СТРЕССЫ МИГРАЦИИ И РЕСУРСЫ МИГРАНТОВ

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MIGRANT FAMILIES AND SOCIAL QUALITY

This article analyses the narrative experiences of families with a Russian background living in South-Eastern Finland focussing on their quality of life. Adopting the theoretical framework of Van der Maesen et al. (2006; 2013), the authors establish a social quality analytical framework in order to scrutinise these families' quality of life from a social perspective (Van der Maesen & Walker 2006; Van der Maesen 2013; Beck et al. 2001). The focus is on the resources, communality, service experiences, and agencies of the families, analysing their narratives gathered through a series of interviews.

Results underline the acts and activities of all family members individually as well as families as units. The families' everyday lives consist of several active decisions and negotiations regarding elements of social quality. The regularity and reliability of various basic services available to Finnish society enable the construction of their socio-economic security. Social cohesion centres around meaningful emotional support received from within the family and from kin as well as from the majority population and social service providers (Heino & Kärmeniemi 2013). Problems related to the accessibility and usability of services hampered the process of social inclusion experienced among the families. Social empowerment represents a demanding task in the migrant families' attempts to build a better quality of life for themselves. Language skills are closely related to all aspects of the quality of life observed as social quality.

Key words: *social quality, narrative research, family with a Russian background, migrant, Finland*

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СЕМЬИ МИГРАНТОВ И СОЦИАЛЬНОЕ КАЧЕСТВО

В данной статье анализируются нарративы семей с русскими корнями, живущих в юго-восточной Финляндии. Особое внимание уделяется качеству жизни семей. Используя теоретическую модель социального качества Ван

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дер Маесена и др. (2006; 2013), авторы рассматривают качество жизни семей с социальной точки зрения (Van der Maesen & Walker 2006; Van der Maesen 2013; Beck et al. 2001).

При анализе нарративов, полученных посредством серии интервью, внимание сфокусировано именно на ресурсах, связях с обществом, использовании основных государственных услуг и действиях самой семьи. Результаты исследования подчеркивают действия и активность каждого члена семьи лично и семьи как целого. Повседневная жизнь семей состоит из разных активных решений, касающихся элементов социального качества. Предсказуемость и надежность различных основных услуг, доступных для финского общества, делает возможным построение социально-экономической безопасности семьи. Чувство социальной целостности создается через значимую эмоциональную поддержку внутри семьи и от родственников, а также от коренного населения и от специалистов, предоставляющих социальные услуги (Heino & Kärmeniemi 2013). Проблемы, связанные с доступом и использованием услуг, мешают процессу социальной инклюзии семей. Социальный эмпауэрмент репрезентирует трудную для семей мигрантов задачу — улучшить качество своей жизни. Знание языка тесно связано со всеми аспектами качества жизни, имеющими социальную природу.

Ключевые слава: *социальное качество, нарративное исследование, семья с русским происхождением, иммигрант, Финляндия*

Preface

Examining the quality of life of families with a Russian background in Finland carries relevance since they represent the largest group of migrant families living in the country. At the end of 2013, 13,700 families with either the only parent or both parents who were native Russian speakers were living in Finland. In addition, there were 12,200 multicultural families with one Russian-speaking parent and a Finnish or Swedish parent (Finnish Centre for Statistics 2014).* In this article, a family with at least one member who migrated to Finland from Russia or the former Soviet Union and with at least one child under the age of 18 is defined as a family with a Russian background. Background is not used to represent ethnicity; instead, it refers to the country in which a person was born.**

We understand migration as a time and place-related critical phase of life, during which families are forced at least partly to re-construct their quality of life. At least one member from all 25 families with children interviewed for this study migrated to Finland between 1991 and 2011. In order to understand the families' experiences, we analyse the nature of their quality of life as expressed through their narratives and how that quality of life has been or is being rebuilt.

Migration as a turbulent and critical period of family life

When the subject of research focuses on families' narratives, definitions of that focus rely on modern family research, which is based on knowledge of inner relations, children and childhood, upbringing, development, interactions, and feelings (Yesilova 2009: 31–

* At the end of 2013, this represented 1.8% of 1,471,000 families living in Finland.

** In fact, some of the families interviewed have very Finnish roots. Most families are Ingrian Finns (11 families), while others migrated because of marriage (8 families), education (3 families), or work (3 families).

37). While families undertake different tasks, familial relationships represent the most important factor influencing family well-being (Carr 2012: 5–53). Family relationships often involve tense, intergenerational, and manifold networks in which feelings, power, responsibilities, and care are negotiated (Sevón & Notko 2008: 13–20). Laws frame the normative tasks of a family, ranging from the economic to the duty of care perspectives (Faurie & Kalliomaa-Puha 2010: 28; 51–54). A family represents a multidimensional and interesting research subject, where the actions of all family members both together and singularly may affect the families' quality of life.

Migration may be considered a critical period in family life, since several things change during the migration process: language, social systems, norms, and values may differ from those family members previously used to structure their lives and surroundings. Stress stems from living in a strange culture, particularly because everyday life must be lived according to unfamiliar operations, models, and conventions (Schubert 2007: 63–64). A period of change in a family's everyday life is often turbulent with the prospect of improving family well-being (Korvela 2014). Role expectations and human relations, as well as learned ways of acting and interacting, may be questioned in a new country. As a critical period in a family's life, migration provides the context for the construction of the quality of a family's life in this article.

