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INCLUSION AS A FACTOR IN THE EMOTIONAL STATE OF MOTHERS OF PRESCHOOLERS

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Abstract

In modern conditions, parents of children with disabilities have the opportunity to choose a learning environment for the child. A preschool child with disabilities can attend a special kindergarten, while parents have the opportunity to integrate the child into a kindergarten group, which is visited by typically developing children. The emotional state of parents, namely the level of psychological tension and anxiety, directly affects the condition of the child. This article presents the results of a study which purpose was to examine the characteristics of the emotional state and attitudes towards mothers raising preschool children with disabilities in special and inclusive educational institutions. The study showed that these parameters mentioned differ among mothers of children with disabilities and mothers of typically developing children. Parents who choose inclusive education for their child have some features that distinguish them from parents whose children get special education. In particular, they are distinguished by a greater degree of acceptance of the child and more tend to look for an active for the optimal way out of stressful situations actively. At the same time, mothers whose children are brought up in a special kindergarten demonstrate higher family anxiety and a higher level of psychological stress than mothers of typically developing children. Knowing the characteristics of the parents of children with disabilities will help specialists in compiling psychological assistance programs for this category of parents.

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1. Introduction

Currently, the problems of the family raising a child with disabilities are receiving greater attention, both from researchers and from specialist practicing in this area. Helping a child with disabilities is effective only if it is based on personal relationships, which is only possible in a family setting. It is the family environment that determines the further psychophysical and social development of the child (Levchenko & Tkacheva, 2008).

However, one cannot consider a family raising a child with disabilities only from the point of view of its influence on child development. Many domestic and foreign authors considered a wide range of neurotic and psychotic disorders in the parents of children with disabilities (Tkacheva, 2014). However, parents often tend to hide their condition from those around them (Seligman, 2009).

It is important to understand that family members are self-valuable individuals who find themselves in a difficult life situation and who, due to the constant psychological trauma, need psychological support

2. Problem Statement

Many mothers of preschool children with disabilities want their child to go to kindergarten. However, it is often difficult for a child to attend a general education institution, especially if he has severe developmental disorders. In such cases, parents are usually offered to visit a special (correctional) kindergarten. In Veliky Novgorod, another type of preschool education is available for parents of children with disabilities — integrative short-stay groups, which are organized on the basis of Municipal Autonomous Preschool Educational Institution No. 42. The education that children with disabilities get in these groups can be classified as inclusive.

In the integrative groups described by us, models of continuous incomplete and partial integration are implemented, where children with disabilities are taught and raised in a preschool together with typically developing peers (Malofeyev & Shmatko, 2008). A feature of these groups is that children (both typically developing, and children with disabilities) are in kindergarten 3 hours a day (for an average), while one of the family members (usually a mother) can be in the group with the children. Thus, the mother is an assistant for a child with disabilities, which is especially important if the child has severe developmental disorders. In addition, there is no sharp separation of mother and child, which can often psychologically injure both of them. Mom can leave the child with the teacher when she and the child are ready for this.

This study is devoted to the study of the emotional state and attitude to the child of mothers whose children are brought up in different conditions: a typical kindergarten, special kindergarten and integrative groups (inclusive education). It is known that the emotional state of a mother and the characteristics of her relationship to a child directly affect his condition (Dobryakov & Zashchirinskaya, 2007). Therefore, for professionals working with a child, it is important to work with parents (Kozhevnikova, 2007). Knowing their special individual traits will allow specialists of educational institutions to build an assistance program for mothers of children with disabilities in a more competent manner.

The hypothesis of our study was the assumption that the emotional state and attitude of mothers of children with disabilities to a child has its own characteristics and differs from the corresponding parameters of mothers of typically developing children. We also suggested that there are differences in the

characteristics of the emotional state and attitude towards the child in mothers whose children attend various types of educational institutions (kindergarten for typically developing children, special kindergarten, and integrative groups).

3. Research Questions

3.1. To investigate the following features of the emotional state and attitude towards the child of mothers of children with disabilities and mothers of typically developing children:

- various aspects of emotional stress (objective tension; subjective external stress; subjective internal stress);
- -level of unproductive neuropsychic tension; neuropsychic stress manifested in a family situation; family anxiety and general dissatisfaction with the family situation;
- features of the maternal attitude towards the child.

3.2. Compare the indicated parameters in mothers of children with disabilities (brought up in conditions of special and inclusive education) and typically developing children.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to study the characteristics of the emotional state and attitudes of mothers of children with disabilities of preschool age who are brought up in a special and inclusive education. Knowledge of these features will contribute to the development of high-quality psychological assistance programs for parents of children with disabilities who are brought up in different conditions.

5. Research Methods

The features of the emotional state and attitude towards the child were investigated by us using the following psychodiagnostic techniques.

