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## **TRENDS IN DEVELOPING FAMILY MEDIATION IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND ITS CONSTITUENT ENTITIES**

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**Abstract:** *Introduction. Family mediation is a social and legal institute that helps effectively resolve family law disputes and conflicts, protect the interests of families and children, and relieve the judicial system of considering family disputes. The article aims at studying the use of family mediation in constituent entities of the Russian Federation and determining its development trends. Materials and methods. The research object is family mediation as a conciliation procedure, as well as its specific features and prospects for its development. The existing empirical and theoretical studies were used as sources. The authors analyzed the statistical data posted on the official website of the Federal State Statistics Service and scientific articles on the issue under consideration. In addition, they used general scientific (analysis, synthesis, induction and deduction, etc.), historical-legal, comparative-legal, formal-legal, sociological, theoretical, prognostic, and other research methods. Results. While analyzing the development of family mediation in Russia and its regions, the authors examine theoretical aspects of its effectiveness, historical context, and development. They consider the specific use of mediation in constituent entities of the Russian Federation and present prospects for its further development. As a result, the authors have revealed the underdevelopment of family mediation in the Russian Federation and substantiated the need for taking a set of measures to increase the use of mediation in family law disputes and conflicts. Conclusion. The study results provide an opportunity to formulate the specific features and development trends of family mediation in the Russian Federation. Further research can study the effectiveness of family mediation and analyze the feasibility of various methods and means of increasing the level of mediation in family law relations and its limitations caused by traditional and cultural characteristics of a particular region.*

**Keywords:** *family mediation, dispute and conflict resolution, mediator, conciliation procedure, mediation agreement.*

## INTRODUCTION

Family is the most important foundation of state functioning since it defines moral values and guidelines for the future generation. However, Russia demonstrates a negative trend of registering a significant number of divorces. Since the late 1960s, Russia has been showing the highest divorce rate in the world (Gurko, 2008). In recent years, the number of divorces has not decreased. According to the Federal State Statistics Service, 950,167 marriages and 620,730 divorces were registered in 2019 (Federalnaya sluzhba gosudarstvennoi statistiki, n.d). The latter amounts to 65% of the registered marriages (Table 1). Based on these statistics, we can conclude that most intra-family conflicts are resolved through a divorce.

**Table 1.** Statistics on the number of marriages and divorces in the Russian Federation

Year	Marriages		Divorces	
	Cases	Per 1,000 people	Cases	Per 1,000 people
2015	1,161,068	7.9	611,646	4.2
2016	985,836	6.7	608,336	4.1
2017	1,049,735	7.1	611,436	4.2
2018	893,039	6.1	583,942	4.0
2019	950,167	6.5	620,730	4.2

To counteract these negative processes, certain measures should be taken to resolve family law disputes and protect the interests of families and children. One of these mechanisms is the use of mediation. The use of mediation procedures in resolving disputes between family members, if they cannot reach a consensus on their own, will allow them to maintain good relations, taking into account the interests of all the parties, preserving their mental health, and allowing them to express their emotions. Family mediation is both a social and legal institution. Recognizing it as a means of conflict resolution, the legislator classifies mediation as an auxiliary institution for relieving the judicial system of considering family disputes.

Family mediation is a form of conciliation procedures allowing, if not to save a family, then make an inevitable divorce peaceful and civilized. Family relationships are complicated, and everything divorce-related is painful for all family members. Spouses often perceive each other as enemies or traitors, although they used to be close. If there are children, the situation can become even more difficult since kids are often used as a way to influence each other in divorce proceedings. Mediation is based on the voluntary participation of all the parties and their joint efforts; therefore, it is impossible if one of the parties refuses to participate. It cannot be effective if one party tries to put pressure on the other, or one party feels intimidated by the other. For example, if one party is afraid of the other and cannot speak to the latter even in the presence of a third party, mediation might be inappropriate. Likewise, too many disputes arising between the parties can hinder mediation. While resolving a dispute, the mediator takes a neutral position, does not give advice, and does not impose their viewpoint, but only helps make a mutually beneficial decision with due regard to the interests of all the parties involved in this procedure (Sidorovich, 2020).

