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**PSYCHOLOGICAL INDICES OF SOCIAL SAFETY OF
CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is the study of psychological indices of social safety of children with disabilities (by the example of children with intellectual disorders). The paper highlights the following indices of social safety of children: sensitivity to threats and the level of self-evaluation, the level of aggressiveness, trust in the world, psychosocial wellbeing. To conduct the study of psychological indices of social security of children, the following methods were used: a threat sensitivity test-inventory (A. Maralov), Buss-Durkey aggressiveness inventory, the method of “Subjective wellbeing scale” (Perrudet-Badoux, Mendelsohn and Chiche), Dembo-Rubinstein’s method of self-evaluation. Sixty respondents in their early teens (12-13 years old) having F70 or F71 took part in the experiment. The conducted study allowed revealing self-evaluation immaturity of adolescents with intellectual disorders, manifesting itself in the tendency towards overestimation of their own personality traits and abilities. Overestimation of their own capabilities resulted in appearance of self-confidence accompanied by inadequate treatment of threats, inability to understand the expediency of their own actions and to foresee their consequences. Merely 30% of respondents have developed sensitivity to threats at an adequate level. Inadequate self-evaluation affects the sense of satisfaction with one’s life, that is, on the sense of wellbeing (pseudo wellbeing or local wellbeing takes place). The comfortable environment of the educational establishment enabled the formation in adolescents of the local subjective wellbeing and, as a consequence, of low aggressiveness.

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Keywords: Psychology of safety; children with disabilities; psychosocial wellbeing; sensitivity to threats; aggressiveness.

1. Introduction

At present, in Russia, the necessity of establishment of special conditions for crippled children and for children with disabilities providing recovery, rehabilitation and social adaptation is actualized. One of the most numerous categories of children with specialised educational needs comprises children with intellectual development disturbances: mentally deficient and with mental retardation (disorders). The

societal attitude to mentally retarded people is extremely dramatic and is rich with instances of both inhuman and highly sacrificial, merciful treatment of them. According to different data, the number of such children has recently increased significantly and amounts to 5 - 10 % of the total children population. In case of intellectual disorders, the central nervous system is unable to provide the necessary foundation for development of personal traits and creates obstacles impeding origination of mindful attitude to the reality as the most important prerequisites of socio-psychological safety and wellbeing of a child. The defect influencing negatively social interactions of a child with intellectual disorders complicates his/her cognition of the environment and impedes his/her integration in society and adaptation to it (Ainsworth, 2004; Santo et al., 2006; Speck, 1999; Vygotsky, 1983). Disorientation in the social medium can result in the development of the dangerous behaviour in a child with intellectual disorders (victimized, addictive, delinquent, risk-taking, aggressive and so on) (Davydova, 2009; Katz1 & Singh, 1986; Kolosova, 2007). And if not to establish intentionally the conditions for his/her full-fledged development, not to foster corresponding personal traits, not to form socially safe, defensive, controllable behaviour, it is unlikely that his/her life will develop successfully.

Socio-psychological safety of the personality is represented by his/her experiencing of his/her security or insecurity in a certain life situation when implementing a social interaction with surrounding people, including those in the virtual setting. The most important component of the favourable (safe) social interaction is the absence or minimization of the threats of social and socio-psychological nature, providing the subjects of the interaction with the feeling of psychosocial wellbeing, referential significance holding them within the limits of standard behaviour and stimulating in them a social activity, which does not restrict freedoms and dignities of other person, excluding violence and promoting personality development (Baeva & Bordovskaia, 2015; Dontsov et al., 2016; Kislyakov et al., 2015; Zinchenko, 2011).

The analysis of studies in the field of psychology of safety offered by us allowed emphasising the following indices of socio-psychological safety of children: sensitivity to threats, the level of aggressiveness, psychosocial wellbeing, trust to the world. On the basis of the assumption on universal regularities of adequately developing children and children with abnormal development (Vygotsky, 1983), the above-mentioned characteristics can be used when studying socio-psychological safety of children with intellectual disorders with exposure of the specificity.

