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## ARTÍCULO DE INVESTIGACIÓN

# Desarrollo de las competencias de los padres para apoyar la autodeterminación profesional de los niños: estudio de caso del Servicio de Apoyo a los Padres\*

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**Resumen.** A medida que un niño crece, sus padres actúan como figuras clave, no solo brindándole apoyo emocional, sino también como autoridad que moldea su comportamiento y valores. Los padres sirven como modelos a seguir, contribuyen al desarrollo de habilidades sociales, transmiten experiencias vitales y brindan apoyo en situaciones difíciles. El estudio explora la experiencia del Servicio de Apoyo a Padres, creado y en funcionamiento en la Universidad Estatal de Ciencias Sociales y Educación de Samara (Rusia). Se presentan los resultados de estudios empíricos sobre el problema de la autodeterminación profesional de los jóvenes. Se destaca la asesoría a padres sobre temas relacionados con la elección de profesión de sus hijos como una práctica eficaz de orientación vocacional. Se describen las formas de interacción entre especialistas universitarios y padres de estudiantes de diferentes edades, desde preescolar hasta la graduación, y se destacan las peculiaridades del trabajo con familias de niños con discapacidad. Las iniciativas para enseñar a los padres habilidades que apoyen la autodeterminación profesional de sus hijos se alinean con las recomendaciones modernas para la orientación profesional temprana y el desarrollo de competencias profesionales a lo largo de la vida. La evidencia indica que la participación de los padres en actividades de orientación profesional fomenta la formación de ideas positivas sobre el trabajo y la diversidad profesional en los niños, contribuyendo así a una autodeterminación profesional exitosa. Por lo tanto, parece beneficioso integrar estos proyectos en las estrategias educativas nacionales para garantizar la escalabilidad y un impacto sostenible.

**Palabras clave:** orientación vocacional, asesoramiento parental, escolares, niños con discapacidad, familia.

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## Developing parents' competencies to support children's professional self-determination: case study of the Parent Support Service

**Abstract.** As a child grows up, their parents act as key figures, not only providing emotional support but also acting as an authority that shapes the child's behavioral and value orientations. Parents serve as role models, aid in the development of social skills, pass on life experience, and provide support in difficult situations. The study explores the experience of the Parent Support Service created and operating under Samara State University of Social Sciences and Education (Russia). The results of empirical studies on the problem of professional self-determination of youth are reported. Counseling for parents on issues related to their child's choice of profession is highlighted as an effective vocational guidance practice. The forms of interaction between university specialists and the parents of students of different age groups, from preschool to graduation, are described, and the peculiarities of work with the families of children with disabilities are illuminated. Initiatives to teach parents skills to support the professional self-determination of their children align with modern recommendations for early career guidance and the lifelong development of professional competencies. The evidence base indicates that parents' involvement in career guidance activities supports the formation of positive ideas about work and professional diversity in children, thus contributing to successful professional self-determination. Therefore, it appears beneficial to integrate such projects into national education strategies to ensure scalability and sustainable impact.

**Keywords:** vocational guidance, parental counseling, schoolchildren, children with disabilities, family.

### INTRODUCTION

The choice of career path by children and adolescents is an incredibly complex and multifaceted process. Optimal professional self-determination can only be achieved with the deliberate cooperation of the family and educational institutions, considering the characteristics of each specific child, such as their interests, abilities, and opportunities.

The problems of career choice are closely tied to the theories of identity and life roles. Another factor that needs to be accounted for is children's age-specific psychological characteristics, which require differentiated support from specialists for different age periods. Modern developmental models emphasize many interacting levels that affect professional development, ranging from the family to the macro system (Klimov, 2012). Empirical studies demonstrate that parental support and expectations have a significant impact on the educational aspirations and professional plans of adolescents (Priazhnikov & Priazhnikova, 2012; Zeer & Symaniuk, 2018).

Research in labor psychology (Konstantinovskiy & Popova, 2015; Stegnyy & Shuvalov, 2016) and the psychology of professionalism (Martynenko, 2006) gives evidence that the conflict between individual preferences and social demands can be addressed by developing flexibil-

ity, self-learning skills, and career mobility in young people and by building institutional support at the level of education and the labor market.