From the sociological viewpoint, it is essential to consider the specific use of mediation in resolving family disputes in certain regions of Russia, analyze civil demands for mediator services, as well as determine the main trends in the development of family

mediation technologies to ensure the peaceful settlement of marital and family conflicts. The article aims at studying the use of family mediation in constituent entities of the Russian Federation and determining its development trends. The research object is family mediation as a conciliation procedure, as well as its specific features and prospects for its development.

## LITERATURE OVERVIEW

The use of conciliation procedures in resolving family disputes has recently become a highly discussed topic. At the legislative level, this idea was reflected in the Federal Target Program "Development of the judicial system of Russia for 2013-2020" (Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation, 2012) as an important area for improving judicial proceedings. Many foreign countries use family mediation as a special form of dispute settlement together with litigation. Unfortunately, this practice remains understudied in the Russian jurisprudence (Kalashnikova, 2011). At the international level, Recommendation No. R (98) and the Charter for International Family Mediation Processes represent the independent regulation of family mediation issues (International group of mediators, 2017).

Family mediation is most widespread in the UK, Australia, the USA, and Canada. Their state family policies aim at preserving family values and traditions, ensuring the continuity of generations, and achieving mutual understanding among relatives (Sims, 2020). Family mediation is regulated separately from other types of mediation within the marital and family (for example, England, Wales, Finland) or specific legislation (independent laws on family mediation adopted in most US states) (Regina, 2011; Hanks, 2012). The mediator should create a comfortable environment in which clients can listen to each other to understand what drives the conflict and what steps and responses are required to resolve this conflict, which depends on the personal interaction of the parties. Due to the spread of COVID-19, foreign scholars, in particular British, note that the basics of online mediation are the same as in face-to-face communication. Self-isolation and the need to help clients using high technologies provide the opportunity to work with them at an earlier stage and establish an emotional connection in a virtual environment (Eileen, 2020).

The Finnish Marriage Act establishes negotiation as a priority to reach a peace agreement when resolving disputes between spouses and other family members (Haavisto, 2018). The mediator's assistance is useful for resolving disputes of the parties and considering the interests of all the parties to the conflict (Karpenko & Korchevskaya, 2020). The implementation of family mediation programs is supported with extensive state funds. In Ireland, family mediation services are provided free of charge (McGowan, 2018). In many other countries, the mediation procedure is also carried out free of charge, but only if disputes arise regarding the issue of child visitation (Irving & Benjamin, 2002). The UK established the Family Mediation Council. Those who have found themselves in a difficult financial situation can use mediation services free of charge (Liebmann, 2011). Family relationship centers were founded in Australia, which operate out of state funds (Mohd Arshad, 2019). Portuguese scholars studying family mediation regard it as an effective means of creating a stable family environment, contributing to healthy psychosocial development and protection of social risk families, including dysfunctional families (Magalhães, 2013).

Spanish scholars emphasize the voluntariness of mediation in their country. In Spain, the parties can decide whether to initiate the mediation process that will allow them to reach a certain agreement and can be later ratified by a judge. Otherwise, they can continue judicial proceedings (Lozano-Martín & González-de-Patto, 2018). Most European scholars present mediation as a means of joint decision-making in family disputes, especially those related to children (Pali & Voet, 2013). Mediation is regarded as an interventional process that differs from legal proceedings, social work, and therapeutic practice and relies on specific knowledge in such spheres as anthropology, psychology, and negotiation theory (Roberts, 2008).

Catherine Hochart, a French scholar, notes that family mediation should be viewed as a process of building or rebuilding family ties based on autonomy and responsibility. During this process, an impartial, independent, and well-qualified third party (i.e. a family mediator) does not have decision-making authority but facilitates the communication of family members, manages their conflict in all its diversity, and traces its evolution through confidential interviews (Hochart, 2017). The issues of mediation, including family mediation, were also considered by such Russian scholars as E.I. Nosyreva (2005), D.L. Davydenko (2013), M.S. Ivanova (2014), T.A. Gurko (2008, 2016), K.A. Pansenko (2018), etc. In this case, most scholars describe mediation as the main direction of family policy but note its low prevalence. However, there are no sociological and comparative studies and scientific publications on the prevalence of family mediation in constituent entities of the Russian Federation and the public demand and effectiveness of such services.

