140 graduates of orphanage institutions. The following assessment tools were used: Hardiness Survey by S. Maddi (adapted by D.A. Leontiev and E.I. Rasskazova); Activity Self-Organization Questionnaire by E.Yu. Mandrikova; Volitional Self-Regulation Questionnaire by A.G. Zverkov and E.V. Eidman. Statistical analysis was conducted using the one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, Mann-Whitney U-test, and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (IBM SPSS Statistics 27.0). Orphanage graduates exhibited low to moderate levels of hardiness. They demonstrated a balanced profile of activity self-organization, characterized by average levels of planfulness, goal-directedness, persistence, and fixation. Graduates with moderate hardiness showed more pronounced self-organization abilities, while those with low hardiness displayed a present-oriented focus. Volitional self-regulation indices in both groups fell within the above-average range. Significant correlations were found between hardiness levels, components of self-organization, and volitional self-regulation indices, indicating the integrative nature of psychological mechanisms underlying social adaptation among orphanage graduates during the post-institutional period. The study demonstrates that hardiness serves as a system-forming psychological resource, integrating processes of activity self-organization and volitional regulation during the post-institutional socio-psychological adaptation of orphanage graduates.

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1. Introduction

The problem of social adaptation among graduates of orphanages and children left without parental care remains highly relevant due to the acute need for effective socio-psychological support during the post-institutional period.

Currently, 31,600 orphans are registered in Russia, who, upon reaching adulthood, face significant challenges in social adaptation, as the transition to independent living becomes a critical period requiring maximum activation and stable functioning of individual psychological resources (Doroshenko, Rudenko, 2024). Despite legislative measures outlined in Federal Law No. 120-FZ of June 24, 1999, and Federal Law No. 159-FZ of December 21, 1996 (as amended on July 31, 2025), which address socialization issues for this category of children, the personality-level aspects remain underexplored. Consequently, the authors identify the following key problem: despite regulated state support and existing post-institutional accompaniment systems, the issue of low adaptation effectiveness persists, indicating the insufficiency of external measures alone and necessitating a deeper understanding of internal psychological mechanisms that determine the success of this transition (Telitsyna, Milakova, 2021; Kovaleva, Babina, 2024; Chernykh, 2021).

Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the characteristics of activity self-organization and volitional self-regulation during the post-institutional period among orphans with varying levels of resilience, as well as to determine the relationships between the studied parameters. The tasks are implicitly derived from the methodology and structure of the work: assessing the level of personal resilience among orphans; evaluating the characteristics of activity self-organization; assessing the characteristics of volitional self-regulation; comparing indicators of activity self-organization and volitional self-regulation between groups of orphanage graduates with different resilience levels; analyzing the relationships between resilience levels and indicators of self-organization components, as well as volitional self-regulation indices.

The primary importance of post-institutional support, particularly socio-psychological adaptation, has been emphasized at both regional and federal levels in the Russian Federation (Anachko, 2020; Bobyleva, 2021; Nesterov, 2021; Timofeeva, 2020; Aleksandrov et al., 2021), as well as internationally (Nuñez et al., 2022).

Key factors of successful social adaptation for orphaned children include resilience, activity self-organization, and volitional self-regulation (Bobyleva, 2021; Dolgova, 2024; Kryuchkova, 2013; Leontiev, Rasskazova, 2011; Maddi, 2004; Sadyrova et al., 2025). Although resilience has been extensively studied, research specifically examining this personality trait among orphans during the post-institutional period remains limited.

Domestic studies on resilience can be categorized into several key directions: as an internal personality resource enabling coping with difficult life situations (Leontiev, Rasskazova, 2011; Oslon et al., 2022; Selezneva et al., 2024; Semya, 2021; Tsiring, 2009); considering the presence of significant adults and support systems that substantially contribute to the formation of resilience and volitional self-regulation (Merkul, Volchanskaya, 2023; Oslon et al., 2021; Tkachenko [Borzilova], Solonchenko, 2016); and for prognostic and intervention purposes in developing programs that include training in volitional self-regulation and self-organization to enhance resilience levels (Titova et al., 2019).