Socio-psychological studies confirm the multifaceted role of parents, who influence the child's motivation and development through behavior modeling and the formation of expectations. Certain parenting types correlate with higher academic outcomes and confidence in adolescents' own professional opportunities. Systemic factors also deserve to be considered, as the socio-economic status of the family and access to information and educational resources substantially modify parental influence.

Changes in the labor market, such as digitalization, the transformation of requirements for competencies, and uncertainty in career trajectories, reinforce the significance of studying professional self-determination from an interdisciplinary perspective. The psychopedagogical perspective needs to be combined with sociological analytics and economic forecasting (Kliucharev, 2015) in order to form the skills of adaptive career planning and continuous vocational training in both adolescents and their families.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The psychopedagogical perspective adopted in the development of the Parent Support Service project approaches the person as an active, developing personality. The basis was the acmeological approach, which incorporates the laws of personality and professionalism development under the influence of self-determination, accumulated life experience, the social environment, and the level of education. The design of the project relied on classical and modern studies analyzing personality changes in the process of interaction (Leontiev & Shelobanova, 2001), the issues of personal and professional self-determination (Rubinstein, 2022), and ideas about personality as a subject of professional activity (Klimov, 2012). Particular attention was paid to the analysis of motives and factors behind career choice (Holland, 1964; Ilin, 2008; etc.) and the concepts of life trajectories of young people (Priazhnikov & Priazhnikova, 2012; Abulkhanova, 2017; etc.).

Recent studies (Zakharov, 2017; Aleksandrova, 2023) confirm the effectiveness of integrating acmeological attitudes with the theories of career development. For example, the perception of building a career as a continuous constructive process aligns with the emphasis on the subject's activity and the influence of the environment. Age psychology (Smirnov, 2015) emphasizes that the development of professional identity is a long process that requires systemic support from both educational institutions and the family.

Proceeding from these theoretical principles, a series of practical tools and programs were developed, aimed at building the competencies of parents in the upbringing and vocational guidance of their children.

The understanding of professional self-determination as a multidimensional phenomenon calls for an interdisciplinary approach that allows for both individual and institutional determinants in the formation of professional choices.

In his analysis of the life path of a personality, S.L. Rubinstein stressed the decisive role of activity in the process of self-determination. Rubinstein asserted that transitions between the stages of the life trajectory occur through the active activity of the personality, in which the mental and spiritual aspects of development are revealed and realized. The scholar noted that “the person not only has a certain relationship with the world, but also determines this relationship themselves, which is the essence of conscious self-determination” (Rubinstein, 2022: 243), emphasizing the primary role of the subject in the design of their own life path.

Current research (Abulkhanova, 2017) considers self-determination not only as an internal process but as an outcome of social integration and interactions. In the practical plane, this means that career guidance programs for parents should include components for the development of skills in networking, organizing collective interaction, and using the resources of local communities to direct children to real professional opportunities. Given the rapid changes taking place in the labor market, the problems of professional self-determination become ever more relevant and require in-depth scientific study. The target of professional self-determination is often defined as an informed choice of life and professional trajectory.

The process of professional self-determination can be lengthy, often stretching for many years, and even its lifelong continuation is not uncommon. During this process, a wide range of factors influence the formation of professional preferences and self-awareness. Among these, the key aspects in childhood and adolescence are the parental position, the closest social environment, as well as targeted pedagogical and psychological interventions.

Scientific literature presents many approaches to the psychological determinants of career choice. While some perspectives emphasize the internal evolution of the person and their interests as indicators of a successful solution (Leontiev & Shelobanova, 2001), others interpret professional preferences as a product of external social conditions and the requirements of professions (Ilin, 2008; Klimov, 2012). Contemporary interdisciplinary research (Zakharov, 2017; Skripova, 2019; etc.) tends to integrate individual and social determinants. Hence, the choice of profession is viewed as a result of the interaction of personal predispositions, cognitive and motivational resources, and the surrounding social environment. In turn, pedagogical studies (Skripova, 2019; Balaeva et al., 2023) emphasize that systemic career guidance programs combining diagnostics, practice, and support facilitate adaptive choice most effectively. Considering age categories, children and adolescents are especially sensitive to the social context in their choice of profession, including school culture, family values, and access to opportunities.