Social quality as an analytical framework for defining quality of life

Quality of life is commonly described as an evaluation of one's own life situation (Vaarama, Moisio & Karvonen 2010: 14). When a person evaluates her/his quality of life, s/he examines experiences and feelings in connection with needs and hopes (Rapley 2003: 54). Dozens of different indicators and questionnaires that measure quality of life exist (Taillefer et al. 2003), but most studies focus on the term as a health-related concept, relying on quantitative analyses and large national or international data samples. Data about citizens' quality of life often assists in political decision-making (Van der Maesen & Walker 2006).

In this research, we explore quality of life using a social quality framework of analysis developed through methods critical of the quality of life approach (Van der Maesen & Walker 2006). This theoretically validated concept closely resembles the definition of the social within a society. Criticism stems from the idea that, by concentrating on individual measurements of quality of life, research does not sufficiently take into account social structures. According to the theory of social quality, the social sphere is constructed through the interaction between a person's life history and societal developments as well as through the interaction between social institutions and communities (Weyman et al. 1996; Beck et al. 2001; see also Kotiranta et al. 2011). Scrutinising quality of life through the concept of social quality highlights the need for a multidimensional, individualistic contextual approach, rather than only exploring a person's life span or societal changes. Social quality is defined in terms of the spectrum of possibilities that an individual enjoys by participating in social and economic life and the development of their communities under circumstances that promote their well-being and unique potential. With the help of these participatory opportunities, people may reciprocally contribute to society, and the results of this reciprocity in turn influence human capabilities and the fulfilment of personal potential (Van der Maesen & Walker 2006: 12; Beck et al. 2001).

Opportunities for participation are explicitly constructed in the theory of social quality through four tightly interconnected conditional factors: socio-economic security, social cohesion, social inclusion, and social empowerment. We use the conditional factors of

social quality to analyse the quality of life of families. In order to gain a good quality of life, families need *access to the economic and other resources* they require (socio-economic security). Society and the family must acquire the *values and norms enabling them to construct communality* (social cohesion). Families need *access to the constructions and service possibilities of the society* (social inclusion). In addition, families must have *opportunities to actively participate in their communities* (social empowerment) (Van der Maesen & Walker 2006: 11–12). In a migrant family, the quality of life must be re-constructed in relation to all four of the conditional factors mentioned above, since, in a new country, those resources and opportunities used in the past may no longer be available (Katisko 2012).

We further operationalised the conditional factors of social quality as follows: socio-economic security is analysed by focusing on the resources available to families, such as finances, labour, housing, and education. Social cohesion focuses on social relationships based on shared values and norms and social networks as central viewpoints. Social inclusion refers to service experiences, which, when positive, may support family integration. Social empowerment focuses on the available opportunities via which families and individual family members may act in and interact with their communities.

The concept of social quality as used in international quantitative society research normally relies on research subjects answering pre-defined questions (e.g. Van der Maesen 2013: Vuori & Gissler 2005). This qualitative article highlights a new approach to research into the quality of life from the social quality viewpoint. We aim to illustrate and portray, understand and meaningfully interpret these families' stories regarding the various conditional factors related to their quality of life.

The research question and methodological choices

Our research question was as follows:

How are the conditional factors of social quality presented in the quality-of-life narratives of families with a Russian background in Finland?

We focus on how families describe the resources available to them, their social relationships, their service experiences, and their possibilities for active participation. Our primary interest lies on how these narratives combine to form constructions of the quality of life. We highlight the active roles of families and family members by using the concept of construction in this article, whereby we view the interviewees as actively constructing their quality of life.

We use narrative research methods in the collection and analysis of our data. Narrative theory (Riessman 2003; Frank 2010) as a methodological choice provides an opportunity to scrutinise families' experiences by using families' narratives about their individual and shared experiences. We focus on those experiences that define the families' life situations during a specific period of time. When an individual recounts their experiences, they normally seek to understand the narrative by combining it into a coherent entity. Fragmented moments may also form a story (Frank 1995).

In this article, we place importance on understanding the unique viewpoints of the family narratives in their social context in both time and space. The role of the researcher in studying experiences through a narrative research project such as this may be interpretive, since experiences are understood as social in nature. When a story is presented in the context of a social relationship, such as in an interview, the interpretation of the story is constructed through the interaction between the researcher and the storyteller. Thus, the researcher must understand the story and the significance granted to events and phenomena as a shared interpretation, which is also accepted by the storyteller (Hänninen 2000: 32–33).

In this article, we create a shared interpretation of family stories through the methodological choice of narrative reflection (Veistilä 2008; Frank 2010). Narrative reflection, as a method of analysis, allows researchers to present their interpretations to interviewees so that they can be re-discussed. This method may also be called shared researchership. This method has resulted in an improved reliability of research findings since it minimises the likelihood of false interpretations by the researcher and provides more room for discussion of the interpretations (Cresswell 2007). The method may also carry therapeutic benefits, since reading or hearing other people's interpretations of one's own narratives may improve self-assertion, enable self-reflection, and engender feelings of being heard (e.g. Colbourne 2005: 551).

The research process

We collected our research data during the summers of years 2012 and 2013, when both authors were involved in the 'Empowerment of Families with Children' project.* For our inquiry, we ordered a random sample of 1000 individual postal addresses from the Finnish Population Register Centre. We sent a separate form along with the questionnaire asking if the respondents would be willing to participate in an interview.

