

HIGHLIGHTING ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF STUDENT PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

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Abstract

The article deals with the personal main features and mechanisms for psychological health development. Personal psychological health is regarded as a cumulative phenomenon and a part of two categoric concepts, such as Personality Psychology and Health Psychology. They are two fundamental notions viewed for the development prospects of Psychology as a scientific and practical subject. A student age is a shift in focus on addressing towards psychological health issues. It is taken into consideration that various factors influence student health. They are a way/standard of living, hereditary background, the environment (natural and social), health care quality provided, etc. The reality that a psychologist has to face at university is an adaptive health level of student psychological health. The characteristics of this level are individual features of social maladjustment. The authors define the main indicators of young people's psychological health via an anthropological approach. The anthropological approach serves as a fundamental and research basis of the process of supporting student psychological health. The basis of psychological health is considered to be the healthy development of human personality as an essential human power. The essential strength of each person appears while solving and implementing important vital challenges. The purpose of the studies is a fundamental and empirical survey of student alexithymia and coping strategies, which can be treated as the most important factors of their psychological well-being. The survey sample consisted of 198 students at Sholom-Alechem Priamursky State University (the town of Birobidzhan). The representativeness of the research sample acknowledges that understanding and describing feelings and emotions in adolescence have a direct say in social interaction distance with other people. Eventually, it determines the quality of behavior strategies and their psychological health condition. The scholars use the following techniques to review the anthropological instruments for measuring student psychological health. They are The Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS), Psychological coping mechanisms to protect oneself in stressful events methodology (an adapted version of N. Endler and J. Parker's technique [Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS) (N. Endler, J. Parker)]). The researchers observe the relevance of correlation between psychological well-being indicators - in this case it is the alexithymia level and key coping strategies. They also monitor the correlation ratio between them. This mechanism can be applied through a variety of ways. A student peculiar feature is to avoid traumatic incidents, and in some cases, to deny them completely, to distance themselves mentally or behaviorally. During the reflection on the study results, it was found out that the testees' dominant use of the escape coping can provoke their negative one's self-concept and negative

self-esteem. The more proper the alexithymia level presented in the sample, the more reflected the action strategy, focused on overcoming obstacles and difficulties. As a result of researching university students' psychological health, there have been identified the main directions to keep and promote psychological health.

Keywords: Psychological well-being, Anthropological approach, Alexitymia, Coping strategies, Self-control, Self-fulfillment, Self-actualization, Human life challenges.

1. INTRODUCTION

Man in today's world lives in such circumstances that do not contribute to the positive development of equability of mind or his/her personal enhancement. Natural disasters, uncertainty, insecurity, urban expansion, dislocation from nature with its eternal harmony codes really make the notion of 'psychological well-being' the most relevant at present-day human development.

The term 'psychological personal well-being' can be determined by two categorical word combinations as an integral concept. They are *personality psychology* and *health psychology* as academic categories for the development prospects of psychology as a scientific and applied discipline.

Theoretical conceptualization is not the only issue which is worth observing, but also development and implementation of practical working models of psychological aspects of work to preserve and strengthen psychological well-being of each student. It should be kept in mind that various factors influence student health, such as a way of living, heredity, the environment (natural and social), the quality of health care, etc. The reality that a psychologist has to face at university is an 'adaptive level' of student psychological health. The characteristics of this level presented are certain signs of maladjustment (difficulty falling asleep, lack of confidence, refusing to attend classes, extreme anxiety, conformity, etc.).

Undoubtedly, the youth priority values in the 21st century are cognitive processes of generating new knowledge of truth, experience, freedom, human self-reflection, which are the most essential mechanisms for an individuality and identity development in this age group. For young people, it is important and valuable to actualize "Humanistic traits in a person", that is, "to be themselves", be "the author of autobiography" (Shuvalov, 2004).

Health is often viewed in the context of medical science and surely needs to be looked at from different points of view, represented in current psychological research: humanistic, cultural, historical, technocratic and anthropological ones.