## METHODS AND MATERIALS

The study materials for determining objective conditions were data taken from the Russian periodicals, Internet portals, legal documents, and legislative acts reflecting the current development of family mediation available online. We also referred to the sociological survey conducted by National Research Ogarev Mordovia State University (the Republic of Mordovia) in 2019-2020. The results were processed using descriptive, analytical, logical, tabular, systemic, and comparative methods. The specific regional development of family mediation was studied with the help of the dialectical approach and special scientific methods. General scientific methods were as follows: historical-legal, comparative-legal, formal-legal, sociological, theoretical-prognostic, etc. Historical-legal analysis allowed us to trace the development of family mediation in Russia. This approach helped supplement theoretical conclusions with historical facts, which proves the continuity of generations, especially the cultural development of Russian society. The comparative-legal method enabled to determine the specific development of family mediation in constituent entities of the Russian Federation. The use of general scientific methods (analysis, synthesis, induction and deduction, etc.) was important for analyzing legislative acts, the opinions of scholars and researchers, as well as for drawing conclusions and putting forward hypotheses. The sociological method involved the collection and analysis of empirical data through the study of sociological and legal information. The method of a sociological survey was used to identify the existing data and ideas about family mediation and assess the feasibility of various methods and means of increasing the efficiency of mediation in family law relations. In addition, we used the theoretical-prognostic method to develop prospective directions for improving family mediation.

## RESULTS

Family mediation aims at resolving crisis situations characterized by the alienation of spouses and insuperable contradictions among them with the least material and emotional losses. The subject of family mediation is disputes on the division of property, the establishment (contestation) of paternity, surrogate motherhood, intergenerational family relationships, etc. (Ivanova, 2014). Besides the parties and the mediator, other people who play an important role in the life of the family can participate in the mediation process. They can be involved in this process upon the consent of both the parties and the mediator.

It is worth mentioning that not every family conflict can be resolved through mediation. While analyzing the process of family mediation, L. Parkinson determined cases when mediation is inapplicable to family conflicts. To assess the applicability of mediation in each specific case, the mediator needs to conduct preliminary analysis. Thus, "family mediation cannot be used in cases of domestic violence continuing at the time of preparation for mediation; intimidation, threats, serious imbalance of power between the parties; the mental illness or disability of one of the parties; refusal or inability to follow the basic rules of the mediation procedure" (Parkinson, 2016). Family mediation is being developed in Russia as a kind of conciliation procedure between spouses. There were some cases when spouses were urged not to break up at party and Komsomol meetings. The functions of family mediators were partially performed by bodies of trusteeship and guardianship involved in resolving disputes about living together or organizing meetings with children (Gurko, 2016).

Unlike family psychologists or therapists, mediators do not give parties advice. The mediator's task is not only to help family members resolve their contradictions and overcome a crisis (Dërmaku, 2020) but also to build a dialogue between spouses, help them find a way out of the current situation, and work out a mutually acceptable solution that meets the interests of both parties. This will teach them how to form responsible and respectful relationships with each other and other people. In Russia, the procedure of family mediation has been developing since the 2000s but still has not become widespread among the population. However, many married couples need to resolve conflicts especially in relation to a divorce, the division of property, the custody of children, problems in parent-child relations, etc.

After analyzing the websites of mediation organizations, we can conclude that the demand for mediation services is low. In 2016, T.A. Gurko analyzed the register of legal entities of the Russian Federation and noted that none of them provided solely family mediation services. In recent years, the situation has not changed, which is confirmed by our analysis of the above-mentioned register. According to this database, mediation organizations function under the following codes established by the All-Russian classifier of types of economic activity: 69.10 Activities in the field of law; 69.20 Activities for the provision of services in the field of accounting, for conducting financial audit, for tax consulting; 70.22 Consulting on issues commercial activities and management; 85.42 Tertiary education; 64.99 Other financial service activities, except insurance and pension funding; 94.99 Activities of other membership organizations. According to the register, all organizations in the field of mediation provide a wide range of services and not only mediation services.

