Health of children in conditions of modern society transformation - Psychological aspect

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Abstract

The purpose of the work is to compare the questionnaire indicators of children of 11 years old from groups of different origin and social status. The assessment of basic family values in groups of children was performed, also the comparison of positive and negative qualities in the family, according to children; identification of differences in family values and qualities between different groups of children. The studies were conducted in 2019 among 1000 children and their parents in Moscow (Russia). Children were divided into 4 groups of 250 people. Group 1 included children from wealthy families studying at the lyceum, group 2 - the same, but from secondary schools, Group 3 - children from low-income and incomplete families, Group 4 - children of migrants (1ˢᵗ generation). Children were questioned in order to identify the main positive and negative characteristics of families. Parents' survey was conducted in order to identify methods of exposure. Anonymity was preserved.

The level of material wealth and social status was established to have a positive relationship with the number of social network accounts (Pearson correlation 0.95), and with the presence of social networks of foreign origin in them (Pearson correlation 0.90 for groups 1 and 2 and -0.99 for groups 3 and 4). Differences were established for the indices of cooperation and care, the distribution of roles in the family, as well as for the presence of clear rules in the family. In group 3, these indicators are minimal in relation to groups 1 and 2 (p≤0.001), group 4 (migrants) occupies an intermediate position between group 3 and first two groups. Social networks massively form infantile, socially maladaptive children who are not adapted to the realities of life due to the lack of active creative search. A similar negative effect has pastime on the street. The financial and social status of the family does not determine the level of mental health of children.

Keywords: children, social networks, verbal violence, level of material well-being, migrants.

I.   Introduction

The development of modern society is characterized by an ever-accelerating growth rate of information technology (Danese et al., 2020). This implies increased competition between all public institutions, as well as

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between ordinary members of society (Settersten et al., 2015). Competition here implies not only a struggle for resources (wealth and other material wealth), but also a struggle for the place of a particular ideology (value system) in the people's mindsets (Karabay & Arici, 2020). There are many examples of essentially marginal totalitarian regimes (North Korea and others), where the interaction between the state and ordinary citizens is based on fear. However, the prevailing Western system of ideals and social institutions essentially does not offer anything in return, except for the consumer institution and the equally marginalized citizens' "clip" consciousness. Thus, in order to achieve the most optimal result, it is necessary to look for ways to the "golden mean" (Chung et al., 2017; Cook, 2020).

The most valuable capital of any human community is children, a growing generation that will shape a future in any country. Therefore, the psychological health of children and its formation is one of the main challenges facing any state (Hoedeman, 2012). Raising psychologically healthy children is complicated by a number of reasons: the increasing involvement of the mass media and shaping the children's value system (Keles et al., 2020), the ever-decreasing role of parents, up to the destruction of family and marriage institution (Kaltenbrunner et al., 2013). The reasons for the appearance of ever-increasing numbers of children with mental disorders include the increase in population migration, when a frequent change of residence simply does not make it possible to form the child's adaptive potential and his socialization (Viner et al., 2015; Veldman et al., 2015; Nikitenko, 2019).

The above reasons are surely very relevant in the formation of the children's psyche. One more nuance is the geographical factor. It lies in the place of residence, and specifically - in the characteristics of the psyche of people from the space of the former USSR (Borodkina & Samojlova, 2013). We can illustrate this with specific examples. Western pedagogy welcomes the development of such children's qualities as ambitions and desires to overcome various obstacles, that is, the achievement of given and clearly set goals, mainly on their own. In other words, children develop a sense that they determine their life themselves and are their own masters. To a large extent, the development of such qualities is promoted by liberalism and tolerance, when the adaptive potential of each individual can be enhanced by the familiar cultural form. In Russia and other post-Soviet republics, the last three decades have been characterized by a significant change in social foundations, paradigms, which required maximum strain on the adaptive potential of citizens (Baeva, 2012). In the time of the USSR, a balance existed between the subject and the state when a citizen, yielding to the prohibition policy, received or expected some material benefits from the state. Thus, there was some predetermination of the life path, which did not require the manifestation of initiative from the individual. Attitudes of that time (including among children) can be described as the hope for help or guardianship from the state, a need for a strong leader, conformism ("I am like everyone else"), fear of the repressive apparatus due to its own helplessness (Bezrukova and Samojlova, 2013). After the USSR collapse, a need for self-sufficiency arose. As polls showed, at that time, 95% of people relied only on themselves or on relatives, the rest relied on the support from the state or enterprises. At the same time, self-orientation by most respondents was considered as a forced measure (Grigor'eva, 2012; Borodkina et al., 2013). Russian citizens surveys between 1990 and 2013 (8 polls total) showed that the majority (50-70%) believe that the state should be the main custodian of citizens (Levada centr, 2011). That is, there is still a tendency among Russian citizens to lay the main hopes on the state. The current stage (from 2014 to the present) is characterized by the beginning of atomization of Russian society, which occurs not only at the level of social institutions, but also in informal communication. Other characteristics of

