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CROSS-CULTURAL CHARACTERISTIC OF COPING BEHAVIOR OF TEENAGERS

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Abstract

Active pace of modern life and associated requirements for personality require rapid and effective overcoming of stress factors, with the help of coping behavior. The article describes and analyzes the empirical study of ethnopsychological features of coping behavior of teenagers among representatives of the Russian and Ossetian ethnic groups. A comparative analysis of socio-psychological differences in coping behavior among men and women was also carried out. A comparative analysis of socio-psychological differences in coping behavior was carried out. The study sample consisted of 160 people, aged 13 to 18 years, the average age of 15.5, living in the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania. It is established that representatives of the Russian ethnos often use problem-oriented coping, and Ossetian-emotionally-oriented coping. Significant differences between men and women in preferred coping strategies are described. In a stressful situation, men are more prudent and inquisitive than women. In turn, women are more likely than men to deny what happened, refusing to believe in what is happening or trying to reject its reality. Avoidance-oriented coping is more common among men regardless of their ethnicity. The obtained results contribute to the enrichment of scientific ideas on the problem of the influence of cross-cultural and gender-age factors on the formation of coping behavior. The results of the study can also be used in the development of recommendations for the implementation of national policy in the republics of the North Caucasus.

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Keywords: Coping behaviour, problem-oriented coping, emotion-focused coping, teenage years.



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1. Introduction

In the present there are lots of studies devoted to the study of various psychological, ethnopsychological, physiological, social and medical aspects of coping behavior (Afanasyeva, 2019). The method how a person copes with stressful situations is coping behavior (Gurieva, 2014).

Currently, there are many different approaches to the study of coping in psychological science. Thus, the dispositional approach studies the relationship of stable individual and personal characteristics with resources and coping strategies. According to the views of the integrative approach, the choice of coping methods is determined by both the characteristics of an individual and the characteristics of the situation. The neo-psychoanalytic approach considers coping as an ego-process aimed at productive adaptation of a person in difficult life situations. From the perspective of a personality-oriented approach, “coping” is defined as “a changeable personality trait that affects behavior in a wide range of stressful situations” (Nartova-Bochaver, 1997, p. 20).

According to the definition of the Russian psychologist Kryukova (2015), “coping is purposeful behavior that allows coping with stress in ways that are adequate to personal characteristics and the situation” (p. 167).

The psychological purpose of coping behavior is to best adapt a person to the requirements of an unfavorable life situation, allowing him to master it, weaken or mitigate negative factors and weaken the non-constructive effect of the situation.

The literature review suggests that to date, more than 20 types of coping strategies have been identified, under which it is customary to consider the use of various methods and methods aimed at overcoming stressful situations (Blaser, Heim, Ringer, & Thommen, 1998). However, most classifications of coping behavior are based on two basic styles identified by foreign researchers Lazarus and Folkman:

1) Problem-oriented style of coping behavior-the subject of coping with a stressful situation analyzes what happened, seeks help from others and seeks additional information. This style involves: a preliminary analysis of the problem, focusing on finding possible ways to solve it, the individual's awareness of their capabilities and characteristics of the situation, the choice of possible alternatives to the most acceptable model of behavior, appeal to their own experience of solving similar problems, practical implementation of plans (Lazarus, 2000).

2) Emotionally-oriented style of coping behavior involves immersion in their experiences, self-blame, involvement of others in personal experiences. This style involves: internal aggression (anger at yourself, guilt); external aggression (anger at others, unmotivated breakdowns on loved ones); fixation on the experience of their helplessness, inability to cope with the situation; focusing on their own shortcomings; apathy or irritation at everything that happens; the experience of nervous tension, breakdowns; search for opportunities for emotional discharge (Lazarus & Folkman, 2007).

It is considered that both styles of coping behavior are necessary for the individual and constructively the ability to apply each of them depending on the complexity of the situation, because they both contribute to the physical and mental health of the individual.

2. Problem Statement

The specific interest of most of the researchers is focused on coping behaviour of a person in the context of cultural variety. The study of ethnopsychological peculiarities of coping behaviour in teenage years has a special topicality in the context of better understanding the ways of integral functioning of a person as an activity performer in the multicultural environment (Antsyferova, 1994).

3. Research Questions

Coping behaviour has different content depending not only on the ethnic group but also on the gender. The leading coping type is problem oriented coping. We may assume that emotional suppression; control over emotions and management of negative feelings connected with personal experience, belonging to the ethnic groups and gender. The research question tends to demonstrate the significant differences in coping behaviour of teenagers depend on ethnic groups.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to compare cross-cultural peculiarities of coping behaviour in teenage age demonstrated by the representatives of the Russian and the Ossetian ethnic groups. Based on this purpose, we have specified the following tasks: comparative analysis of ethnopsychological features of the Russian and Ossetian ethnic group's representatives' coping behaviour as well as identification of differences in the coping strategies preferred by boys and girls.