Some organizations provided mediation services only within the grants received, for instance, the Independent Non-Profit Organization "Academy of Mediation" in Barnaul



(Presidium of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, 2015). The Territorial Reconciliation Service of the Kemerovo Region had a positive experience in developing and testing algorithms for the mediation of complex school and family situations based on the restorative approach. If there is special training in restorative techniques and an organizational structure that brings together qualified therapists, these algorithms can be used by specialists in the social sphere, the education system, the prevention of juvenile delinquency, and the system of neglect (Belonogova & Prokopyeva, 2020).

However, the qualified services of family mediators are quite expensive, and not every family can use them. At the same time, prices for mediation services differ depending on a particular region. For example, the Independent Non-Profit Organization "Volgogradskii Center for Out-of-Court Dispute Settlement" charges a mediation fee of 2,000 rubles per hour when conducting a conciliation procedure in a dispute whose price does not exceed 1,000,000 rubles. During this session, mediators work with all the parties to conciliation procedures. However, the final fee could not be less than 15,000 rubles plus possible additional costs, regardless of the final result of the conciliation procedure (Resursnyi tsentr mediatsii, n.d).

In Moscow, mediation services cost even more. Here is a calculation of a four-hour mediation session for two parties having a non-property dispute: organizational costs of 2,000 rubles on each party (4,000 rubles in total); 1,300 rubles per hour over four hours of work (5,200 rubles in total; 2,600 rubles on each party); 1,500 rubles for drawing up a mediation agreement. The total cost of the mediation procedure amounts to 10,700 rubles (5,350 rubles on each party). In relation to property disputes (for example, the division of property worth 1,000,000 rubles between spouses in case of a divorce), a four-hour mediation costs 13,700 rubles (6,850 rubles on each party). This price includes the following components: organizational costs (one-time payment) of 2,000 rubles on each party (4,000 rubles in total); 1,300 rubles per hour over four hours of work (5,200 rubles in total; 2,600 rubles on each party); a contingency fee – 0.5% of the cost of the divided property (2,500 rubles in total; 1,250 rubles on each party); 2,000 rubles for drawing up a mediation agreement. The total cost of the mediation procedure amounts to 13,700 rubles (6,850 rubles on each party) (Magic Lex, n.d).

It should be noted that the mediation procedure is quite lengthy, ranging from one to several days. Even one session can take up to eight hours, which entails big financial expenses. The obligation to use mediation for resolving disputes and conflicts is an oft-discussed issue in the scientific literature. Many scholars believe that it is necessary to consolidate a mandatory pre-trial mediation procedure in family matters. According to Z.Z. Alieva (2017), the obligatory appeal to the mediator in the course of divorce proceedings will increase the demand and efficiency of this procedure.

E.N. Toguzaeva (2018) believes that mediation services are necessary in case of disputes about the upbringing of children, determining their place of residence, establishing a procedure for communication between children and their parents, divorce proceedings, and the payment of alimony. T.I. Koba also proposes to protect family rights through mediation. Given the Russian mindset, there is no need to seek mediation services if the case comes to trial (Koba, 2014). According to S.I. Kalashnikova (2011), a mandatory pre-trial meeting of the parties with the mediator is helpful since they will be informed about the possibilities and advantages of this procedure and will agree to carry it out.

Other scholars claim that states have no right to oblige the parties to use mediation, thereby violating the fundamental principle of voluntariness. Thus, E.Yu. Maksimova (2011) argues that such a measure is not entirely effective since the parties will incur

additional costs and face bureaucratic barriers and obstacles while protecting their rights and interests that have been violated. A.R. Suleimenova believes that the legislative consolidation of compulsory mediation would undermine the fundamental principle of voluntariness. Reconciliation cannot be achieved through force. Consequently, compulsory mediation does not fall within the free will of the parties. However, this scientific viewpoint has not been sufficiently reasoned (Suleimenova, 2017).