this process are state distrust, decline in moral principles, triumph of nihilism, political apathy. Often there is a hybridization of new moral standards and foundations that have been preserved since Soviet times (Levada centr, 2013). One such manifestation is complete helplessness in the face of change - regardless of its magnitude. The adaptation strategy in this situation manifests itself as a passive position in relation to the conditions set by external factors. All these negative qualities are naturally transmitted from parents to children.

The factors above contribute to the marginalization of some children, the manifestation of negative trends on an increasingly massive scale. Nevertheless, the situation is not so hopeless - according to some reports, up to 65% of Russians under the age of 60 consider such values as civic activism, initiative, freedom and self-realization (Levada centr, 2013) as congenial.

Our study is an attempt to generalize the characteristics of the children's psyche in post-Soviet countries (primarily Russia) in different population groups. We examined the results of testing a group of children from financially prosperous families representing the middle class, children from financially disadvantaged families (incomplete families or lower middle class), and children from migrant families (first generation, mainly from Central Asia). Comparison of data on questioning children from different status and origin groups will help to improve understanding of the main problems that children face. Moreover, the obtained data reflect the aspirations of children, not their parents, which will help to identify the characteristics of their psychology at this stage of development. We will be able to assess which external factors most negatively or positively affect the child's leisure and psyche. The authors admit that excessive enthusiasm for computer games and spending free time on social networks (VKontakte, Facebook, Youtube) negatively affects the psyche formation, up to an increase of deviant behavior among children.

The purpose of this study is to compare the questionnaire indicators of children of the same age from different in origin and social status. The objectives of the study included: a) assessment of core values in groups of children; b) assessment of positive and negative qualities in the family, according to children; c) the establishment of differences in the values and qualities of the family between different groups of children.

II.   Material and methods

Material

The studies were conducted in 2019 in Moscow (Russian Federation). A survey was conducted in the form of a questionnaire among 1000 children aged 11 years (7th grade) of 7 secondary schools and lyceum. The lyceum belongs to the educational institutions of the elite class, with the representatives of the middle and upper class of society (judged by the factor of material well-being). The first group included 250 children from functional middle-class families (lyceum), the second - 250 children from functional families, but lower than the middle class, studying in secondary schools, the third - 250 children from disadvantaged families (incomplete families) - 100 children, families with low income level - 150 children). Finally, the fourth group consisted of children from migrant families (250 people) born in the first generation in Russia (in Moscow). The country of origin of parents was mainly Uzbekistan (75%), also Tajikistan (23%) and Kyrgyzstan (2%). The average age of children of the first group was 11.0 ± 0.3 years, of the second 11.4 ± 0.2 years, of the third - 11.1 ± 0.5 years, of the fourth - 11.2 ± 0.4 years. Thus, the groups were homogeneous in age and have no statistically significant

differences. The gender composition of the groups is given in Table. 1. Children from 2, 3, 4 groups studied in the same schools and classes. Children from group 1 represent control.

Table 1. The gender composition of the studied groups of children (in %).