5. Research Methods

The study was performed in Vladikavkaz, the Republic of North Ossetia – Alania, where the indigenous population are the Ossetians. The Russians, being an ethnic minority at this territory, make the united ethnic community and preserve their ethnic identity and specific features of natural culture. Representatives of the Russian ethnic group, living in the Republic, who participated in the study, are the Cossacks, who has been dwelling at this territory for about 100 years (41 persons) and the Russians who has mainly moved to this territory in the times of the Soviet Union (38 persons). Totally, the selection scoped 160 persons (92 girls and 68 boys) aged from 13 to 18 years. Subject to the personal ethnic self-identification, we inquired the following groups: representatives of the Ossetian ethnic group – 81 persons (32 boys and 49 girls); representatives of the Russian ethnic group – 79 persons (36 boys and 43 girls). By education: 136 respondents are enrolled in school, and 24 people-receive secondary vocational education (college or technical school).

The following set of empirical methods was used in the study: author's questionnaire for determination of social and demographic characteristics of the respondents, "Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations" questionnaire (Rasskazova, Gordeeva, & Osin, 2013; Vetrova, 2008), COPE Questionnaire (Kryukova, 2013). Excel and "SPSS.13.0" programs, as well as Student's t-test, were used for processing, and mathematical and statistical analysis of the of the study results.

6. Findings

According to the obtained data, the representatives of the Russian ethnic group more frequently use the problem oriented coping ($t=3.18$ at $p\leq 0.01$) in problem situations. This type of coping includes high level of self-control and belief in own internal resources for overcoming hardships. The obtained data signify that control over emotions, self-restraint is natural for the Russians, and thorough planning of actions and analysis of the encountered problem are prevailing. Thus, in stressful situations, the Russians are aimed at changing the problem conditions they face by searching useful information and performing active actions for their elimination. It is found that the Russians use the “active coping” strategy in conditions of life hardships more often than the Ossetians ($t=2.50$ at $p\leq 0.01$) by developing the systematic actions aimed at overcoming the stressful situation. It is found that in the Russian selection the respondents more often use “seeking social support” strategy as a form of coping behaviour ($t=2.84$ at $p\leq 0.01$). According to this strategy, an individual, in attempt to cope with the problem situations, tends to be in the public places more often than usual and make social contacts with other people.

As for the Ossetian selection, the emotion-focused coping was more frequently found ($t=-1.98$ at $p\leq 0.05$). Such coping behaviour includes demonstration of own feelings and emotions caused by the unpleasant situation, as well as high indignation and rejection of hardships, hopelessness, anger, self-blaming, and blaming of others.

The representatives of the Ossetian ethnic group more frequently concentrate on their own emotions ($t=-3.28$ at $p\leq 0.01$), demonstrating focus on adverse and negative emotions, expression of personal emotional stress and own feelings in case of troubles. It was found that the representatives of the Ossetian selection frequently use “denial” as a stress coping behaviour in critical situation ($t=-3.70$ at $p\leq 0.01$). This means that the Ossetians, more frequently than the Russians, do not want to believe in what happened and thus try to deny the reality in any possible way. In addition, it is natural for the representatives of the Ossetian ethnic group to use the “behavioural avoidance of the problem” strategy ($t=-3.42$ at $p\leq 0.01$) in conditions of life hardships. This strategy means abandonment of the desired purpose and impossibility to regulate efforts directed at cooperation with the stress (Gurieva, 2008).

By evaluation of the individual psychological peculiarities of the studied ethnic groups, we have found that the Russians more clearly demonstrate respect to others ($t=2.50$ at $p\leq 0.01$). This possibly means that the Russians tend to percept others positively and need to be close to other people. They are sympathetic, have good understanding of others, feel personal responsibility for their own well-being and are tolerant to the drawbacks of others. They can feel empathy, take part in social events and feel themselves responsible for the common goal. They accomplish their assignments scrupulously and responsibly. In cooperation with others, they try to avoid discrepancies and rather prefer collaboration to rivalry.

As for the representatives of the Ossetian ethnic group, self-respect is more natural for them ($t=2.53$ at $p\leq 0.01$). This feature signifies a person’s tendency for independence and self-dependence. The Ossetians are always ready to protect their interests in case of competition and usually aim at being perfect.

According to the obtained data, boy use the problem oriented coping in stressful situations more often than girl do ($t=-2.33$ at $p\leq 0.05$). Obviously, it is more natural for boy to control their emotions and

be self-restraint. Thorough planning of actions towards solution of the problem and situation analysis is prevailing. Thus, boys are stronger oriented at changing the problem conditions they face by searching useful information and performing active actions for their elimination than girls are. It was found that in stressful situations boys are more cautious ($t=-2.42$ at $p\leq 0.05$) and inquisitive ($t=-2.08$ at $p\leq 0.05$) than girls. This fact once again confirms that boys have higher level of regulation of behaviour and self-control.