Mass media and social networks are one of the most influential channels shaping the ideas of children and adolescents about the professional world. In particular, social networks give immediate access to positive information about “influencer” careers, yet they often fail to convey the realities of employment, competency requirements, and the risks of economic instability. These channels provide information on fields demanded in the labor market, rank the popularity of various specialties, and broadcast ideas mainly about the highly profitable professional trajectories. To some extent, this influence reorients young people from professions that are expedient from the standpoint of the national economy to flashy public professions in demand primarily among the teenage audience (Lipai et al., 2015; Solovyev & Makarenko, 2016).

By actively participating in preparation for the choice of a profession, parents can compensate for the teenager's lack of life and professional experience and aid them in the decision-making process. Socio-psychological models explain the influence of parental perceptions through reinforcement mechanisms, simulations, and the formation of expectations of success. Effective parental support requires specific knowledge of modern employment trajectories and the skills of communication with adolescents. In this way, more adaptive decisions by children can be facilitated by programs to increase parental competence in career guidance.

Current sociocultural conditions often force the final choice of professional trajectory upon school graduates, and this choice in the vast majority of cases (Skrynnikova & Ogenesova, 2021) is made together with the parents or with their active participation. In this context, organized counseling support for parents is proposed as a means to improve their competence in career guidance.

Therefore, targeted counseling programs for parents can improve their ability to create a supportive environment and engage adolescents in a reflexive choice of future professional path and career trajectory.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In 2023, Russian general education organizations adopted a universal vocational guidance model, the so-called Career Guidance Minimum, which set the task of systematic involvement of parents in the processes of children's professional self-determination. Legal representatives are listed as one of the seven key subjects of the implementation of the Minimum, making the study of their competence and methods of interaction with educational institutions a subject of applied interest.

The present study relies on two complementary bodies of data. The first is a theoretical and empirical array of Russian scientific literature, which enabled argumentation regarding the nature and structure of parental competencies in vocational guidance. The second block is provided by an empirical study conducted on the residents of Samara Urban District and settlements in Samara Region to determine the real state and prospects for the development of these competencies.

In 2023, a project to provide psychological, pedagogical and methodological consultations to parents was initiated at Samara State University of Social Sciences and Education (Bakulina, 2024). The counseling was provided to parents with the involvement of academic personnel, which improved the quality of consultations and facilitated the translation of evidence-based practices into the regional environment. Russian studies on additional education testify to the effectiveness of such inter-institutional connections, especially when using mixed communication channels (online + offline).

Personal consultations were booked via an electronic form on the website of the Parent Support Service project (Parent Support Service. Samara State University of Social Sciences and Education, n.d.). Information for the target audience was distributed via social networks (including a VKontakte page (Parent Support Service – SSUSSE, n.d.)), as well as traditional channels through announcements in kindergartens and schools.

To assess the effectiveness of the project, methods of psychological and pedagogical diagnostics were applied, including a survey of parents and the analysis of their requests and questions. The obtained empirical data were generalized, grouped, and systematized to identify typical needs and competency gaps and guide further interventions.

The systematization of parents' requests makes it possible to form modular competence-building programs targeting specific age stages of the child, the social context of the family, and the local professional requirements of the region. Such recommendations align with the approaches of domestic pedagogues who offer differentiated career guidance practices that account for family attitudes and the regional labor market.

## RESULTS

Over the course of practical implementation of the project, specialists organized group and individual consultations for 3,093 parents. The greatest popularity was enjoyed by webinars "Principles of adjusting the needs and interests of the child" (616 participants), "Professional self-determination of schoolchildren in the IT sphere. Where and how to organize the self-education of schoolchildren?" (438 participants), "Vocational guidance for school students considering the individual features of psychophysiological constitution" (411 participants), and "On the responsibilities of children in the family" (229 participants). These figures illustrate the considerable interest of families in the practice-oriented formats of distance support.

A differentiated approach to the development of parents' competencies in career guidance for children can and should be employed. The participants in our study were differentiated based on various grounds, including the age of the child in question.