Twenty-five families were willing to participate, and all were interviewed during the summer of 2012. Nine of these families were re-interviewed during the summer of 2013. We conducted interviews in Finnish or Russian and one partly in English based on the wishes and language skills of the interviewees. Most interviews took place in the homes of the families. In order to gain an overall picture of the families in a short period of time, we used the following social work methods: a timeline, a genogram, and a network map together with a thematic interview. Mothers, fathers, children, grandparents, and friends were invited to attend the interviews based on the wishes of each family. Interviews lasted a total 53.5 hours and consisted of 416 pages of transcribed data.

After the first round of interviews, we selected nine families for narrative reflection. These families were chosen based on their reasons for migration and the amount of time they had lived in Finland. In addition, these families were chosen based on our insight regarding the amount of information available related to a particular family's well-being and service experiences. The reachability and willingness of the families to participate in another interview also affected the choice.

During the process of narrative reflection, we first wrote our interpretations of the nine families' narratives in the form of a one-page summary. We wrote these summaries from the different viewpoints which came up during interviews, such as a sensitive and thought-provoking story or the overall situation of the family. We titled each story as 'x family's experiences of well-being and the service system'. Then, the interviewees read the story in either Russian or Finnish. Following this, we thoroughly discussed the story, concentrating on the family members' feelings and thoughts. In this way, family dynamics as well as researcher relations influenced analysis.

The analysis then proceeded with a detailed reading of the data and a thematic division of the narrative fragments of text, which were essential in order to answer our research question. Next, we grouped together fragments associated with each of the four conditional factors of social quality, which we further divided into three sub-narratives. We then conceptualised these narratives in order to understand them within the context of previous

* This project, implemented between 2011 and 2014, was coordinated by the Kotka Unit of the Palmenia Centre for Continuing Education at the University of Helsinki.

research and research questions. The final, more in-depth stage of analysis involved an exploration of the narratives aided by the questions guiding the narrative analysis (Frank 2010: 75–85, 92). These questions included what the narratives were about, why they were told, how they were told, and what kind of image the storyteller wanted to present through their story. In addition to the previously asked "what" questions, this stage of analysis answered the "how" questions, which carried equal importance in the narrative analysis. Thus, our analysis can be described as, first, a detailed analysis of narratives (Polkinghorne 1995) and, then, as a thickening of the analysis which includes the questions of narrative analysis.

The following sections describe the analysis of family narratives concerning resources, social relationships, service experiences, and opportunities for active agency within communities. We present our results using fragments from the narratives as examples of the themes in our data and as support to our interpretations. These excerpts appear in italics. We use aliases to protect the anonymity of the interviewees.

Resource narratives

Financial benefits promoting security and eroding morality

Family narratives concerning resources emphasise creating a feeling of security. This feeling of security stems from everyday experiences of trust in the welfare state and predictability in securing the family's economic resources. Also among families not receiving any financial benefits, individuals recounted feeling reassured knowing that financial assistance was available if needed. One positive consequence of migration included alleviating the stress of financial worry, which was felt at times in the family's country of origin. Moreover, this lack of stress due to financial worry validates the family's decision to migrate. In fact, Vornanen (2000) argues that security is a key element of the subjective sense of well-being.

Security is also understood in terms of a better standard of living. These kinds of impressions may be called 'welfare state security impressions', where security is defined as socio-political basic needs fulfilment and financial living (Niemelä 2000: 27). Interviewees stated that financial security also improved their relationships with their spouses and children.

Family narratives construct socio-economic security in terms of the predictability of life given the regularity of support and benefits received from the state and municipalities (Antonovsky 1987). From a parental viewpoint, knowing that society may assume the role of carrying for one's children so that they remain safe even if parents for some reason become unable to do so provides a measure of comfort. The interviewees stated that, now that they live in Finland, thoughts of even major life changes no longer frighten them. They feel certain that society — that is, basic services* — will offer support when necessary:

But, this brings a sense of safety. Because there is social security in Finland, I don't have to be afraid of, for example, my children's survival. I don't have to be afraid for my own life. Even if I lose everything, go bankrupt, and there is nothing left, we will not die of hunger. We will not have to live on the streets. There will be a solution (Tamara 2).

All of our interviewees were satisfied with the financial benefits they had received from the Finnish state and stated that financial security formed the basis of a good family life. At the same time, families brought up the 'incentive trap' of financial support. Most families underlined the obligation that migrants remain useful and beneficial members of society,

* By basic services, we mean social services, health care services, migration services, and childcare and educational services as well as eligibility for social benefits.

whilst deprecating families who use financial support for long periods of time, which was defined as misuse of benefits. This behaviour was associated with laziness and immorality. The misuse of unemployment benefits was considered unfair in the sense that people who are working pay for the benefits of those migrants who could work but choose not to. The misuse of benefits is viewed as directing resources away from other important services, such as family services and health care. In addition, interviewees highlighted the idea that receiving benefits makes the recipients passive, and that migrants should be obligated to work in order to receive support and services.