Group	Boys, number + (%)	Girls, number + (%)
1 (functional, middle class)	110 (44)	140 (56)
2 (functional, full families, below middle class)	130 (52)	120 (48)
3 (unfunctional, below middle class, incomplete)	150 (60)	100 (40)
4 (migrant children)	120 (48)	130 (52)

As can be seen from Table. 1, there are no significant differences between the gender composition of children in different groups. The objective of the study was not to compare indicators between girls and boys. Different groups were compared among themselves. The study included children whose age was 11 years old, and whose financial status or social status corresponded to those declared for each group. These parameters were determined as a result of testing. Based on testing, 354 children were excluded who did not meet the requirements of the study (refusal to cooperate, discrepancy in age parameters, discrepancy in the material and social status being studied).

Data was collected based on the verbal permission of each of the children, and with the written permission of the parents and teachers (class teachers and school directorates). This study was carried out in accordance with generally accepted moral and ethical standards. The study observed the principle of anonymity of the information received.

Methods

The study used the questionnaire method. Each of the children filled out a questionnaire, the results of which were subsequently processed. The questionnaire consisted of 10 blocks, which reflected the scale of assessment of children's climate in the family. All scales are given in the Results section (Table 2). For each of the scales, indices were calculated. The theoretical gradation of which ranges from -1 to 1. The indices reflect %, either in the assessment of children of different climate indicators in the family, or in the calculation of the number of positive and negative answers. The real values of the indices range from 0.18 to 0.79 - that is, all are positive. For each statement (about the presence or absence of a particular climate indicator in the family), the children answered either unambiguously (yes, no), or expressed this indicator in % (from 0 to 100). Similarly, the questionnaires were filled in by the parents of these same children, for comparison. The difference was in the approach: the parents answered questions related to the possibility of applying physical punishment, what

children's action allowed it. In addition, at the beginning of the study, children filled out a questionnaire on the existence of accounts on social networks, as well as a questionnaire on the distribution of time (to obtain the ratio of leisure and study). All questionnaires were filled out by children at school, during the lesson, with the permission of the class teacher and by prior arrangement. Parents filled out questionnaires in their free time at home.

Statistical data processing was performed using the Microsoft Excel 2013 software package (Microsoft Inc.). The distribution of features in the sample corresponded to normal, which determined the choice of parametric criteria for statistical analysis. The significance of the difference (t-test for independent samples) between the parameters (for children from different groups) was calculated. The differences are significant at $p \leq 0.05$. Pearson correlation coefficients were also calculated to clarify the relationship between the parameters.

III. Results

Data on the availability of social media accounts for them was obtained for different groups of children (Fig. 1).

1A

1B

1C

1D

Figure 1. The number of children from different groups with social networks accounts. 1A - the first group (control); 1B - the second group, 1C - the third group; 1D is the fourth group.

So, in the first two groups, children have constant access to the Internet and various gadgets (primarily smartphones), and almost all of them have accounts in popular social networks - such as Vkontakte, Facebook, Youtube, Instagram. At the same time, most prefer the local social network (Vkontakte), as well as worldwide popular social networks - Facebook, Instagram. The gap between social networks with entertainment services

(Youtube) is unreliable in the first two groups, while for the third and fourth groups a significant difference was obtained - 1.3 times between Vkontakte and Youtube (p≤0.05) in the third group, 1.2 times in the fourth. In parallel, in the same groups, the preference of the local Vkontakte network with respect to Facebook is noted: 25 times in the third group (p≤0.001), 20 times in the fourth (p≤0.001). In the first two groups, this difference is not significant. Moreover, children from the first two groups also use Instagram, while from the third and fourth groups, they ignore this social network. Thus, the level of material wealth and social status is directly related to the number of social network accounts (Pearson correlation 0.95), as well as the presence of social networks of foreign origin (Pearson correlation 0.90 for groups 1 and 2 and -0.99 for groups 3 and 4). It can also be concluded that social networks play a decisive role in organizing leisure activities for children from the first two groups, while their role in the third and fourth group is less pronounced.

The results of surveys of children's qualitative indicators of the family showed the following patterns (Table 2).

Table 2. The results of a survey of children from 4 study groups on scales of the family climate.