Let us consider the content of the mentioned indices of socio-psychological safety.

1. The ability of a human being to adequately reflect (forecast) risks in psychology has been named as sensitivity to threats. Its origin and development is in many respects conditioned by, on the one hand, individual and personality peculiarities of a human being, on the other – by the experience of facing the dangers, errors and achievements in the field of provision of one's life activity safety and the life activity safety of other people. The fact that sensitivity to threats is a socially desirable trait of a person, which is necessary to develop in a human being starting from childhood, is indubitable (Maralov et al., 2012).

In the meaningful context, the essence of sensitivity to threats was described by M.A. Kotik, (1994) to the fullest extent. Characterising the peculiarities of emotional experience and behaviour of a human being in a dangerous situation, he is guided by the concept of meaningfulness. So that the life event was sensed as threatening and attracted human being's attention, it should possess a high negative valence. One person can treat getting a small scratch even under a low probability of event occurrence as a threat

to his/her life. Another person – a possibility of receiving a severe injury under a high probability of event occurrence is the fact not worth any particular attention. Sensitive adolescents less commonly have difficulties in interactions with educators, parents, peers; they more frequently choose adequate ways of responding to risky situations (Maralov et al., 2012).

Sensitivity to threats is connected with the level of self-evaluation. Self-evaluation in the structure of socio-psychological safety of a personality performs the functions of self-regulation, self-improvement, self-control of a personality in the process of social interaction (Webster, & Sobieszek, 1974). The most substantial mental disturbance observed in adolescents having a light degree of mental retardation is insufficiency of a critical attitude to oneself and a situation and, as a consequence, overestimated self-evaluation (Ainsworth, 2004; Santo et al., 2006; Speck, 1999; Vygotsky, 1983).

2. Those who are prone to accidents are characterised by aggressiveness, impulsivity, emotional disequilibrium, increased anxiety, inclination to conflicts and so on. Aggressive adolescents for all differences in their personality traits and peculiarities of behaviour differ by some common traits. To such traits, we can refer poverty of value orientations, their primitiveness, absence of hobbies, narrowness and unsteadiness of interests. As a rule, these children have a low level of intellectual development, increased suggestibility, underdevelopment of moral principles. Emotional rudeness, exacerbation towards both peers and surrounding adults are peculiar to them. Such adolescents experience fear of extensive social contacts, egocentricity, inability to find the way out of difficult situations (Campbell, 1998).

It is necessary to note that each personality must possess a certain degree of aggressiveness. Its absence leads to becoming slave, to conformity, as a result of which the victimised behaviour can occur. This type of abnormal behaviour is especially peculiar to adolescents with intellectual deficiency. Mentally deficient children are the most suggestible and less cautious in comparison with normally developing peers (Hentig, 1979).

3. The studies conducted by psychologists showed that the source of psychological safety of children becomes attachment and trust (Dontsov et al., 2016). Trust to the world is understood as a specific subjective phenomenon, the essence of which lies in the specific relation of a subject to different objects and fragments of the world, consisting in the experiencing the actual significance and a prior safety of these objects or fragments of the world for a human being. Basic mistrust is a feeling of unsafety of the surrounding world, and a yearning to avoid unpleasant factors of social medium arises at early stages of ontogenesis (Erikson, 1963; Jeffry, 2007; Kjærnes, 2006). The crisis of “basic trust/mistrust”, which has not been resolved adequately and timely, can accompany a human being throughout his/her life in the form of social mistrust relatively him/herself, other people, the world. The most significant criteria of mistrust are: immorality, unreliability, aggressiveness, belonging to a hostile social group, proneness to conflict, competitiveness, impoliteness, and reticence. Social mistrust to the world can be accompanied by total malice, fantasies of destruction and vandalism. The lack of trust for an adolescent can turn into his/her social isolation, abrupt alienation, “withdrawal”, and as a consequence, weakness of conation and low social adaptation.