Still, we need to mention that the avoidance coping is also more frequently used ($t=-2.21$ at $p\leq 0.05$) by boys than by girls. It is more natural for boys to distract themselves from stressful situations in a merry noisy company, drinking, smoking or taking psychoactive drugs. This way they try to evade contacting with reality or escape from solution of the existing problems.

However, we have found that “distraction” from the problem situation is more natural for the Russian boy than for the Ossetian boy ($t=2.30$ at $p\leq 0.05$). The distraction means tendency for temporary escape from solution of the existing problems by drinking alcohol, taking drugs, immersing into hobby, travelling and fulfilment of the cherished dreams. The results also demonstrate that the Russian boy uses the “problem avoiding” coping strategy more often than the Ossetian boy do ($t=3.61$ at $p\leq 0.01$). Such behavioural strategy means ignoring thoughts about troubles, compliant behaviour, passivity and wish to stay comfortable. It was found that the emotion-focused coping is dominating among girls ($t=-2.78$ at $p\leq 0.01$). Such coping expresses itself in focus on unpleasant emotions and feelings. In the course of the study we have found that girls more often deny what happened than boys ($t=-2.27$ at $p\leq 0.05$) and do not want to believe the problem is real. According to the results, a stressful situation forces girls to seek support in God, faith and religion more often than boys.

The level of girls’ tension in stressful situation is higher ($t=-2.29$ at $p\leq 0.05$) than boys’ level of tension. Possibly, it may mean that girls, in case of failure, can easily fall into despair or depression. According to the performed study, the following strategies are prevailing among the Russian girls: planning of problems solution ($t=2.44$ at $p\leq 0.05$) and active stress coping ($t=3.22$ at $p\leq 0.05$). It means that the Russian girls tend to manage the difficult stressful situation using purposeful analysis of situation and possible ways of behaviour, development of strategy for problem solution, planning of own actions considering objective conditions, experience and available resources.

7. Conclusion

According to the results of the study, the Russian respondents more often use the problem oriented coping, which means that they are the realists, adequately perceiving the surrounding conditions, highly adapted to everyday life, use logic in managing stressful life events and more frequently seek rational explanation of the problem.

As for the Ossetian respondents, expressiveness is predominant that means easy attitude to life, higher level of confidence in their feelings and intuition than in common sense. We shall also mention that the Ossetians are more conservative, this fact is confirmed by their adherence to traditional values and observation of ethnic behavioural norms. Among the most important values, they mention preservation of natural and cultural authenticity of their ethnic group.

It is important that in stressful situations men more often choose meaningful coping strategies, such as planning and searching for direct social support. This may mean that consideration of actions in

response to the life hardships and development of behavioural tactics is more natural for men. They more often try to get advice, help or information from the social environment.

Predominance of the emotion-focused coping behaviour, expressed as deep immersion into negative emotions and feelings is more natural for women. It is more natural for women than for men to deny what happened and refuse to believe in reality. Thus, trying to influence the reality, women tend to seek support in God, belief and religion. It is also more natural for women to respond the problem with humour, laugh or jokes.

Coping behaviour has different content depending on the ethnic group and the gender. For example, the following coping strategies are socially acceptable for the representatives of the Russian ethnic group: positive reassessment, planning of problems solution, self-control. The leading coping type is problem oriented coping. We may assume that emotional suppression, control over emotions and management of negative feelings by their positive reconsideration are natural for the Russians. As for the representatives of the Ossetian ethnic group, focus on negative feelings and emotions related to the existing problem situation is more natural for them.

There are significant differences in coping behaviour of men depending on what ethnic group they belong. For the Russian men, it is natural to escape and seek social support, and for the Ossetian men, it is natural to deny and control coping.

There are also significant differences in coping behaviour of women. The Russian women tend to demonstrate self-control, which means that management of negative feelings related to the life hardship is based on purposeful emotional suppression and control over emotions, as well as mitigation of their influence on assessment of situation and selection of behavioural strategy, high control over behaviour and tendency for self-restraint. As for the women of the Ossetian ethnic group, concentration on emotions and their release, as well as behavioural avoidance of the problem, are predominant.

The results of ethnopsychological and gender peculiarities of coping behaviour may be used in development of recommendations on implementation of the national policy in the North Caucasus Republics (Korzhova, 1997). The empiric results may be used as a theoretical background for new studies of coping strategies preferred by the representatives of various ethnic groups. Such studies make informational contribution in scientific understanding of cross-cultural, social and cultural factors' influence on the process of coping behaviour generation (Nabiullina & Tukhtarova, 2003). The results of the study may be used in development of recommendations on arrangement of social and psychological services in the multi-cultural regions, as well as for development of stress psychology, personality psychology, ethnic psychology and developmental psychology. It is also possible to use the empirically obtained data in practice of psychological counselling of men and women enduring life hardships.

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