On the contrary, Z.Z. Alieva notes that the introduction of compulsory mediation will not violate the fundamental principle of voluntariness since it only obliges the parties to consult the mediator. Their possibility and desire to use mediation procedures will be determined at separate meetings (Alieva, 2017). E.O. Shkryl proposes to reconsider the legislative consolidation of procedures coercing the parties having a family dispute to use mediation to avoid contradictions between the obligation of such a procedure and the principle of voluntariness. To attain this end, it is necessary to make amendments to a significant number of federal laws, by-laws, and regulations (Shkryl, 2016). The legislative consolidation of compulsory mediation procedures in marital and family conflicts will significantly reduce the number of cases considered by courts.

To introduce the procedure of family mediation into the legal sphere, it is necessary to amend the current Russian legislation in terms of establishing a mandatory pre-trial procedure for contacting the mediator for the peaceful resolution of family law disputes. The principle of voluntariness in mediation would not be violated if the following provision is met: if the parties cannot reach a mutual decision during mediation, then they have the right to apply to a court. To ensure the availability of family mediation services, it is necessary to envisage the possibility of state financing for socially vulnerable categories of citizens. Family mediation results in the conclusion of a mediation agreement which should contribute to the fullest satisfaction of the parties' needs, especially when it concerns the well-being of children. For example, this document might contain provisions on the exercise of parental rights, shared parenting and childcare, the distribution of costs for the maintenance and education of children, etc.

In the Russian Federation, there are some regions where family mediation develops more actively due to the support of local authorities. Currently, family mediation centers function in the Moscow Region, the Leningrad Region, the Republic of Bashkortostan, the Vladimir Region, the Irkutsk Region, and the Ivanovo Region. The "Family Mediation" project has been operating in the Republic of Bashkortostan since 2018. In April 2018, reconciliation rooms were opened in some areas of the republic. Specially trained mediators give people a chance to save their family, i.e., avoid a divorce, improve relationships with their children, resolve legal disputes between family members, etc. In Ufa and some other cities of the Republic of Bashkortostan, the State Budgetary Institution "Semya" provides qualified assistance to any person free of charge if they have problems with their loved ones. All in all, family mediators are in great demand in the region. In 2020, 204 couples applied for assistance, 43 of them refused to divorce or postponed this decision, while 34 received social and psychological support (Sal'manova, 2018).

Supported by the Presidential Grants Foundation, the Vladimir Region implemented a project to create a system of free family mediation centers aimed at preserving families and protecting the health and psyche of children. It has been operating since December 2017 and has received financial support from the Presidential Grants Foundation twice. Project executors noted that "it is necessary to introduce mandatory mediation in family disputes, especially where the interests of children are affected.

Unless this rule is enshrined in the relevant law, mediation will be provided on a paid basis. This project helps those who cannot pay for mediation services" (Turabaeva, 2019). Before the implementation of this project, only a few judges in the region recommended using means of family mediation and most residents did not even know about the existence of mediators. Due to the project, those who would not be able to apply for the mediation procedure got this opportunity free of charge. In December 2018, the Vladimir Wedding Registry Office opened the so-called reconciliation lounge.

Free family mediation for families and children in difficult or socially dangerous life situations is being introduced in the Irkutsk Region by the Independent Non-Profit Organization "Irkutsk Interregional Center for Educational and Mediation Technologies". In relation to the above-mentioned conflicts, most problems subject to family mediators concern communication with another parent after a divorce; the order of communication and the provision of financial support to children; the settlement of relations between parents due to a divorce; the child's escape from home and the child's deviant behavior (Sadovnikova & Arkhipkina, n.d). With the support of the Presidential Grants Foundation, the Ivanovo Region launched the project "Let there be peace! Mediation as a way of resolving family conflicts and conflicts with children's participation". In September 2017, municipal reconciliation services were formed in the Ivanovo Region to resolve family law disputes between spouses, as well as to prevent future family problems, child neglect, and homelessness. Today, the most active mediators work in Kineshma, Teikovo, and Puchezh (Plekhanova et al., 2018).