Those families receiving support also brought up the incentive problem and expressed their desire to survive without assistance from basic services or other authorities. This element of the families' narratives can be interpreted as an attempt to distance themselves from those migrants who misuse benefits. Interviewees presented themselves as active and employment-oriented individuals hoping to prove useful in Finland. Varjonen (2013) and Peltola (2014) in their migration-focused dissertations found similar tendencies towards highlighting disapproval of migrants not working in contrast to one's own activities.

Two sides to these narratives about the state's economic support for migrants emerge. First, interviewees' views may be characterised by strong support for the welfare state, the high value placed on the financial benefits received from the state, and appreciation towards the feeling of security created by the welfare state. Yet, interviewees raised the issue of unfairness involved in the misuse of benefits and agreed that the provision of financial benefits renders recipients lazy or passive when it comes to looking for employment. These were first and foremost presented as political questions.

Language skills enabling employment

All of our interviewees agreed that language is a most valuable resource. Language skills are essential for running errands, developing one's knowledge and skills, and completing one's education.

For a long time, I worked and studied by myself as well as I could and also studied at work, but I could not take courses. Then, I was dismissed because of insufficient language skills. Now, my only goal is to learn the language (Stanislav 2).

Language skills are also strongly related to employment (e.g. Toivanen et al. 2013, 6). Viewing language as a gateway to employment has also been criticised since migrants may be identified with a so-called lack of Finnishness, having the wrong kind of name, having an accent, wearing unconventional clothing, all of which may be connected to the prejudices of employers (Tarnanen & Pöyhönen 2011: 142).

Some interviewees also pointed out negative attitudes among employers, while their narratives also highlight the widespread belief that their chances of getting a job would improve when and if their language skills improved. Parents relayed several ways in which they tried to improve their language skills: courses, dictionaries, spouses, children, neighbours, and friends were often mentioned. Almost all of the narratives highlighted the meaning of one's own activity and target orientation in language learning.

Even though knowledge of the Finnish language is essential, our interviewees said that the present language-learning options available were insufficient or ineffective. Instead of first learning the language for years and then earning a professional or a university degree, they suggested that language should be taught alongside professional skills. This would make it more inspiring and, along with a professional vocabulary, bring confidence to one's task, thus promoting target-oriented career development.

Establishing security and predictability with resources

Narratives related to usable resources focus heavily on an increased feeling of security that stems from migrating to Finland, which in turn combines with their trust in Finnish society and an appreciation of the welfare state. Migrating to a country like Finland, which features a well-developed welfare state, provides families with a chance to experience an overall sense of security.

The predictability of life forms an important part of socio-economic security among the families we interviewed. The families in this study found that intelligibility and control over their lives after migration increased as their socio-economic situation became more predictable.

The resource narratives here illustrate how interviewees define themselves as active and productive members of society either at the moment of the interview or at least in the near future. Activity and productivity are portrayed as the basis for decent citizenship as opposed to laziness and the misuse of social benefits. Economic resources and language skills are defined as central socio-economic resources in connection with one's employment status and livelihood.

Social relationship narratives

Emotional support as a construction of integration

Family narratives of relationships are often related to social support and its various sectors, particularly emotional support, which interviewees considered most important for their families' integration into Finland. Törrönen (Törrönen 2013: 42) argues that the function of emotional support is primarily to support a person's self-esteem.

Interviewees mostly discussed emotional support vis-à-vis relationships within their families. The parent's relationship is the central repository of emotional support; but, when experiencing a crisis, this relationship is also the most in need of support. Russian grandmothers provide emotional support to their daughters, now mothers themselves, either from Russia by visiting families or after migrating to Finland themselves. In multicultural families, Finnish relatives are a great source of emotional support. The approval of kin carries great significance to families, and relations with them are cherished in various ways. A lack of social support is experienced as a weakening of their quality of life as well as the families' integration (see also Pöllänen 2013).

Peer support received from Finnish friends, neighbours, and co-workers is also valuable to families. In these narratives, peer groups may be defined based on one's neighbourhood, job, religion, or hobbies:

For me, emotional support is provided when my neighbours greet me, when I open the mailbox and find a post card wishing me a Merry Christmas, and sometimes when neighbours ask how I'm feeling. When I go to the supermarket, they smile at me just like they do at Finns. Sometimes, when I visit Kela, they talk to me in the same way that they talk to Finns. These things are a source of emotional support for me. I don't feel like a second-class citizen, and I'm feeling comfortable. (Valentina 2).*

Making friends with Finns is presented as a difficult task. Our interviewees believed that this is partly related to historical events, such as the wars** between Finland and Russia which still influence Finnish attitudes towards Russians. Making friends with represen-

* Kela is the Social Insurance Institution of Finland.

** One historical event in particular that has influenced Finnish attitudes towards Russians is the war between Finland and Russia which took place between 1939 and 1944 during World War II.

tatives of the majority population is difficult also because Finns already have firmly established social contacts and do not have as much need to meet new people as migrants do. For children and younger migrants in particular, becoming friends with the majority population supports their chances of integrating (NíLaoire et al. 2011: 159–160). For this reason, parents' narratives included detailed descriptions of the ways in which parents supported their children's friendships with Finnish children. These include guiding their children towards taking up different hobbies, establishing close contact with kindergarten and school, organising parties, and local networking. The passage of time influences the ability to instrumentally form friendships, because of the gradual improvement of children's language skills.