Internationally, recent years have seen rapid growth in interest regarding outcomes of care leavers transitioning to independent living. The most extensive experience in resilience theory research of this kind is represented in North America, Australia, Europe, as well as many African and Asian countries (Duggal, Wadhawan, 2021; Gomera, Mutambara, 2020; Mawila-Chauke, Munongi, 2025; Mishra, Sondhi, 2021; Schafer, 2022; Ulfah, 2023; Simben, Mokgatle, 2025; Ungar, Theron, 2020; van Breda, Reuben, 2025). Along with addressing care-leaving issues, authors note the absence of accompaniment programs and assistance in social adaptation, as well as legislation aimed at improving transition outcomes for children leaving care (Nuñez et al., 2022). In this regard, the Russian experience in post-institutional support has the potential to serve as a model for countries only beginning such practices (Doroshenko, Rudenko, 2024; Chernykh, 2021; Nesterov, 2021; Semya, 2021; Semya et al., 2024).

Successful social adaptation requires activating complex behavioral regulation processes (self-regulation), such as goal setting, value orientations, and moral attitudes. L.I. Antsyferova

points out that personal behavior is largely determined not by objectively given situations, but by their subjective evaluation and personal perception (Antsyferova, 1994). Accordingly, personality traits (independence, responsibility, persistence, flexibility, etc.) comprising the structures of self-organization, self-regulation, and resilience are of primary importance for successful adaptation and socialization, including during post-institutional patronage for persons from among orphans and children left without parental care (Telitsyna, Milakova, 2021; Merkul, Volchanskaya, 2023).

K. Bernard was the first who examined self-regulation scientifically, noting it as active regulation and homeostasis of the internal environment that ensures resilience (Bernard, 2010). Volitional regulation represents the conscious regulation by the individual's behavior, manifested in the ability to overcome internal and external difficulties on the path to goal achievement during purposeful actions. This is the level of arbitrary regulation, through which the individual intentionally modifies the meaning of actions or creates new ones, with behavioral manifestations in the form of coping behavior strategies that can be developed among orphans through networked interactions (Timofeeva, 2020; Barkova, 2016; Ivannikov, Monroz, 2014; Rovenko, 2025). Within a comprehensive approach, it has been noted that orphanage graduates with high resilience levels and pronounced self-organization components exhibit higher volitional self-regulation indices (Kunitsyna et al., 2022; Morosanova, 2021; Yanovskaya, 2013).

2. Materials and methods

The study was conducted at the child protection sector of the Education Department of the Oktyabrsky District Administration in Kamennolomni. It involved 140 graduates of organizations for orphans and children left without parental care, aged 18–23 years, including 46 males and 94 females. Participation was voluntary, and all participants were informed about the study's objectives and procedures.

To achieve the research objectives and test the hypotheses, the following psychodiagnostics instruments were employed:

Hardiness Test (S. Maddi, adapted by D.A. Leontiev, E.I. Rasskazova);

Activity Self-Organization Questionnaire (E.Yu. Mandrikova);

Volitional Self-Regulation Questionnaire (A.G. Zverkov, E.V. Eidman).

Data collection was conducted using a targeted online survey link on the Russian Testograf platform, with participants providing informed consent.

For statistical analysis of the results, frequency analysis and descriptive statistics were applied. As the one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated that sample distributions significantly deviated from normality for most variables ($p < 0.05$), nonparametric statistical methods were used: the Mann-Whitney U test for group comparisons and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient for examining relationships between the studied characteristics. Data processing was performed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 27.0 software package for the social sciences.

3. Results

Analysis of the obtained data revealed that 40.00 % of orphans exhibit low resilience levels (Group 1), 54.30 % demonstrate medium resilience levels (Group 2), and 5.70 % show high resilience levels. Given that the high resilience level was identified in a statistically small number of respondents, these participants were excluded from subsequent analysis. Consequently, high resilience is not characteristic for orphans overall.

Examination of activity self-organization indicators in the formed groups yielded the results presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Indicators of components of self-organization among groups of orphaned children with differing levels of hardiness

Scale	Group 1 n = 56		Group 2 n = 76	
	M	SD	M	SD
Planfulness	17,54	5,71	18,68	5,15
Goal-directedness	32,36	6,77	34,87	4,49

Persistence	20,25	5,96	24,50	5,44
Fixation	22,54	4,58	21,21	5,01
Self-organization	10,91	4,32	9,34	4,75
Orientation to the present	10,21	2,43	12,57	1,13

As evident from the table, both groups of respondents demonstrate moderate levels of overall activity self-organization development, as well as moderate levels across all its components – planfulness, goal-directedness, persistence, and fixation.