Positive characteristics	Index (group rating) for each of the groups (1, 2, 3, 4)	Share (in %) of negative grades	Negative characteristics
Peaceful, conflict-free environment	0.55	26.2	Conflict situations within the family, scandals
	0.52	25.9	
	0.39*	40.4*	
	0.42	38.5	
Attentive attitude from relatives	0.68	15.9	Complete indifference on the part of parents
	0.65	16.7	
	0.43*	39.1*	
	0.50	22.1	
Trust between family members	0.69	15.6	Parental suspicion
	0.67	16.1	
	0.44**	38.0**	
	0.50	22.1	

Having cooperation and care within the family	0.79	14.1	Lack of care
	0.75	15.3	
	0.38***	42.1***	
	0.45	37.4	
Understanding within the family	0.53	28.2	Perseverance in compromise
	0.52	27.7	
	0.27**	51.2**	
	0.38	42.1	
Common Interests	0.50	22.1	Lack of common interests in the family
	0.49	20.0	
	0.22**	55.7**	
	0.39	43.2	
Goodwill within the family	0.60	24.1	Dissatisfaction and irritation of family members towards each other
	0.59	23.0	
	0.33**	45.8**	
	0.40	40.2	
A sense of security within the family	0.77	13.1	The presence of fear and a sense of threat
	0.75	14.1	
	0.44**	42.1**	
	0.55	25.5	
Family relationships and roles are distributed fairly	0.53	26.2	Infringement of the rights of the child, injustice in the distribution of roles
	0.49	28.9	
	0.19***	66.6***	

	0.31	30.0	
Clear rules within the family	0.61	20.2	No clear rules in the family
	0.60	19.9	
	0.18***	70.3***	
	0.32	32.1	

*Note. * - differences between the 3rd group and 1-2 groups are significant at p ≤ 0.05; ** - at p ≤ 0.01; *** - at p ≤ 0.001.*

The highest indicators of the index gained cooperation in the family and the sense of security of the child within the family is in the first two groups. The third group scored the minimum indicators for all parameters - 1.5-5.0 times less than in the first and second groups (p ≤ 0.001), and up to 1.6 times less than the fourth group (p ≤ 0.05). The fourth group (migrants) occupies an intermediate position between the third and first two groups. The maximum differences were obtained for the indices of cooperation and care, the distribution of roles in the family, as well as for the presence of clear rules in the family. In group 3 these indicators are the worst (p ≤ 0.001). Also interesting data were obtained for the time children spent outside the educational process of their time (Fig. 2). So, the main pastime of children from wealthy families of the first two groups is connected with Internet leisure (Fig. 2A, B). At the same time, study also takes a lot of time - from one quarter to one fifth of all leisure time. Due to this distribution of time, these children practically do not spend time on the street.
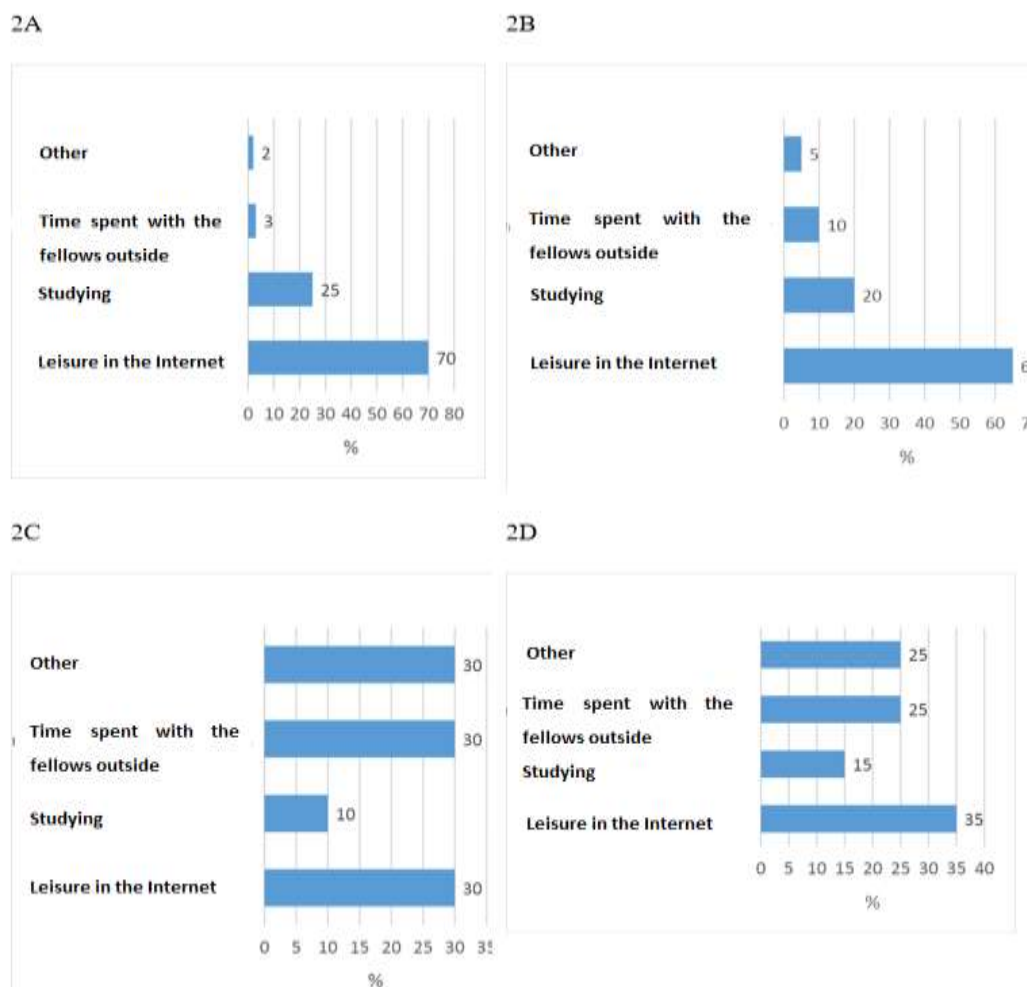
Figure 2. The distribution of time among children of different groups: 1 group (2A), 2 group (2B), 3 group (2C), 4 group (2D).