4. Subjective wellbeing belongs to the number of those psychological peculiarities which occupy a central place in the self-consciousness and in the subjective world of a person. Happiness and subjective wellbeing of adolescents influence different parameters of their psychological state, mood, self-attitude, learning activity success, efficiency of the interpersonal interaction, tolerance, communicative

characteristics (Kislyakov et al., 2016). R. Gilman and E. Huebner (2006) relate psychological wellbeing of learners to satisfaction with life and the ability to handle stress; S. Suldo with colleagues (2008) relate it to high emotional control and academic capabilities.

2. Research methods

In order to assess the above-mentioned indices of socio-psychological safety of children with intellectual disorders, we have developed a set of diagnostic tools, which includes standardized psychological methods. The methods were adapted to the target group.

For the purpose of diagnostics of sensitivity to threats, we used the test-inventory for defining sensitivity to threats developed by A.G. Maralov. Each task included the wording of some statement and four variants of the answer. The tasks were aimed at revealing the ability to detect possible threats, as well as the ability to take the situation under control. The modified method of studying self-evaluation developed by Dembo-Rubinstein was also used. Children were offered to assess the level of development of the following traits and abilities in themselves: health, intellect, their authority in the group, the ability to defend themselves, the character, the ability to do much with their own hands, appearance, self-confidence.

To reveal the level of aggressiveness, the inventory developed by Buss-Durkey (modified by G. V. Rezapkina) was used. The inventory allows defining the following types of reactions: physical aggressiveness, indirect aggression, irritation, negativism, resentment, suspiciousness, verbal aggression, sense of guilt. Also, this method allows defining the level of trust to the world.

For the purpose of diagnostics of psychosocial wellbeing, we have conducted a study of the level of subjective wellbeing using the method “Subjective wellbeing scale” (Perrudet-Badoux, Mendelsohn and Chiche, adapted by V. M. Sokolova). The content of the method is connected with the emotional state, social behaviour and some physical symptoms.

Sixty respondents in their early teens (12-13 years old) having diagnosis F70 (Mental retardation of a light degree) or F71 (Moderate mental retardation), studying in the 5th – 6th forms at special (remedial) school of the VIII type, took part in the experiment.

3. Results and Discussion

The conducted study has shown that only one third of respondents have optimal-level self-evaluation of their ability to protect themselves in case of necessity. Half of the respondents display overestimated self-evaluation, which justifies personality immaturity, inability to adequately assess the results of their own activity, comparing themselves with others; such self-evaluation can point out the essential distortions in personality formation – “closure for experience”, insensitiveness to their mistakes, failures, remarks and evaluations made by other people. Twenty percent of adolescents display low self-evaluation, which points to an extreme ill-being in the personality development. These learners are included into the risk group. Beyond low self-evaluation, there can be two completely different psychological phenomena: genuine diffidence and “defensiveness”, when declaring (to oneself) one’s own inability, absence of the ability and such sort of things allows one to make no efforts.

The level of aspirations confirming the optimal notion of one's own abilities is an important factor of personality development. The level of aspirations to the development of the ability to defend oneself in case of necessity in the majority of respondents is at a high level, which justifies unrealistic, uncritical children's attitude to their own abilities. Twelve percent of respondents display a low level of aspirations, which justifies unfavourable development of personality. The level of aspirations definitely depends on (in)adequacy of self-evaluation. Inadequacy of self-evaluation can result in extremely unrealistic (overestimated or underestimated) aspirations.

The observations of the behaviour of the testees when performing experimental tasks, their reaction to the assessment showed that the self-evaluation of the majority of testees is of superficial nature. Adolescents did the tasks, answered quickly without deliberation; hesitation is not characteristic of them. They stated out the following self-evaluation judgments about their real traits connected with safety: "I fear nothing", "Nothing and nobody threaten me", "I am strong and courageous", "Nothing bad will happen to me" and others.

Thus, the results, obtained by us, confirm the data of numerous studies, justifying the immaturity of self-evaluation of this category of adolescents. The immaturity of their self-evaluation reveals itself in the absence of differentiation between real and desired things, in the tendency of overestimation of their personality traits and abilities. Overestimation of their own personality by the adolescents with intellectual disorders arises in response to a low evaluation on the part of surrounding people and performs a pseudo-compensatory function.