To determine the significance of differences between groups of orphans with low and medium resilience levels, the Mann-Whitney U test was applied (Table 2).

Table 2. Mann-Whitney U-test indicators

Scale	U-test	p-value
Planfulness	1966,000	0,454
Goal-directedness	1670,000	0,032*
Persistence	1314,000	0,0001**
Fixation	1966,000	0,453
Self-organization	1618,000	0,019*
Orientation to the present	1628,000	0,019*

Notes: * – $p < 0.05$; ** – $p < 0.01$

Our analysis established that orphans with low resilience levels exhibit more pronounced overall self-organization, whereas those with medium resilience levels demonstrate stronger present orientation, goal-directedness, and persistence. Consequently, orphans with low resilience, likely perceiving their vulnerability to life's challenges, tend to utilize various external means for organizing their activities and life, which may serve as a specific protective mechanism. The pursuit of enhanced control over their lives through meticulous organization, planning, and adherence to specific algorithms may function for them as a mean of reducing anxiety and enhancing feelings of security amid perceived environmental instability.

Orphans with medium resilience levels demonstrate a more pronounced ability to live "here and now," focusing on the present moment and maximizing its opportunities. This temporal orientation indicates a more adaptive time perception, enabling flexible responses to current circumstances without excessive fixation on past experiences or future uncertainty. The capacity to value and fully engages in the present moment represents a critical component of psychological well-being and may facilitate more successful adaptation of orphanage graduates to independent living. At the same time, they exhibit stronger goal-directedness and persistence. They possess sufficiently clear life goals and aspirations but are not always rigidly oriented toward their achievement, maintaining flexibility to adjust priorities based on emerging opportunities. In overcoming difficulties, orphans with medium resilience demonstrate adequate persistence, exerting necessary volitional effort to resolve emerging problems without excessive stubbornness in situations requiring strategy changes. This balance between perseverance and flexibility may be as a result from institutional living experiences, where both asserting personal interests and adapting to group norms are essential.

The results of volitional self-regulation analysis across the formed groups are presented in Table 3.

As evident from the table, all components of volitional self-regulation in both groups fall within the high values range, with no significant differences between groups identified: volitional self-regulation index ($U = 1882.500$, $p = 0.306$), persistence index ($U = 1912.500$, $p = 0.399$), self-control index ($U = 2002.000$, $p = 0.560$). Therefore, orphans in both groups demonstrate sufficiently developed volitional self-regulation.

Table 3. Index scores for volitional self-regulation in groups of orphaned children with differing levels of hardiness

Scale	Group 1 n = 56		Group 2 n = 76	
	M	SD	M	SD
Index of Volitional Self-Regulation	13,54	3,54	14,97	3,66
Index of Persistence	9,32	2,80	9,44	2,37
Index of Self-Control	8,25	2,18	9,34	2,24

Spearman's rank correlation coefficient analysis, aimed at identifying relationships between resilience levels, activity self-organization, and volitional self-regulation, revealed significant correlations presented in [Table 4](#).

Table 4. Results of the correlational analysis between level of hardiness, self-organization of activity, and volitional self-regulation

Scale	Hardiness	
	r-Spearman	p-value
Planfulness	0,042	0,625
Goal-directedness	0,266	0,001**
Persistence	0,283	0,001**
Fixation	-0,113	0,186
Self-organization	-0,033	0,701
Orientation to the present	0,310	0,0001**
Index of Volitional Self-Regulation	0,432	0,0001**
Index of Persistence	0,448	0,0001**
Index of Self-Control	0,415	0,0001**

Notes: * – $p < 0.05$; ** – $p < 0.01$

The data indicate that resilience level significantly positively correlates with three components of activity self-organization – goal-directedness, persistence, and present orientation and with three volitional self-regulation indices: volitional self-regulation index, self-control index, and persistence index. Thus, we can assert that an increase in orphans' resilience is associated with enhanced goal-directedness, persistence, and present orientation, facilitating current task resolution without distraction by past experiences or unfounded future daydreaming, as well as with the development of self-control and volitional regulation of behavior, activity, and communication.

Thus, our study confirmed that orphans predominantly exhibit medium and low resilience levels. Content differences between groups were also identified:

- Orphans with medium resilience levels demonstrate more pronounced self-organization abilities;

- Orphans with low resilience levels show more pronounced present orientation, goal-directedness, and persistence.