The time of children from the third and fourth groups is completely differently distributed (Fig. 2C, D). Studying (completing homework) takes 1.5 times less time for them than children from groups 1 and 2 (p≤0.05), they also spend 2 times less time on the Internet (p≤0.01), but on the street - 3-10 times longer (p≤0.001). In other words, children from the first two groups spend their time separately from their parents on the Internet, while children from the third and fourth groups grow on the street, remaining almost without parental influence. This is especially true for children from low-income families. Accordingly, a survey of parents gave the following results (Table 3).

Table 3. Parent behavioral reactions to the children's misconduct in the groups studied (in %, 100% - all parents of this group).

Parent Behavioral Response	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Explanations (oral calm	45	43	23	30

explanation of what was done wrong)				
Verbal aggression (screaming, disputes, threats)	20	25	44	30
Punishment by restriction (no phone, no walks)	22	25	20	21
Physical punishment (with belt, slap)	3	4	9	6
Ignoring the child	10	3	4	13

Among the parents of the first two groups, the following line of behavior prevails as a punishment for misconduct: dialogue with the children, in the form of a calm discussion of the behavior and moral and ethical rules. Parents of these children are twice less likely than parents from group 3 to resort to verbal aggression (p≤0.05), 2.5-3.0 times less often to physical punishment. Parents from wealthy families of the 1st group and parents from families of migrants from the 4th group are characterized by a similar line of behavior towards children - ignoring (10-13% of all behavioral reactions in each group). This is not a constructive line of behavior, since in the long run it leads to conflicts.

Thus, our study showed that the level of material status and social status does not always determine success in raising children. The differences are only in the venue of the main leisure of children - whether it be the Internet (social networks) or the street.