5.1. Questionnaire of parental relationship (Y. Varga, V.V. Stolin) (Rogov, 1999). Child-parent relations were investigated on 5 scales:

- acceptance;
- cooperation;
- symbiosis;
- control;
- attitude to failure.

5.2. A questionnaire for identifying parental stress in families with children with disabilities, The Caregiver Strain Questionnaire (Brannan, Heflinder, & Bickman, 1997). The questionnaire allows you to analyze the condition of the parents of a child with disabilities for 4 characteristics.

Objective stress: the stress of parents that arises due to any objectively observed events due to violations of the child: anxiety delivered to neighbors, disruption of relations within the family, change of daily routine, and decrease in social activity.

Subjective external stress: negative feelings towards the child, such as anger, resentment, indignation.

Subjective internal tension: negative feelings experienced by the parent in relation to himself, such as guilt, shame, embarrassment.

General tension: the sum of the first three scales.

This questionnaire was offered only to mothers of children with disabilities.

5.3. Methodology "Typical family status" (E. G. Eidemiller, V.V. Yustitsky) (Eydemiller & Yustitskiy, 1990).

We studied 3 indicators:

- general dissatisfaction with the family situation;
- family anxiety;
- neuropsychic tension.

5.4. Color psychodiagnostic test by M. Luscher (Etkind, 2000). The indicator "total deviation from the autogenous norm" was used as the main indicator. This indicator reflects the level of unproductive neuropsychic tension, which consists in an excessively high expenditure of neuropsychic resources with an equally immoderate low coefficient of performance. The larger the value of this indicator, the greater the degree to which a person's forces are spent on maintaining his own mental integrity, on combating intrapersonal problems, on voluntarily overcoming fatigue to the detriment of achieving subjectively significant goals.

5.5. Based on the results of the study, a discussion was held with the mothers; they got acquainted with the results of the study and could ask questions of interest. In addition, the conversation made it possible to clarify some features of the parental attitude to the child and the emotional state, as well as the features of specific life situations in which families are.

Mathematical and statistical processing of the results included the calculation of the Mann-Whitney U-test to identify significant differences between the performance of all samples.

6. Findings

The study involved 67 mothers of children aged 3 to 5 years, of which 36 were the mothers of children with disabilities, 31 were of typically developing children. Mothers of children with disabilities consisted of two subgroups: the first subgroup consisted of 25 mothers, whose children attend special (correctional) kindergarten for children with intellectual disabilities, the second subgroup included 11 mothers of children with disabilities who attend integrative groups of short stay.

The results of the study of the characteristics of the parental relationship are presented below (see Table 01).

Table 01. Features of parenting

Group	Acceptance	Cooperation	Symbiosis	Control	Attitude to failure
1	25.8	5.5	4.4	3.7	2.0
2	30.5	6.3	4.2	3.1	1.3
3	30.9	6.2	4.4	4.1	1.1
U1	0.003				
U2					
U3					

According to the table:

Group 1 - mothers whose children attend a special kindergarten;

group 2 - mothers whose children attend an integrative kindergarten;

group 3 - mothers of typically developing children.

U1 - U-criterion of differences between the indicators of group 1 and group 2;

U2 - U-criterion of differences between the indicators of group 2 and group 3;

U3 - U-criterion of differences between the indicators of group 1 and group 3.

Only statistically significant differences are listed in the table.

The features of the emotional state of mothers were also studied (see Table 2).

Table 02. Features of the emotional state of mothers

Group	Typical family situation			Color Test M. Luscher
	General dissatisfaction	Family anxiety	Neuropsychic tension	
1	8.8	9.9	17.5	15.1
2	10	9.3	15.9	12.3
3	7.9	8.3	14.1	15.1
U1				
U2				
U3		0.021	0.037	

According to the table:

Group 1 - mothers whose children attend a special kindergarten;

group 2 - mothers whose children attend an integrative kindergarten;

group 3 - mothers of typically developing children.

U1 - U-criterion of differences between the indicators of group 1 and group 2;

U2 - U-criterion of differences between the indicators of group 2 and group 3;

U3 - U-criterion of differences between the indicators of group 1 and group 3.

Only statistically significant differences are listed in the table.

When studying the characteristics of the parental attitude to the child, it turned out that most mothers of all groups have a high level of acceptance of the child and the ability to work with him. Moreover, mothers of typically developing children demonstrate the highest level of acceptance, mothers of children

brought up in a special kindergarten show the lowest level (the indicator is significantly lower than that of mothers of typically developing children and mothers whose children attend integrative groups).

A significant difference was also revealed between the parents of typically developing children and the parents of children brought up in a special kindergarten on the “cooperation” scale. Parents of children who are brought up in a kindergarten of a general developing type have a higher level of cooperation (as skills and desire to cooperate with a child) than mothers of children with disabilities who attend a special kindergarten, that is, mothers of typically developing children are able to interact with the child than mothers of children with disabilities better.