Meanwhile, volitional self-regulation indices in both groups remain in the high values range, indicating the formation of basic mechanisms of arbitrary behavior regulation.

Correlation analysis revealed statistically significant relationships between resilience levels, certain self-organization components, and volitional self-regulation indices, underscoring the integrative nature of psychological adaptation and personality development mechanisms during the post-institutional period.

4. Discussion

The obtained results verify the hypothesis within the framework of domestic scientific schools (Leontiev, Rasskazova, 2011; Titova et al., 2019; Morosanova, 2021). L.I. Antsyferova emphasizes that independence, responsibility, persistence, flexibility, and other traits comprising the structures of self-organization, volitional self-regulation, and personality resilience play a determining role in ensuring effective functioning of the subject under complex life conditions (Antsyferova, 1994). Our study demonstrated that among orphans with low resilience levels, the self-organization component is most pronounced. This phenomenon can be explained by several interrelated psychological mechanisms characteristic of this group of orphans. Compensatory mechanism, high self-organization may serve as compensation for insufficient resilience. Lacking adequate internal resources to counter stress, orphans develop external control structures. Adaptive survival strategy – in institutional upbringing conditions, strict self-organization often represents an essential survival and adaptation skill. Hypercontrol as protection – low resilience is accompanied by heightened anxiety, which orphans attempt to compensate through intensified control over external life aspects. External structure substituting internal stability – without sufficient internal resources (resilience), they create external structures (self-organization) to ensure stability. Rigidity of psychological defenses – high self-organization may reflect the rigidity of psychological defenses typical of individuals with low resilience.

In the group with medium resilience levels, present orientation, goal-directedness, and persistence are most pronounced. This can be explained by psychological mechanisms characteristic of this group of orphans. Basic security – medium resilience levels provide sufficient psychological safety to "release" rigid control and live in the present moment. Adaptive flexibility – medium resilience enables easier adaptation to current circumstances without fixating on future planning out of fear. Tolerance for uncertainty – with a certain resilience reserve, orphans can better tolerate uncertainty and focus on the present moment. Development of self-regulation skills – medium resilience levels are often accompanied by more developed emotional self-regulation skills, facilitating better presence "here and now." Reduced fixation on traumatic experience – medium resilience may indicate better processing of traumatic experiences, reduce future anxiety and enable present-moment living.

Thus, the paradoxical combination of low resilience and high self-organization can be regarded as a protective-compensatory mechanism, whereas present orientation, goal-directedness, and persistence at medium resilience levels reflect a more adaptive psychological functioning strategy.

Resilience is positively associated with personality traits implying its activity, i.e., engagement in societal life activities. Among orphans, activity manifests weakly due to virtually absent engagement in various activities under deprivation conditions while still under care. Reduced initiative and activity are characteristics of learned helplessness. The low and medium resilience levels with correspondingly low and medium engagement indicators precisely demonstrate this fact, which aligns with D.A. Tsering's research concluding that "the phenomena of autonomy and personal helplessness are closely linked to human resilience levels" (Tsering, 2009: 341).

Successful social adaptation requires activating complex behavioral regulation processes (self-regulation), such as goal setting, value orientations, and moral attitudes. Our results demonstrate this tendency; however, stress resistance (resilience) remains low to medium, making goal setting alone insufficient for achievement. Activity, initiative, and decision-making ability in changing conditions are necessary. Orphans possess emotional regulation skills and the ability to control emotional manifestations, developed in institutional living conditions, but lack more flexible decision-making skills accounting for changing environmental conditions. Nevertheless, the sufficient development of volitional qualities among all respondents, regardless of resilience level, indicates a pronounced tendency to complete initiated actions aimed at achieving set goals. This reasoning finds confirmation in the emotional model presented in G.V. Vanakova's research, which directly links resilience with emotional-volitional self-regulation (Vanakova, 2012).

L.P. Kryuchkova emphasizes that developing high resilience levels among orphanage graduates, particularly the control component, requires consistent adult support for the child's initiatives in coping with increasingly complex tasks (Kryuchkova, 2013). Environmental variability and heterogeneity contribute to risk acceptance as specific experience utilized in later life. Our findings confirm this necessity. We can conclude that our respondents received insufficient adult support, both in terms of involvement and risk acceptance, as a factor for acquiring experience

applicable in various life situations. Based on our results, it can be stated that the absence of significant adults is characteristic of our sample. The relationship between resilience and the presence of significant adults among children left without parental care is confirmed by studies by N.S. Tkachenko (Borzilova) and colleagues (Tkachenko [Borzilova], Solonchenko, 2016).