**TABLE 1.** Distribution of parents contacting the Parent Support Service by the age of the children.

Age group	Number of requests	%
Preschool children	216	7
Elementary school students	311	10
Middle school students	991	32
High school students	1,575	51
Total	3,093	100

**Source:** developed by the authors.

The predominance of requests from mothers (>70%) supports the results of sociopsychological studies arguing that mothers are more likely to initiate pedagogical and educational support for the child. This suggests the need for special forms of work to engage fathers and other family members in assisting the professional self-determination of children.

One of the key objectives of counseling was to bring to parents' awareness the need to create an environment of respect and open communication in the family.

Consultations with the families of preschoolers (216 requests, 7%) and elementary school students (311 requests, 10%) mainly consisted of recommendations for expanding children's knowledge about the world of professions and, most importantly, nurturing their striving for knowledge, professional flexibility, and continuous development. These components create a solid foundation for future professional identity and adaptation in the labor market.

The parents of middle school students (991 requests, 32%) were recommended to expand adolescents' understanding of the range of professions, their pay levels, and qualification requirements. For instance, parents can tactfully assist in choosing extracurricular classes, hobbies, project areas, and additional education programs. These recommendations are consonant with the conclusions of Russian research on the profile development of adolescents (Chistiakova & Agapova, 1989), which emphasizes the importance of practice-oriented motives and social support from the family in the formation of children's professional interests.

The parents of ninth-graders were recommended to pursue professional internships – temporary employment over the vacation period or project practice that gives specific work experience. Russian studies of professional self-determination in adolescents show the effectiveness of early professional internships, suggesting that these contacts with the profession reduce uncertainty and increase motivation to learn.

High school students (1,575 requests, 51%) required closer attention due to the large number of requests from parents and the urgency of professional choice for young men and women. Modern Russian studies on adolescent self-determination (Morozova, 2004; et al.) confirm that the discussion of alternatives and predictive modeling of the future increase the stability of the choice and lower the risk of impulsive decisions.

Our study also took into consideration the fact that the student's professional choice is not dictated solely by the position of the parents. In actuality, both objective family circumstances and relatives' expectations regarding the result of the child's choice play a substantial role. The Russian scientific tradition emphasizes the multidimensionality of determinants in career guidance. The family's socio-economic status and educational resources, cultural attitudes, and regulatory expectations all shape the field of available and preferred options for a teenager. The parents participating in the study were asked to rank the life tasks the family will be able to solve once the child decides on their life path and begins to work in the chosen specialty. Table 2 lists only the most prioritized options.

**TABLE 2.** Priority life tasks of families contacting the Parent Support Service for consultations.

Life task	Number	%
Ensuring survival	361	12
Continuing family traditions	728	24
Improving the family's social status	399	13
Spiritual and intellectual growth	340	11
Improving the financial standing	1,265	41
Total	3,093	100

**Source:** developed by the authors.

As can be seen from the data, most often parents associate the child's choice of professional path with the opportunity to improve the financial standing of the family as a whole and the child as its member (1,265 references, 41%). The chief criterion in assessing the desired profession is potential income, which often extends to contemplating part-time jobs and combinations as ways to improve well-being. Parents' reasoning often takes an economic turn: "you won't earn money in this profession," "look into more lucrative options." The anticipated difficulty of studies and actual professional work is also emphasized as a means of adjusting the child's ambitions.

The described trend reflects the pragmatic function of parental influence, as parents focus their choice on resources that ensure the economic security of the family. Russian studies of family attitudes in vocational education (Skrynnikova & Oganeseva, 2021) find economic considerations to be critical in conditions of social uncertainty and labor market instability. Age psychology stresses that adolescence is the stage of developing identity and professional preferences, and the conflict between parents' pragmatism and the personal aspirations of the child can generate intra-family tensions (Timonin, 2012).

In expressing their objections to the chosen profession, parents tend to employ cognitive strategies, exaggerating the difficulty of the profession, downplaying the child's abilities, and appealing to the objective realities of the labor market. Educational psychology (Kuznetsova, 2020) refers to such strategies as translational attitudes that can promote adaptive choice in resource-limited settings but simultaneously undermine motivation for self-realization and reduce readiness for educational efforts.