Tensions within the family and relationships with kin

Family members speak about their dependency on one another, which increases during migration and integration. The meaning of family and relatives becomes more important because everything else in their surroundings remains unknown and unpredictable. The familiarity, predictability, closeness, and love of the family unit represent strengths that help to cope during this difficult stage of their lives. When opportunities to construct social relationships are limited because of migrants' lack of sufficient language skills and social networks, especially during the early stages of integration, family represents the only stable and empowering force.

Regardless of the received support, conflicting feelings towards other members of the family and other relatives exist. Relatives who may live a long way away can be of great help or become a burden that impedes the family's ability to settle down in their new community. Relationships with relatives who moved to Finland earlier are described as invaluable, because, during the early days of the family's arrival, those already established can translate cultural differences and ease the family into their new community's activities. On the other hand, relatives may hamper integration by providing incorrect information.

Individual family members may integrate more or less quickly (e.g. Katisko 2012), which may alter internal relationships and power relations within the family. These differences in the phases of integration became clear during our interviews. Ideals about what is best for their children normally represent important reasons prompting families to emigrate. Thus, our interviewees presented the integration of children into the new society as a primary issue through their narratives (see also Pöllänen 2013: 75). Different phases of integration may mean that children do not rely on the same mother tongue as their parents or that parents have given up their own career dreams based on those available to them back in Russia:

Our children are growing up, and they have friends. I have friends in St. Petersburg, but the life of my children, their school, their friends, are here ... If I did not have children, maybe I would go back to live in Russia, because I had a home and a job. They told me at my job when I was expecting my child to come back, but I didn't. There is a perception that Finland is the best place, but hmm... I wonder if that is the case. But, the children are here, and they are growing up here (Alina 1).

Relationships between children and their parents represent a primary source of support, providing interviewees with experiences of meaningfulness and recognition. In their narratives, children are portrayed not as passive receivers of support given by adults, but as actively contributing to the well-being of the family as a whole (Veistilä 2013).

Experiences of racism, discrimination, and bullying

Some families experienced racism and bullying, experiences which deeply wounded not just those family members who were the object of such incidents, but the family as

a whole. The narratives on bullying were detailed and clear in the minds of the narrators. Some of these described discrimination and bullying in terms of racism, while others simply described bullying, particularly when speaking about their children. Parents' experiences or fear of racism often lead them to formulate preventive survival strategies for themselves and especially for their children. They may choose which language to speak with their child, decide on which place to live, and choose whom to invite to the child's birthday party based on past experiences. When children experienced discrimination and bullying, the discussions became more detailed highlighting the role of the authorities. According to parents, schools and kindergartens assume the task of ensuring that bullying does not happen and punishing bullies. In addition, children are taught various survival strategies ranging from ignoring such incidents to informing adults and learning various ways of standing up to bullies.

Parents experienced discrimination as children or youngsters after moving to Finland, but also when applying for a job or in other contact with authorities. Interviewees presented these experiences as either strength building or as creating bitterness, which in turn affected their trust in Finnish society. These kinds of negative experiences made parents more sensitive to discrimination in their daily lives.

Children recounted many experiences of being called names as well as serious instances of bullying. Bullies could be anyone, including a familiar or an unknown child or adult. Some children were forced to handle these situations on their own without support from adults. In many cases, an adult only found out about the incident long after it occurred. In parents' and children's narratives, bullying and discrimination deeply affected their identity and sense of well-being (Kivijärvi & Heino 2013; Perhoniemi & Jasinskaja-Lahti 2006: 65–67):

School. How is school? My god. Last year, adaptation was really hard for us. My son was very stressed, and it is safe to say that the whole year was very tense. He went to school for the first time as a Russian among Finns. A week or two after school started, something terrible happened to us. I don't even now know how to put it into words; it was a psychological blow. Three children from his class attacked him in the woods with rocks and wooden sticks and took all his clothes. When my child came home, he hid under the covers, and did not even want to talk. I ran to the school and there was no one there. I understood that I needed to try to meet the teachers and the principal in the morning when the school opened at nine. It is only then that the teachers and the principal are there. When classes are over and the bell rings, there is no one there—no principal, no teachers, no one. The next day, I went there and said that there is Nazism in the school. Nothing is being done to prevent such things, even though I have read in the newspapers that everything is being done to prevent and stop bullying from happening. Nobody is doing anything. I hope that this year will be easier for us (Josefina 2).

Interviewees also described Finnish society, which witnessed a trend away from mistrusting migrants during the 1990s towards greater tolerance due in part to the increasing number of migrants. Jaakkola's research (2005; 2009), which studied the attitudes of Finns towards foreigners from 1987 onwards, observed that the attitudes of the Finnish majority towards migrants and specifically towards Russians were significantly more positive in the 21st century than during the 1990s. Despite this greater degree of tolerance, according to a number of studies, Russian migrants still face discrimination and racism. Russian migrants are often characterised according to negative stereotypes that developed over time (Jasinskaja-Lahti & al. 2006; Vähemmistövaltuutettu 2010).

Social relationships as a safety net

Narratives on social relationships mention emotional support, tense family relationships, and friendships or their absence. Families stated that social support proved crucial to

their well-being. Social networks, relationships, and support are viewed as crucial to one's well-being and health in all cultures (Malin 2011: 209).