The anthropological approach can be a fundamental basis of the process supporting student psychological health. The foundation of psychological health is normal development of human subjectness as a man's essential power. The essential strength of each person is revealed in the process of important vital tasks to be solved and completed. In A.V. Shuvalov's opinion who looks upon humanitarian and anthropological foundations of a personal psychological health, his/her survival, personal identity and self (personhood), actualization of human potential and a status of a family man and "survival, condition and saving oneself" in some sort of spiritual sense become the most important tasks for everyone (Shuvalov, 2008).

Theoretical and empirical comprehension of the problems of a personal psychological health has aroused the authors' interest to study alexithymia and student coping strategies, which are commented on as the most important indicators of their psychological health.

The authors mean alexithymia the emotional and cognitive disorders, undifferentiated emotions and cogitation, a special kind of archaic defence activity. The nature of it supposes the delay or regression of affective or cognitive development. Certainly, the external verbal reasoning of what people with alexithymia really care inside is distorted and such people "are characterized by constriction of the nervous system with various states and strengths of arousal relating, apparently, to particular emotions caused by various life situations and contexts" (Sifneos, 1973). Besides, alexithymia can be a consequence of a lack of adapting early emotions (van der Velde, Gromann, Swart, Wiersma, de Haan, Bruggeman, Krabbendam and Aleman, 2015) and it also influences the neural processing of emotions (Goerlich-Dobre, Witteman, Schiller, van

Heuven, Aleman and Martens, 2014).

People with a low degree of awareness of their own experiences, feelings (with a high degree of alexithymia) have enough difficulties with achieving their crucially important goals (Filonenko and Bogomaz, 2004).

Solving the most important task of a person, i.e. personal fulfillment is definitely combined with overcoming more or less difficult situations. Psychological health and its qualitative features serve as a potential for overcoming these challenges and moving forward.

In coping with stressful situations, a person takes psychological mechanisms termed as coping actions, coping strategies/skills and copying styles, which are the structural parts of psychological response (coping behavior) (Kobzeva, 2011).

Coping actions (that is what an individual feels, thinks or does) are often grouped into coping strategies. Those are brought together into copying styles (for example, a group of strategies that are conceptually similar actions): problem-focused copying; emotion-focused coping, avoidance-focused coping.

Coping behavior aimed at the passive responding to the situation, involves the reflection of various types of psychological defense mechanisms that reduce emotional reactivity and help modulate stress responses, but do not cope with a stressful situation. The older and more mature the individual is, the more probability of using active coping behavioral strategies (Kobzev, 2011). As described in the research by N.E.Holz, R.Boecker, C.Jennen-Steinmetz, A.F.Buchmann, D.Blomeyer, it is passive behavior that serves a forcing instrument for non-adaptive actions, even at the neuropsychological level (Holz, Boecker, Jennen-Steinmetz and Buchmann, 2016).

2. STUDY METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the highlighted study is a theoretical and empirical research of alexithymia and student coping strategies, which are intended to be the most important parameters of their psychological wellbeing.

The sample of the authors' basic research consisted of 198 students at Sholom-Aleichem Priamursky State University (the town of Birobidzhan). The representativeness of the research sample was ensured by the fact that understanding and comprehension of feelings and emotions in adolescence affects directly the location of interaction with another person and determines the quality of behavioral strategies and their psychological health condition in future.

To study the anthropological features of student psychological health, the authors used the following methods: the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (Taylor, Ryan, and Bagby, 1986), *Coping behavior in stressful situations* technique (adapted version of N.S. Enderl and D. Parker's method) (Korostelyova and Rotenberg, 1993; Kryukova, 2007).

3. RESULTS

After psychognostic examination of psychological health, the authors came to the conclusion that 65% of all students can be defined as the alexithymic type of personality.

The experiment found that 65% of respondents had a peculiar phenomenon of 'wordlessness of feelings.' They are becoming unable to describe their emotions verbally while modeling the impact of some stressors on them.

It is important to pay attention to a group of students who demonstrated signs of alexithymia. These are the people who misuse verbal and cognitive resources because of hard mental work load, stressful life events while studying and everyday life, especially in adjusting to a new way of life.