Emotional-volitional regulation manifests behaviorally through coping strategies (Barkova, 2016). D.A. Leontiev and E.I. Rasskazova identified positive correlations between resilience and coping strategies of planning and positive reappraisal (Leontiev, Rasskazova, 2011). In our study, orphanage graduates exhibit moderate levels of systematicity, goal-directedness, persistence, and fixation, indicating moderately developed self-organization abilities. K. Bernard refers to resilience as the volitional component of self-organization (Bernard, 2010).

The logic of reasoning derived from our findings and colleagues' research enables identification of reasons why orphans with low resilience may demonstrate high volitional self-regulation:

Activation of compensatory mechanisms. Orphans may develop strong volitional self-regulation to compensate for the lack of external support and structure. When external resources are limited, internal control mechanisms become more critical.

Adaptive survival strategy. In institutional upbringing, strict rule adherence and self-control are often necessary to avoid punishment and gain approval.

Dissociation of emotional and behavioral components. A child may learn to control behavior while feeling emotionally vulnerable and unstable.

Early responsibility. Orphans are often forced to assume life responsibilities earlier, fostering self-regulation skills.

Protective mechanism. High volitional self-regulation may serve as protection from traumatic experiences, maintaining control over behavior.

Absence of healthy emotional regulation models. A child may master external behavioral control but lacks skills for managing internal emotional states.

Supercompensation. The drive to prove adequacy and overcome stigmatization may lead to excessive development of volitional qualities.

Fragmentation of psychological resources. High volition regulation may coexist with low resilience if other psychological well-being components (meaning-making, social support) remain underdeveloped.

Yu.V. Selezneva et al. note that resilience is associated with the temporal perspective of a negative past. Significant self-regulation resources influencing its operational-technical and personality components include time attitude and resilience. According to our results, respondents with medium resilience levels demonstrate present orientation, indicating readiness to live in the present day, considering current life situations and managing their time effectively (Selezneva et al., 2024).

Thus, our study confirmed the role of resilience as a factor in activity self-organization during the social adaptation of orphans in the post-institutional period. Additionally, we obtained results indicating sufficiently high volitional self-regulation among orphans, representing their internal resource that enables coping with difficulties despite medium and low resilience levels.

Our findings regarding the relationships between resilience and three components of activity self-organization – goal-directedness, persistence, and present orientation – as well as with three volitional self-regulation indices – volitional self-regulation index, self-control index, and persistence index – are consistent with research by V.I. Morosanova (2021), E.I. Titova et al. (2019), D.A. Leontiev and E.I. Rasskazova (2011), and others. These studies identified significant positive correlations between activity self-organization components (goal-directedness, persistence, present orientation) and resilience, as well as between volitional self-regulation indices and resilience.

The results also reveal gaps in the socio-psychological preparation of orphans for independent living, in their emotional and psychological support by educators and staff of orphanages and organizations for children left without parental care, and in the diagnostics of orphans' personality characteristics and prediction of difficulties they will encounter in independent life. These findings align with research by A. Meshelova et al. (2025), A. Sadyrova and Z. Simtikov (2025). Among the problems faced by orphans during the post-institutional period, studies note the lack of social and emotional support due to inadequate preparation of orphanage educators and the absence of a comprehensive approach to pupil accompaniment (Popov et al., 2025).

5. Conclusion

Thus, the article presents the results of a study that for the first time examined activity self-organization and volitional self-regulation during the post-institutional period among orphans with varying resilience levels. The empirical data analysis conducted in the study demonstrates the need for differentiated psychological and pedagogical support: the obtained results can be utilized by psychological services to develop targeted individual accompaniment programs, taking into account resilience levels when planning support, adapting the intensity of assistance to orphans' needs, and gradually reducing the degree of accompaniment as independence grows.

Future research directions include examining resilience, self-organization, and volitional self-regulation as factors of social adaptation among graduates of organizations for orphaned children, considering gender factors or the current situation in the country during the Special Military Operation period.

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7. Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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