The second most common motivation of parents for the child's professional choice is the desire to follow the dynastic model (728 mentions, 24%), meaning that parents often expect the child to continue the family's professional tradition. This standpoint can be seen as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it narrows the likely scope of choice, as the teenager can accept the "transmitted" profession "by inertia" without deep reflective analysis or checking if it aligns with their own interests and aptitudes. On the other hand, closeness to the chosen profession gives the child a fairly realistic idea of its content and requirements. For example, the children of medical workers are aware of the possibility of unscheduled calls and revisions, and the children of teachers know the amount of work that goes into preparing for lessons and checking homework. Therefore, when the teenager leans into the profession of their parents, it is important to clarify their motives and level of awareness. Passive adherence to tradition is often associated with deficits in reflective strategies in adolescents. Accordingly, the practice of consulting should include the methods of reflection on motivation (discussions, motivational value analysis).

Other family strategy priorities are less represented in the sample. Specifically, 399 respondents (13%) consider the priority to be building useful ties to increase social status and create career opportunities. Such families find special importance in the prospect of their child entering a university, where they can find connections with more high-status circles. The problem of the focus on connections and status fits into the framework of studies on stratification and intergenerational mobility. Although pragmatically justified, the striving for social connections can lead to a career choice resting on the status criterion rather than personal interests, thus increasing the risk of professional insolvency and psychological discomfort.

Another 361 respondents (12%) are primarily focused on the child's quick entry into the labor market, provided at least minimal earnings, placing an emphasis on early economic independence. Forcing a child to enter the labor market reflects family strategies for survival and economic rationality.

Finally, 340 parents (11%) give priority to the accumulation of intellectual capital and the spiritual growth of their child. For them, the key question is what opportunities for personal development the chosen profession provides. The focus of some parents on the child's personal development is consistent with approaches to developmental education and humanistic pedagogy.

Overall, the data indicate a high degree of parental involvement in the development of children's lives and professional plans. Nevertheless, we would like to emphasize that choosing a profession and determining ways to continue education remain difficult tasks for both students and their parents. Parental recommendations often disagree with the real needs of industries in personnel. Since parents are not always able to objectively assess the interests and abilities of the child, parental desires and the professional aspirations of adolescents frequently do not coincide.

Another potential basis for a differentiated approach to working with parents can also be the sociocultural model of professional self-determination predominant in the family.

**TABLE 3.** Distribution of parents contacting the Parent Support Service for consultations by the adopted socio-cultural models of professional self-determination.

Model of professional self-determination	Number	%
Traditional	671	22
Industrial	696	23
Post-industrial	1,726	56

**Source:** developed by the authors.

The TIPI questionnaire developed by I.S. Sergeev (2021) was applied to establish the distribution of families according to sociocultural models of professional self-determination. A total of 22% of respondents adhere to the traditional model, considering the child's professional self-determination in conditions of strictly limited choice. For these families, the lack of options does not equal conflict, as self-restraint is perceived as an organic, grounded strategy. Russian studies in the field of age and social psychology indicate that family value attitudes outline the "realm of possibility" for the teenager, defining both preferences and restrictions in the choice of profession. The high value of familiar roles in traditional families provides stability but reduces the motivational autonomy of the teenager.

In turn, 23% of parents gravitate towards the industrial model of professional self-determination, convinced that the child has a wide range of educational and professional trajectories available to them. The main risk of the industrial model lies in the possible alienation of the individual from the profession. A highly diversified individual might not fit well into the strict requirements of professional standards. Furthermore, broad educational opportunities in the absence of value orientation and professional reflection increase the likelihood of unverified choice and the frustration of professional identity.

In this connection, career guidance practices should be concerned not only with the availability of trajectories but also with the development of the teenager's professional reflection.

The largest group of parents (56%) is focused on the post-industrial model, where the choice of profession is interpreted as the formation of a unique set of competencies based on the person's capabilities and needs and as creating a workplace "for oneself." In the post-industrial paradigm, the process of self-determination becomes virtually continuous. Most families oriented towards individualizing competencies create a favorable environment for self-determination. However, the continuity of choice requires constant support with diagnostic tools, flexible educational routes, and support in labor adaptation.