Less stress tolerance, a special psychological vulnerability can cause psychological maladjustment and, in fact, psychological ill-being. Alexithymia is reflected in emotional displays (when violent fierce frenzy does not get its way, it turns into sobbing) and tearfulness. People with alexitimicity sometimes get very emotional and even aggressive. At the same time, they can have serious problems with sharing their feelings, as they often do not have experience in their definition, recognition, learning information about it, thus preventing any negative consequences of their behavior.

Actually, suppression, reticence, that is, just not expressing oneself in general, constitute another way of alexithymia. Such a form can be an effect of reflecting some real past experience of expressing feelings and a negative response to this behavior by the inner circle. The authors surely assume that it is difficult to students with a high level of alexithymia to care about the content of instructions, so there is a danger of following them unconditionally ('well-behaved', passive performers).

Alexithymia influence muscular tension, the unclear language of facial expressions, which may indicate some neglecting one's internal physical and mental wellbeing.

A low level of perceiving oneself, one's own sensations and body-focused awareness results in difficulty with interacting to other people. The relationships of a person with alexithymia and the surroundings are quite shallow. The contacts may break easily. There is mainly a complex adaptation to external circumstances and people around.

Reflecting the emotional aspect of studying psychological health, alexithymia contributes to understand behavioral indicator of studying psychological health of students through coping strategies.

As the authors have defined, internal coping resources (personal and environmental) are also essential in maintaining psychological health.

Summarizing the outcomes of the study, the authors point out that the active coping behavior in this sample is not given clearly.

Only 16% of students have dominating strategies for coping with difficult situations. This number is not enough in comparison with other factors, for the students need to take the internal position of an adult, self-determine in the world, and realize their capabilities, their function in life in order to actualize personal activity. Therefore, the reasons for such a low percentage of strategies aimed at solving problems may be an insufficient internal maturity of students and their unwillingness to take responsibility for themselves.

The second category of coping strategies is emotion-focused strategies. Here is a high level also represented by a small percentage (19%), which confirms that emotional response to a difficult situation is not acceptable for the majority of interviewed respondents, although the average level is the most represented (42%). Therefore, emotional responses to difficult circumstances are concomitant with no doubt.

The common third scale includes the study of distancing or avoidance-focused strategies. This is one of the main behavioral strategies in shaping the maladaptive behavior (a reduction in perceived control) or 'dyscopia'(this term here assumes to be not coping with certain aspects of people's lives). It is aimed at overcoming or reducing distress. And it is what most interviewed students have (high level is 44%, average level is 36%). The use of this strategy is connected with underdevelopment of personal and environmental coping resources and active problem-solving skills. But it can be appropriate or not depending on the specific stressful situation, age and condition of an individual resource system. Avoiding uncomfortable or unpleasant situations can serve a psychological defense. This strategy is expected to keep either ego-defenses (consciousness) from the threats of the outside world or from the drives of the unconscious mind.

4. CONCLUSIONS

A peculiar feature of the students in this sample is the avoidance of situations associated with traumas, and in some cases, their complete negation, mental or behavioral distancing. The prevailing use of the avoidance coping strategy can provoke a negative self-concept/identity, an inadequate self-image.

Taking into account the significant corresponding indicators of psychological health (the alexithymia level and the main coping strategies according to the paper), the authors have measured the correlation between them via the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient or Spearman's rho (rs) method. In other words, the more adequate the alexithymia level obtained in the sample, the more targeting the strategy focused on the active overcoming obstacles and difficulties ($rs=0.62$). The higher the alexithymia level, the higher the coping strategy focused on emotional experience ($rs=0.71$).

Finally, there are the main fields in saving and developing psychological health found according the research of university student psychological health. These are the following:

- Actualization of constructive active behavioral strategies in difficult life situations,
- Stimulating a productive, emotional response to unordinary life situations for a person,
- Development of the prospect of 'self-making' of student own psychological health, undoubtedly associated with the developing understanding of their own feelings and emotions, as well as other people's emotions and feelings.

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