As an element of social quality, social cohesion arises through trust in official and unofficial institutions (Ruuskanen 2001: 23). Migration clearly represents one type of change in an individual's life, since an migrant needs to change not only his/her everyday routines, but must deal with possible loss, social changes, and learning new things. During such changes, social support is particularly crucial (Litwin 1997: 45).

Racism represented the worst factor hampering the safety net. It influenced the ability of the entire family to make friends with the majority population. From the family's perspective, a matter of particular concern included racist acts as unpredictable and impossible to control making it difficult for parents to protect their children from experiencing this phenomenon. In the case of racism, cultural and ethnic differences are viewed as triggers of conflict and permanent features of some individuals. These differences may justify discrimination and maintain power relations within society. In this kind of atmosphere, it becomes difficult to create interactions between the majority and minority populations based on equality (Rastas 2004: 6).

Service experience narratives

The accessibility and usability of services to promote or prevent integration

Individuals highlighted the accessibility, reachability, and usability of services as factors that either promote or prevent integration. Our interviewees provided several examples of the difficulties they faced just after arriving in Finland due to the lack of information on available services. This lack of information caused feelings of helplessness and unpredictability. It also lead to serious economic difficulties. Interviewees found it difficult to grasp the logic of an unfamiliar system, and would have appreciated assistance navigating it.

The principle of equality, according to which basic services are organised in Finland, results in the unequal treatment of families. The consequences of not understanding the unique needs of specific families can be severe and life-long, particularly among migrant children:

When my child was one-year-old, he could speak Russian well; he had a large vocabulary, and he could even say that there was a war when we were watching TV. We then put him in a Finnish–Russian kindergarten [...]. All of the children and almost all of the teachers were Russian. The adults spoke Russian, our son's Finnish did not improve, and time passed. We started to worry, because the beginning of school enrolment was drawing closer. We applied many times for a place in a Finnish-speaking day care centre, but we didn't get one because my wife stayed at home with the smaller child. We were told to go to a Russian-speaking kindergarten and that we could not send our child to a Finnish-speaking school. We became even more worried and took our child to a logopedist who did some tests and told us that our child does not understand Finnish at all. We applied for a place again and presented this expert opinion, but only received negative decisions. It was only three months before pre-school started that he got there, but it was no use any more. [...] He can't speak and he has no friends; he has no motivation to learn. (Stanislav 1).

These narratives reveal how families need assistance from the basic services system, particularly when dealing with difficult situations. Some interviewees received assistance within a reasonable time frame. Some received help only when the family's problems became serious or when Finnish friends or relatives who had been living in Finland for a long time helped the family to seek out the proper social service department. Success or failure in negotiating their way through basic services in difficult family situations influenced

integration and the attitudes among families towards Finnish society. In the worst cases, this resulted in bitterness and a lack of trust towards public institutions and Finnish society (see also Turtiainen 2009: 229, 334). In particular, parents spoke about their obligation to take care of their children's official business. Difficulties arose when authorities did not support them in fulfilling this obligation.

Encounters with authorities

In many of the stories, the interviewees told that the authorities acted unclearly and felt that doing business with them was difficult. The interviewees' current problems included lacking a common language, a lack of available interpreters, no knowledge of the specific professional vocabulary authorities use, a lack of personal guidance, negative staff attitudes, and changing staff. Other studies report similar findings (Heino & Kärmeniemi 2013; Väänänen et al. 2009: 75).

If the language barrier is successfully negotiated and interviewees possess sufficient information to consult a public authority, the biggest obstacle to a fruitful interaction centres on indifference or insensitivity among service staff. Such attitudes are seen in the way staff look, talk, and work, primarily with computers, and the lack of clear answers to specific questions, providing false information, not addressing service users' problems, or sending the individual to another authority. The narratives do, however, also include many positive experiences of meetings with social service staff:

What stays in my mind is that, when I was studying, every year I had to apply for permission to stay, and there was this lovely lady who helped me. If I needed something, she told me who to turn to and so on. And I had many questions about the study weeks that I needed to ask. She was very helpful, and then I felt that I had really found someone that genuinely cared (Venera 2).

In a new country, the attitudes and actions of authorities are especially important for migrants, because they remain in a vulnerable position if they are not fully aware of their rights, depend on the actions of authorities, do not speak their own language, and feel different (Turtiainen 2009). Immediately after their arrival, families must normally meet with several different authorities. These authorities may represent the whole of Finnish society in the family's mind, and their attitudes can affect the family's trust in that society. The attitudes and actions of staff are also viewed as important, because, due to migration, the families' kin and other social networks may be less available or completely non-existent. Thus, meetings with authorities may represent important social actions as well. In addition, a staff member's attitudes and actions come across in the family narratives as affecting the family's affairs and, thus, the life of the entire family.

Close relations as service agents or gatekeepers

A close personal contact may act as a service agent for a parent or the entire family through a relationship that normally occurs between a service user and a professional in the field of social work. Finnish spouses, relatives, and friends who arrived in Finland earlier, co-workers, and neighbours all helped the families. That help often appeared quite tangible in nature, including resolving issues related to several kinds of businesses and arranging meetings with authorities:

He (the other child) is going to a Finnish-speaking kindergarten. At first, we were not able to secure a place for him; but a friend of mine who speaks Finnish very well promised to help us. He went to talk to the manager of the kindergarten that his child attends, explained our situation, and we got a place (Stanislav 1).