One of the most important characteristics of the personality of the safe type is an ability to detect and warn about threat. At the level of the behavioural component, it is revealed as an ability of an individual to realise the choice of adequate or inadequate ways of responding to a threat.

As the results of the conducted study show, on the whole, the adolescents with intellectual disorders demonstrate a low level of sensitivity to threats (70%). The average level is revealed only in every fourth respondent. These data are quite regular and comply with the overestimated self-evaluation of the adolescents indicating their risk-taking and self-confidence.

A successfully socialised personality more often chooses accepted in the society ways of adequate response to threats; otherwise, such personality would be unable to function properly. Along with it, the presence of merely sensitiveness does not guarantee the fact that the personality in a threatening situation will choose adequate behaviour, which prevents, reduces and levels the threat. Nevertheless, the presence of sensitivity allows an adolescent to make a substantial step towards provision of his/her safety.

The results of the study of the level of aggressiveness of adolescents with intellectual disorders, obtained by us, confirmed the above-mentioned regularities partially. Having inadequate self-evaluation and a low intellectual status, the adolescents in the majority (67%) demonstrated a low level of aggressiveness. Having analysed the data of testing, we established that the most widely spread forms of aggressive behaviour are suspiciousness, negativism, physical and verbal aggressiveness, which in its turn indicates a pronounced symptom of distrust to surrounding people.

Any adolescent independently of the level of intellectual development, including a mentally retarded one, craves for not only attention, but also understanding, trust on the side of the adults. It is quite natural that he/she strives for playing a definite part not only among peers, but also among adults. In the adult society, the attitude – an adolescent is a child who must know his/her place and obey adults – has

strengthened and hampers the development of the social activity of an adolescent. As a result, between adults and adolescents, there is a barrier, which adolescents strive to overcome, resorting to, first of all, an aggressive way of behaviour. Such aggressiveness is displayed in the form of suspiciousness (45% of respondents) – distrust and caution in relation to people, based on the belief that surrounding people intend to do harm (“social distrust to the world”) – as well as in the form of negativism (45% of respondents) – an oppositional behavioural pattern directed against authority of significant adults, against the established laws and traditions (antisocial behaviour).

The aggressive behaviour of adolescents with intellectual disorders and expression of connected with it negative feelings are displayed through physical aggression (40% of respondents) – fights, beating, bodily injuries, damage and destruction of property – and through verbal aggression (38% of respondents) – insults, abuse, yell. An adolescent can respond to any abuse with physical aggression, without thinking of consequences.

The data of the conducted study allowed revealing the following levels of subjective wellbeing. A high level of subjective wellbeing is observed in 63% of respondents, which is characterised by absolute or moderate emotional comfort. Adolescents of this level of wellbeing do not experience serious emotional problems, they are optimistic, and possess overestimated self-evaluation, they are confident in their abilities. The rest 37% of adolescents display an average level of subjective wellbeing. Adolescents of this level are characterised by moderate subjective wellbeing, there are no serious problems with them, but we are unable to talk about absolute emotional comfort. The observations of the behaviour of the testees when performing experimental tasks, their reaction to the evaluation showed that the majority of the testees responded that they “feel healthy and cheerful”, they are “in a good shape”, “they study easily”, they are “in a good mood”, etc. Hence, it is possible to talk about “local wellbeing” of adolescents with intellectual disorders in conditions of the boarding school. At the same time, subjective wellbeing is associated with prevalence of positively toned emotions, with relations to educators permeated with care, with the feeling of referential significance.

4. Conclusion

The above-mentioned indices of social safety of the individual are interconnected and interdependent. It is necessary to note the hierarchy of the emphasised indices of social safety of the individual, where every subsequent index in a certain degree implies and rests on the previous one. Thus, provision of psychosocial wellbeing is not possible without preventive treatment of aggressiveness and establishment of personality-trusting relations. In addition to it, an indispensable condition of providing socio-psychological safety of an adolescent is formation of his/her adequate self-evaluation and development of sensitivity to threats, which our socium harbours.

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