IV. Discussion

Most conflict situations between children and parents develop in the absence of dialogue (Hale et al., 2015; Amick et al., 2016; Veldman et al., 2017). The main answer for the parents, according to the results of our study, is the situation in which the child is misbehaving. It is worth noting that the age of 11 years studied by us is the threshold of adolescence, when enormous hormonal changes occur in the child's body. Therefore, manifestations of "insolence" can be caused not only by dissatisfaction with any situation in the family, but also by the beginning of the body restructuring (Phelan et al., 2010; Brzinsky-Fay, 2014; Burkhauser et al., 2016; Hayward et al., 2016). According to our data, the bulk of positive reactions on the part of parents relate to academic success (53%) or to help with household chores (49%), as well as in connection with the personal qualities of the child (28%). For all groups, parental praise is often related to their mood (51%). This indicates inconsistency in education, which is also known from other works (Fletcher, 2010; Haaland, 2016; Hadjivassiliou et al., 2016). We also confirmed another trend (Dunn et al., 2018) - most often parental praise is associated with verbal encouragement (57%), and much less often with close contact (hugs, kisses; 19%). This speaks for a certain distance between parents and the child.

As you know, the foundation of psychological health is laid in early childhood (Flint et al., 2013; Ben-Shlomo et al., 2016). A child's relationship with his mother plays a special role, from which his social relationships later emerge in adulthood (Cullati et al., 2014; Landstedt et al., 2016; Fan & Amick, 2018). Naturally, relationships associated with verbal or physical violence fundamentally adversely affect the formation of a person with mental abnormalities. Pastime plays an equally important role - we have shown, as also known from other works, that the Internet (and, especially, social networks) has a negative impact on the psyche of a child (Jetha et al., 2019). Given the enormous role of the Internet and social networks in the modern world, this factor becomes paramount among the negative. It is worth mentioning various cases of bullying, which have been gaining popularity among children in recent years, including in Russia (Borodkina et al., 2013). Families of migrants, despite the average worst financial situation, showed an average result for the family climate index. This may be due to the strength of traditions, including upbringing, still popular among Central Asians. Some studies have focused on identifying the Adult Attachment Scale. According to their results, reliably attached people are characterized by generally constructive features of social behavior - planning, responsibility and self-control. On the contrary, adults from another group, unreliably attached, preferred to avoid making decisions, to move away from problems into passive waiting (Haaland, 2016). Such an attitude is key in social maladaptation, in stressful situations and loneliness.

Mistakes made from the very beginning of raising a child are common among parents, especially young ones, which can lead to insoluble psychological problems in the future. In particular, this can be an attitude when good behavior is described as calm, and exacting attention and excessive activity are described as manifestations of bad behavior. Due to the fact that the foundations of the psyche of the child are set in early childhood, such distance leads to psychological problems that increase with age. There are studies among adolescents, that were divided into two groups, which showed that responsible parents, on the one hand, paid children maximum attention and solved their problems, on the other hand, they resisted their "provocations," that is, they did not indulge their whims (Dunn et al., 2018). Accordingly, these children were characterized by an active lifestyle, the presence of a goal and understanding of the ways to achieve it, they were independent, creatively active and ambitious. They were well aware that extremes as well as unnecessary risks must be avoided. This is reproduced in our study in all groups except for the third one. In our opinion, the street influence has a more negative impact on the formation of deviant character traits in children compared to social networks. On the other hand, social networks on a massive scale form infantile, socially maladaptive personalities that are absolutely not ready to the realities of life due to the lack of active creative search, the will to overcome difficulties on their own and hiding from life difficulties in the virtual reality of the World Wide Web.

V.   Conclusions

The study showed that the level of financial situation and the social status of the family are not in all cases decisive in the formation of behavioral reactions in children. In particular, in financially secure families of groups 1 and 2, children mostly spend their time on social networks (65-70% of leisure time), while in low-income families of groups 3 and 4 they are equally divided on social networks and on the street (30-35% of leisure time). The most unfavorable situation is in the families of the third group, where parents do not pay attention to children and use destructive methods of education - verbal (44%) and physical (9%) violence. The

remaining groups have 1.5–2.0 times lower indicators (p≤0.05). Children from groups 1 and 2 are characterized by a more frequent dialogue with parents (43-45%), compared with group 3 (23%), which determines their greater psychological stability, because they feel support from the family and are not left to their own devices all the time. .

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