In addition to addressing practical matters, the importance of the help received from close personal relationships centres around imparting a feeling within the family that they are not alone in coping with difficult problems. That is, families have someone they can trust and from whom they can ask advice. Access to basic services may solve most of a family's problems, but only with the help of friends may families find their way to these basic service departments. These friends can apply their own knowledge and experiences to helping to address the problems experienced by newly arrived migrant families.

Families are grateful for the help they receive from these friends; simultaneously, this assistance may bring additional problems. Friends do not always have up-to-date information about the principles of and legislation concerning basic services. Depending on friends can also be demanding. The interviewees living in multicultural relationships suggested that, if a marriage is experiencing some difficulties, migrant spouses may be placed in a highly vulnerable position. Their dependence on Finnish spouses as gatekeepers to Finnish society and basic services may pose serious problem (see also Pöllänen 2013: 168).

Usable and accessible basic services support family integration

Experiences dealing with basic services may either promote families' social inclusion or obstruct them. Our interviewees received support from their friends and relatives when accessing basic services, but this support could also result in their being overly dependent on their friends and stultify their own capacity to take charge. Families viewed basic services as promoters of integration; but, when families faced difficulties, basic service personnel were also viewed as sources of emotional support. Friends, neighbours and kin where presented as service agents.

Families recounted narratives of social support in order to highlight the quality of services by giving a voice to their negative experiences. This, they hope, will serve to improve basic services and, thus, promote social inclusion among future migrants.

Narratives on opportunities to act within communities

Internal heterogeneity among Russian migrant communities

According to our interviewees, communities of Russian migrants are divided into hierarchical subgroups according to the reasons for migrating, their use of basic services, and their employment status. Returnees (or re-migrants) represent one specific group with a moral right to live in Finland based on family ancestry. This group also has the most contact with the Finnish population and enjoys the most profound cultural understanding of and support from authorities. In relation to work-related migration, the employed parent more easily finds their place within Finnish society than the spouse who lacks any knowledge of the Finnish language, stays home with the children, and only interacts with other Russian migrants who live in the neighbourhood.

Migrants moving on the basis of marriage hold different attitudes and values based on marrying for love versus marrying for economic advancement, the latter group representing the least appreciated subgroup. Whilst all of the interviewees mentioned this last group, no one identified himself or herself as belonging to it. Women, in particular, highlighted love as their reason for moving to Finland, providing detailed narratives about how they met their spouse and fell in love (see also Pöllänen 2013).

Many interviewees wished to distance themselves from internal conflicts within the Russian community and to make friends with Finns. On the other hand, the Russian community can provide emotional and practical support, including, for example, child care just after the family arrives to Finland. In addition, many younger migrants are in contact

with their Russian peer group, where speaking the same language and sharing a similar background unite them. The need to belong to and be like others may guide younger migrants to make such choices (Korkiamäki 2013: 147; Kivijärvi & Heino 2013):

Then, at some point, there were two Russian girls. So, there was this kind of strange thing: in some sense, they did not want this circle to break, so I was forced outside this circle. So, at that point, I had to make a decision: Do I continue that small life in that Russian-speaking circle, or do I go outside it and try to find new friends? So, I decided that, for the sake of language and life perspectives, I had to make the decision to leave those friends. It was not easy, even now I remember it sometimes. But, it was not possible to have those friends simultaneously. (Venera 1).

Institutions and participation

For adult family members, participation in language training and re-education carried the promise of active community membership in the future. In their narratives, school and education represented important factors promoting a sense of belonging within the community. For children, kindergarten and school represent communities that enable integration into their new environment. Families also experienced confusing encounters with different practices:

Our daughter brought an invitation home about a parents' meeting. We went together and it included the entire school. But, it was the parents' association meeting. At this meeting, my wife and I and the teachers were present. And, they were nervous. Nobody came, only one mother. People did not get excited about this. We wanted our daughter to have more contact with Finland and thought it would be good if she had Finnish friends. We wanted to suggest that we could organise some trip, some outing, this kind of action, which connects children in an unofficial capacity. Our objective was to speak about this, but there were only two of us, and the teachers looked nervous. So, we did not speak about this issue. (Artem 2).

Some families felt that their religious community provided them inner strength. This may be partly related to the fact that this aspect of their cultural knowledge did not change after moving to Finland. These religious communities represented something with which families were familiar. Families stated that they received emotional support from their congregation during times of need. Religion as experienced united individuals, existing beyond nationality and language, creating a sense of belonging. Green and Eliott (2009) studied the effects of religion on health and psychological well-being, finding that people who described themselves as religious thought they were healthier and more satisfied with their lives than people who were not religious. According to our results, support from one's own religious community and having religious convictions were helpful during critical periods in the lives of migrants.

Constructing inclusion using cultural-societal information

In their encounters with basic services, families recounted experiences of participation. Participation is normally divided into involvement and participation as a process (Laitila 2010: 8–18; see also Muukkonen 2009: 135). Participation may also be described in more holistic ways as empowerment, and the result of being informed and consulted. Families also described situations where they felt a lack of participation. This was particularly evident in situations where outside agents were able to define the families' rights preventing families from influencing the situation. In such situations, strengthening participation is possible by adopting the cultural-societal knowledge guiding everyday life. Language is also presented as an instrument for empowerment and participation:

For me, the improvement of my Finnish language skills has been important. The better I speak Finnish, the better I feel. Before I was worried because I am not alone, I am responsible for my child, and he is still so little. If I do not speak the language and there is some kind of problem at the kindergarten or someone bullies him in the playground, or something else, can I defend him or clarify the situation? This sense of unease is related to the language issue. Now, I feel much more comfortable, and I can speak and express myself much better (Ludmila 1).