Free assistance in family conflicts was provided within the project "Let's Save the Family by Ourselves" realized by the Independent Non-Profit Organization "West Siberian Regional Center for Mediation and Law". This institution also received financial support from the Presidential Grants Foundation. The project "Let's Save the Family by Ourselves" was implemented in 2016 and has shown the effectiveness and viability of mediation as a method of resolving disputes. In more than 60% of cases, people who addressed professional mediators were able to find a mutually acceptable solution (Zapadno-sibirskiy regional'nyy tsentr mediatsii i prava, n.d). The effective application of mediation in the Republic of Mordovia can be exemplified by a civil case on the division of joint property considered by the Oktyabrsky District Court of Saransk. The joint property in question included a car registered in the name of the wife (plaintiff). For a long time, the parties could not decide who would own the car. The court proposed to settle the dispute through mediation. As a result, the parties managed to reach an amicable agreement. The Oktyabrsky District Court of Saransk approved the above-mentioned agreement, and the judicial proceedings were terminated. At the same time, the parties concluded a mediation agreement, whose terms exceeded the scope of the dispute. The defendant undertook an obligation to pay maintenance arrears through the mutual settlement of payments. The car remained in the plaintiff's ownership. Instead of monetary compensation for half of the car, the defendant paid his alimony obligations. The executive list from the Federal Bailiff Service was withdrawn (Lyubishkina, 2018).

In another case, the lawyer offered spouses to use mediation services in connection with the division of their property acquired together in marriage. To apply to a court, they needed to pay a considerable state fee. Contacting the mediator was more beneficial for the spouses than going to court and paying a state fee; therefore, they accepted the lawyer's proposal. The parties agreed on the mediation procedure and were acquainted with the provisions of the Family Code of the Russian Federation. After mediation, a mediation agreement was concluded. In addition, the Oktyabrsky District



Court of Saransk considered a civil case where citizens V. and B. agreed to apply the mediation procedure to the dispute that had arisen over the refusal of the child's father to issue a permit for his minor daughter and her mother to leave the Russian Federation for permanent residence. Due to mediation, the parties understood each other's motivation and decided what kind of conflict resolution is better for their daughter (Morozova, 2018).

To promote and apply mediation procedures in resolving family conflicts, the Republic of Mordovia held the interregional scientific conference "Practical mediation as a culture of consent and a tool for resolving disputes" in September 2018. This conference was organized with the support of the Government of the Republic of Mordovia, the Supreme Court of the Republic Mordovia, the Association of Mediators of the Republic of Mordovia, and higher education institutions of the Republic of Mordovia. Judges from the Volga Federal District, the Lipetsk Region, the Ivanovo Region, and the Novosibirsk Region were invited to attend the conference and took an active part in the development of mediation. The Republic of Mordovia holds annual workshops, press conferences, and round-table discussions on mediation, as well as develops methodological recommendations on the application of this procedure. The Association of Mediators of the Republic of Mordovia was established.

At the same time, the awareness of the population about family mediation in the Republic of Mordovia remains extremely low. According to the sociological study conducted by National Research Ogarev Mordovia State University, the overwhelming majority of the respondents did not know about the existence of mediators, not all the respondents were aware of the possibility to resolve a family dispute through mediation, few of the respondents could name the exact bodies providing mediation services in the Republic of Mordovia. As part of this sociological survey, we interviewed 115 people, including students of National Research Ogarev Mordovia State University and people who requested a legal consultation, comprising 54% of women and 46% of men. Their age groups were as follows: 45% of the respondents were under the age of 25 years; 42% were between 26 and 50 years old; 13% were 51 years old and older.

**Table 2.** The cohort of people who participated in the survey (persons)

	In total	Under 25 years old	Between 26-50 years old	Over 51 years old
In total	115	52	48	15
Female	62	25	25	9
Male	53	27	23	6

Only 37% of the respondents (42 people) answered "yes" to the question "Do you know what family mediation is?". In most cases, a positive answer was given by persons under the age of 25 (91%) and by persons between 26-50 years old (73%). The survey confirmed the low prevalence of information on mediation among the population. When answering the question "Have you ever used mediation services?", only 1% of the respondents (1 person) gave a positive response. Most of the survey participants did not consider it necessary to consult the mediator for resolving family conflicts. Only 16% of the respondents (18 persons) said that they would address the mediator in case of a family conflict. The majority of them (90%) were women (16 persons).