These models differ in the nature of parental influence on the choice of profession, in the extent of the child's subjectivity, and in the number of options available. A differentiated approach involves identifying the family model and adjusting the interaction accordingly. With traditional families, the work will involve the development of reflective skills in the teenager and a soft discussion of opportunities. Children from industrial families will benefit from strengthening professional identification and clarifying value priorities. Finally, post-industrial families require assistance in building individual trajectories and transitioning between the stages of education and employment.

At individual consultations, parents tend to ask typical questions on how to hold a dialogue about the child's professional future and what to do if the teenager, as it appears to them, does not show interest in choosing a profession. Experts note the need to first establish the relevance of the topic for the child themselves: whether they are interested in this issue and what aspects are important to them. The analysis of trends in the labor market and education is introduced into the dialogue as a tool to expand knowledge. Meanwhile, parents are encouraged to maintain a supportive position, presenting career guidance as research, a creative and promising process, and not as an imposed requirement.

It is extremely important to respect the statements made by the teenager. Parents are strongly discouraged from mocking or belittling their child's ideas, even if they seem fantastical or unrealistic.

The support service also receives requests from parents of children with disabilities. In this case, career guidance acquires a specific focus on developing readiness for independent choice, considering the child's unique personal, physical, and mental capabilities. The counselor needs to help identify the child's strengths and assess real professional resources and possible barriers. Individual consultations for the parents of "special children" aim to expand their ideas about vocational education options and forms of employment, as supported by Russian monographs on inclusive vocational education. The practical value of such consultations lies in the formation of realistic but positive expectations in parents and the provision of specific recommendations on supporting the professional development of the child.

## **DISCUSSION**

The conducted analysis of work with the parents of children in various age groups revealed a number of problems, the key one being the inconsistency between the efforts of the family and

the educational organization in career guidance. At the same time, we can observe a change in parental attitudes from the model of direct transfer of the profession in the family (labor dynasty) towards the understanding of continuous education as the basic principle of the post-industrial professional trajectory. More than half of the parents in the project saw the profession as a resource for individual well-being and self-realization, expressing a position that reflects current labor market realities.

Counseled parents are increasingly aware of the limitations of traditional and industrial models of professional self-determination, which is that they can only provide a basic financial minimum and a minimal set of social statuses. In contrast, the post-industrial paradigm, focusing on multiprofessionalism, flexibility, and a dynamic set of competencies, empowers professional mobility and gives space for personality development.

Under the differentiated approach, the targeted counseling of parents on the professional self-determination of children becomes an important resource in professional choice and, therefore, in building a more meaningful life trajectory for the child. The essence of developing parents' competencies in this area is to expand their career guidance potential. The components of this potential include willingness to factor in the interests and capabilities of the child when assisting them in choosing a profession and the availability of information and practical tools (knowledge of modern professions, ability to organize professional internships, the skills of partnering with educational institutions and specialists).

Parents' readiness is formed by their awareness of the professions in demand, desire to fill gaps in knowledge, and ability to design an individual educational and professional trajectory together with the child and interested parties. In practice, the need is for parents to be able to organize professional internships and provide access to specialized events, as these efforts lower the risk of erroneous choices and reinforce the adolescent's motivation.

## CONCLUSIONS

The evidence-based link between adequate professional choices and feelings of well-being, happiness, and personal effectiveness is supported by a number of studies. The present study demonstrated the experience of Samara State University of Social Sciences and Education in developing and implementing a project to improve the competencies of parents in vocational guidance for children from preschool to graduation. The project is integrated into the Federal Project "Modern School" under the National Project "Education" and presents a system of psychological, pedagogical, methodological, and consulting support for the parent community.

The main conclusion of the study concerns the challenges of teaching parents to support children, given the inability to fully predict future conditions in the modern world. Economic and political changes, technological progress, labor market transformation, and family circumstances can dramatically affect the realization of professional plans that parents build for their child. Nevertheless, purposeful planning and active steps in the chosen direction reduce uncertainty and increase the likelihood of young people's successful self-realization.

Effective support for children's professional self-determination is a synthesis of early preparation, coordinated interaction of the family and educational structures, the development of

parental competencies, and the adaptation of approaches to the changing socio-economic context. This integrated approach promotes informed professional choices that can meet both the interests and needs of the person and current social demand, contributing to the long-term well-being of the individual.

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