Through communication, it is possible to become close to others and to find one's place within a community. Language skills make it possible to communicate with one's neighbours, to participate in parent evenings, to express one's feelings, and to be heard (Tarnanen & Suni 2005: 9). Language skills promote a person's quality of life, which is related to experiencing participation and autonomy.

Empowering a sense of community

Social quality theory defines social empowerment as the ways society enhances an individual's ability to act freely and participate. The selection of a peer group and experiences of participation emerge in our interviews as the families' perspectives related to a sense of community.

Narratives about acting in communities provide a sense of the meaning attached to family connections, particularly just after moving to Finland. Experiences of participation emerge from positive encounters with basic services.

Knowledge provides one with the power to act the way families wish; but, insufficient knowledge can also diminish a family's quality of life, particularly when beginning life in a new country. However, as families attach themselves to their adopted country's communities and institutions, their participation is strengthened and they feel empowered.

Discussion

These narratives from families with a Russian background provide a broad overview of the ways in which they construct their well-being, which they then use to integrate into Finnish society. The regularity and reliability of various basic services available to Finnish society enable the construction of their *socio-economic security*. At the same time, families present an image of themselves as decent families by criticising the misuse of benefits and by presenting themselves as active, productive citizens. As a resource, socio-economic security is closely connected to economic capital; but, interestingly, highlighting security raises the importance of symbolic capital as well. This notion challenges the economic mainstream of social quality research.

The second conditional factor of social quality, *social cohesion,* centres around meaningful emotional support received from within the family and from kin as well as from the majority population and social service providers. Marital relationships and relationships between parents and their children lie at the centre of these families' narratives, but also reveal a certain tension within these relationships. The fact that the families find the difficulty of making friends with majority population unfortunate reveals their acute understanding of the importance placed on the sense of cohesion vis-à-vis integrating into the new society.

Living in a society with established values and norms enabling the exclusion and bullying of migrants may cause serious family malaise and complicate social cohesion as well as lead the family to form relationships only outside the majority population. Nearly all of the families interviewed experienced some form of exclusion. This is a most worrying

result since experiencing exclusion is known to affect an individual's and a family's quality of life, integration, and mental well-being (Safi 2010).

Problems related to the accessibility and usability of services hampered the process of *social inclusion* experienced among the families we studied. Fragmentary services and unclear information may complicate use of basic services, cause stress, and lead to economic difficulties. In addition, such factors may also slow children's and their parents' learning of the Finnish language or the validation of parents' diplomas and, thus, the employment of parents. A common means of initiating contact with basic services involves eliciting the help of friends. But, they may also become gatekeepers for society. Julkunen et al. (2005) defined welfare institutions as the face of Finnish society. Turning one's face away from migrant families may mean that society, which has an official integration policy that seeks to include migrants, may actually serve to exclude them through its own actions.

The families found active participation in their communities quite difficult. *Social empowerment* represents a demanding task in the migrant families' attempts to build a better quality of life for themselves. Niemelä (2009: 10–11) defines empowerment as a process that creates societal capabilities, participation, and control of one's life. Establishing connections to institutions promotes the families' abilities as real actors and positive experiences with basic services are essential to promoting participation. Heterogeneous Russian communities in Finland challenge families to construct their relationships with their communities through their choices between peer groups. In neo-liberal societies, normative responsibility for social integration has either already moved or been moving towards a person or a family (Borodkina et al. 2013: 29–30).

Language skills are closely related to all aspects of the quality of life observed as social quality. Language is a resource through which a family may express itself and at least begin to acquire some measure of socio-economic security; but it also serves as the basis of social relationships. Language skills enable one to access and use basic services. Yet, learning a language and acquiring some level of language skills are also needed in order to establish one's place within a community. Simultaneously, social contacts with the majority population promote language learning where learning is seen as a social process. In these families' narratives, language skills are presented as both individual and family skills. If one member of the family learns the required language faster than other members of the family, then that person may end up acting on behalf of the entire family to secure a better quality of life in their newly adopted country.

Finally, the analytical framework of social quality shows the diverse activities of migrant families in constructing their quality of life and the strong societal relationships attached to these acts. The narratives presented here underline the acts and activities of all family members individually as well as families as units. The families' everyday lives consist of several active decisions and negotiations regarding elements of social quality. This point of view is quite different from the dominant integration discussion (State Integration Programme 2012–2015). Rather than highlighting migrants' own activities, societal activities necessary for integrating migrants into Finnish society lie at the centre of this discussion.* This idea does not, however, deny the importance and meaning of the quality of services and support provided to migrant families.

The families interviewed in this study talked about their unique life circumstances and highlighted several phenomena connected to migration and integration as well as cultural

* These activities and different forms of support and services are defined in the individual integration plan for the migrant and his or her family (Integration Law 1386/2010).

issues. Some points of view presented in this article may resonate beyond Russian-specific interests, and more generally relate to the construction of the quality of life among families. The implications of this study for social policy and social work practice can, therefore, extend beyond migration-related issues and apply to work with families in general.

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