On the scales of “symbiosis” and “control”, parents of all groups show average results, while no statistically significant differences between the groups were revealed.

On a scale of “attitude to failure,” mothers of all groups show low results that characterize them as parents who believe in their children. However, the indicators on this scale are significantly higher for parents whose children attend a special kindergarten than for parents of typically developing children, that is, mothers of children with disabilities who attend a special kindergarten more often consider children's failures to be regular and permanent.

An analysis of the data of the “Questionnaire for identifying parental stress in families of children with disabilities” showed that parents of children with disabilities from both groups are characterized by a slight level of objective and subjective external stress; average level of subjective internal stress, a slight level of general stress. Significant differences in the voltage level were not detected.

The data can be interpreted as follows. The most stressful period for these families — the time when a child was found to have developmental disability — is behind (by the time of the study, all children had attended kindergarten for at least one year). It is assumed that by this time, most mothers, regardless of what type of education they choose, reach the stage of reorganization, when the main resources are allocated to optimally build a life with their child. At the same time, subjective internal stress is slightly higher than other types of stress, which indicates a tendency to direct negative feelings more often at oneself than at the child. This feature should be considered when planning psychological assistance to parents.

When processing the results of the “Typical Family Situation” methodology, it turned out that most mothers of all groups have a low level of general dissatisfaction and family anxiety and an average level of psychological stress. Moreover, the highest general dissatisfaction is inherent in mothers of children attending integrative groups, in second place there are mothers whose children go to a special kindergarten, and in third place there are mothers of typically developing children.

The level of family anxiety is slightly higher for mothers whose children go to a special kindergarten, in second place there are mothers of children attending integrative groups, and third place is for mothers of typically developing children. Moreover, the level of family anxiety of mothers whose children attend a special kindergarten is significantly higher than that of mothers of typically developing children.

In the study of neuropsychic stress caused by the family situation, one significant difference was revealed: neuropsychic stress in the families of children attending a special kindergarten was significantly higher than that of mothers of typically developing children.

These results suggest that the family situation is somewhat more favorable in families, children of which attend integrative groups, than in families, children of which go to special kindergarten. However,

in both groups of children with developmental disabilities, the family situation is somewhat less favorable than in the group of mothers of typically developing children.

When studying the level of unproductive neuropsychic tension (total deviation from the autogenous norm), it turned out that the group of mothers of children attending a special kindergarten and the group of mothers attending a kindergarten of a general developing kind have an average level of unproductive neuropsychic tension, and the group of mothers, whose children attend integrative groups - an insignificant level. That is, for most mothers of children with disabilities, whose children attend integrative groups, the orientation toward active work prevails, and they come out of stressful situations with dignity. Most mothers of typically developing children, as well as children attending a special kindergarten, are able to overcome fatigue by volitional effort. However, after that, a long “plume” of reduced working capacity is traced in their affairs; they require a clearer subjective separation of the time of work and rest. This happens in the lives of modern parents of children from 3 to 5, in addition to the child’s problems, there are still many stressful factors that are difficult to cope with for both parents of children with disabilities and parents of typically developing children. At the same time, parents who choose an integrative form of education often find themselves more resistant to stress.

This is also evidenced by the data obtained in an interview with parents. Many of them say that it is not easy for the family to live because of financial difficulties (after all, mother cannot work full time, since the child is in kindergarten for only 3 hours, therefore only the father works), but at the same time choose inclusive education for various reasons: “We want the child to get used to communicating with different children”, “The child will follow the other children”, “We want to develop him, but do not want to send to kindergarten for the whole day”.

7. Conclusion

Thus, we found that the emotional state and attitude towards the child varies between mothers of children with disabilities and mothers of typically developing children. The specified parameters also have their own characteristics for mothers whose children are brought up in an inclusive education, unlike mothers whose children attend a special kindergarten.

In general, mothers of children with disabilities, both for those who attend a special kindergarten and those who choose inclusive education, tend to find sources of difficulties more often in themselves than in other people and circumstances. Also, their family situation is less favorable than the situation in families of healthy children. In addition, mothers who choose an inclusive education for their child are more resistant to stress than those who choose a special kindergarten.

In modern conditions, the parents of children with disabilities gradually have the opportunity to choose the educational environment for the child. The results of the study suggest that inclusive education is more often chosen by parents, who are inherent in accepting their child as he is, and also characterized by an active desire to find the best way out of a difficult situation, albeit not quite traditional and generally accepted.

The data obtained on the characteristics of the emotional state and attitude of mothers of children with disabilities to a child indicate that, regardless of the family's educational environment for the child, families need psychological support: help parents to accept their child, improve the family situation, and

develop skills to cope with stressful. The results of this study may be useful in compiling psychological assistance programs for this category of parents.

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