While conducting the survey, we realized that most respondents did not know where to go and how to find the mediator in the Republic of Mordovia. Thus, the question "Do you know who you can contact to resolve a family dispute in the Republic of

Mordovia?" received only 7% (8 persons) of affirmative responses. Few respondents emphasized the expediency of mediation. 21% (24 persons) answered affirmatively the question "Do you think that it is advisable to contact the mediator in case of a divorce or a conflict between spouses before initiating judicial proceedings?". The study results demonstrate a low demand for family mediation services in the Republic of Mordovia. Accordingly, there is practically no information on the provision of these services. We can state that the institute of family mediation is at the stage of its initial formation and development. The main problem is that people do not know about this procedure and the way it is carried out. These data stipulate the need to improve the existing legal framework and raise the awareness of the population on the use of family mediation.

## CONCLUSION

Noting the low prevalence of mediation in constituent entities of the Russian Federation and its complete absence in some regions, we can state that mediation will play a significant role if the Family Code of the Russian Federation establishes the obligation for parties to contact mediators. The parties who do not want to reach a consensus have to use means of mediation, which is beneficial for all of them (Shkryl, 2016). Moreover, it is possible to introduce the obligatory participation of a mediator in the procedure of divorce only if such services are available for all categories of citizens. For example, socially vulnerable citizens can be represented by family mediators in courts thanks to state funding.

Family mediation in the Russian regions and the whole country is characterized by the following features: insufficient applicability; low demand due to the lack of information about family mediation among the population; the low competence and lack of family mediators; no state control and support. It can be said that Russia somehow uses family mediation but this experience is hardly well-regulated or effective. Most Russian regions apply mediation while dividing the common property of spouses. According to the Family Code of the Russian Federation, a mediation agreement determines the spouse's share in their common property and its content. Sometimes disagreements and disputes related to alimony obligations can be resolved through family mediation. A mediation agreement might include questions about the maintenance of minor children, the amount of alimony, and additional costs, including alimony for disabled parents (Isypova, 2019). Since an agreement on the payment of alimony under the Russian law requires notarial certification, a draft mediation agreement should also be certified by a notary.

An effective and accessible system of family mediation aimed at providing qualified assistance to conflicting families can be developed under the following conditions: Introducing innovative mediation techniques and methods for the peaceful settlement of disputes and conflicts in the activities of state bodies and institutions working with families that identify family disadvantages; Drawing the attention of state bodies and society to the issues of protecting children from the destructive consequences of family conflicts and the need to introduce family mediation into the current legal systems. Ensuring the mediation-based development of meaningful cooperation among bodies and institutions protecting the interests of children with the involvement of specialists in mediation techniques. Forming mediation skills among employees working with families. Training family mediators who possess the necessary psychological skills and abilities; Creating a quality control system for mediation services. Holding accredited and certified mediators accountable for their actions, suspending or terminating their certification or

accreditation or excluding them from the register; Improving the peaceful settlement of disputes, preventing and resolving family conflicts. Developing the legal literacy of parents raising minor children and ensuring the availability of mediation for every family; Making mediation a mandatory procedure in family disputes to provide qualified free mediation to families having minor children in a state of divorce (including assistance to children suffering from family conflicts, as well as families living together with alcohol and drug addicts). Introducing a full refund of state duties if the parties enter into an amicable agreement; Raising awareness among the population about benefits and possibilities of family mediation, which can be achieved through advertising, online judicial consultations, workshops, and seminars, developing and publishing informative literature, posting information about the provision of mediation services on the official websites of judicial authorities; Forming a unified federal resource containing reliable and up-to-date information about mediators and institutions providing mediation services in different regions.

Further research can study the effectiveness of family mediation and analyze the feasibility of various methods and means of increasing the level of mediation in family law relations and its limitations caused by traditional and cultural characteristics of a particular region.

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