CONCEPTUAL BASES OF RESEARCH OF A VERBAL AND NONVERBAL PATTERN OF CHILDREN'S FEARS

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The article presents the results of theoretical and experimental research on emotional states, in particular, on fears that worry young school-aged children. The approach used to study this phenomenon comprises quantitatively-qualitative, frequency-intensive, existential, micro- and macro surrounding, moral and self-regulation dimensions. Substantial characteristics of children's fears, self-control of young school-aged children, and ways of coping with fears in various conditions of social situations of development are considered. The studied spectrum of emotions young school-aged children experience in everyday situations (at home, at school, during their leisure time) is described. Study on verbal and non-verbal patterns of fears of young school-aged children is presented. The original structural questionnaire developed by the author and the picturesque test composed the research apparatus. In a majority of drawings children tend to "counter-balance" the image of their fear with some additional images containing positive elements (positive plot). This finding confirms the assumption previously made by the author of the immanent nature of self-regulating processes that regulate coping with fear.

Keywords: emotional states, living conditions of young school-aged children, children's drawings, fear, depicting fears, the verbal and nonverbal content of fears, methods of coping.

Emotional saturation and dynamic nature of the modern life create psychological pressure not only in adults, but also in children. This is largely attributed to the ongoing social transformations that increase the demands for the intellectual, psychological, emotional, and physical abilities of people and their abilities to culturally regulate their own emotional states. The children are the least secured participants of this process as their minds and bodies are unstable, defenseless and highly sus-

ceptive to the external impacts: their vulnerability and lack of confidence result in acquired anxiety and fears. Children of the XXI century are “struggling” to cope with fears that were nonexistent in the last century. The increased amount and complexity of school curricula, “computerization”, TV news of accidents, destructions, and disasters, broadcasted horror and action movies, criminalized living conditions, all that forms a new psychological reality in the minds of modern children.

The problem of children's fears, commonly regarded as a thoroughly explored one (Garbuzov, 1990; Zaharov, 2000; Prihogan, 2000; Spivakovskaja, 2000; Jersild & Holmes, 1935; Girard-Frésard, 2009 etc.), acquired new forms and meanings in the swiftness of changes Russia endured in the last decades.

Let it be noted, that when writing about children, a prominent Russian scientist V.M. Bekhterev pointed out ‘the susceptible and impressionable’ nature of the child's soul. The author urges always to consider the exceptional impressionability of the child, especially in such matters as the psychological health care. “Sometimes a careless word said in front of a child about a murder or other terrible incident can disturb the child's night sleep or become a subject of nightmares. That is why environment plays a great role in the upbringing of children” (Bekhterev, 1999, p. 153).

V.K. Vilunas claims that the intensity of a child's fear “depends on individual features of mental development and current social conditions in which the formation of child's personality occurs” (Vilunas, 1976, p. 35).

In this work, devoted to children's emotional states and, in particular, children's fears, we described multidimensional approach to exploration of the emotional phenomena and identified the types of multidimensionality in the studies of emotional states. *Dimensional multiplicity* (Wundt, 2007; Woodworth, 1950; Schlosberg, 1954) represents the creation of an emotional space, which can grow from one, two, three, or more dimensions based on homogeneous bipolar characteristics (attributes) of emotions. *Modality-base multiplicity* (B. Spinoza) represents differentiation of the “primary”, basic emotions, the various combination of which shapes other kinds of emotions. *Complex multiplicity* (Izard, 1980) combines neurophysiologic processes, expression, body movements and subjective experiences.

The multidimensional complex we have created comprises the following measurements: quantitative – qualitative; frequency – intensity

of the experienced emotions; spatial (location, area) and temporal (past, present, future) localization of emotional experience; the projection of emotions onto the micro and macro social environment; moral evaluation of the experienced emotions and self-regulating abilities in the context of their culturally acceptable forms.

An integrated structural-typological classification of fears is developed where all of the children's fears are organized by their genesis: *conditioned* (formed by one's own experience), *induced* (formed by the people from the immediate social circle, mass media, peers), *internally generated*. This classification also includes their specifications on the basis of ethnicity and mentality. Conditioned fears are the fears caused by external factors serving as the sources of emotional states: the biologically conditioned fear (of animals, natural and other phenomena occurring in children's everyday life), socially and technologically conditioned fears. Induced are the fears acquired in the result of direct or indirect social impact on the emotional state, causing the experience of fear (suggestion, contamination, etc.). Fear as emotion can be induced socially-biologically (social impact on the formation of fear of some biological objects), socially-socially (social impact on the formation of social fear), socially-technologically (social impact on the formation of a real or a virtual technological object). Internally generated fears, existing in verbal, iconic or symbolic forms, depend on individual traits of a person and are realized in the natural biological, technological, social, or virtual form. Ethnicity and mentality (belonging to a professional, residual, or other social group) can define manifestations of fear.

The interrelation of fear and other emotional states define the actual range of emotions experienced in everyday life (at home, at school, during leisure time) of schoolchildren. Emotional profiles (range of the most significant experiences) of children in school are different at different ages: the positive emotions of joy, interest, surprise, and other prevail in young school-aged children, teenagers and high school students. The spectrum of emotions which are experienced in school and outside its walls is significantly different: in young school-aged children the emotions of joy and interest prevail in school and at home, while in teenagers and high school schoolchildren they prevail in schools and places of leisure (streets, parks, cafes, etc.). The spectrum of negative

emotions of all age groups experienced in educational institutions is dominated by the emotions of fear, offence and anger. The experience of fear by different age groups is nonlinear and reaches its maximum in adolescence. Anger is more frequently experienced by teenagers and high school than by young school-aged children. At private schools (gymnasiums) fear experienced by schoolchildren is temporally related (of having no time to do homework, of oversleeping school), connected with significant others and situations of educational interaction. The pupils of public schools fear emotionally-charged situations such as being alone in the classroom, standing at the blackboard in front of the entire class, or being sent to the principal's office. It is shown that widely used differential emotions scale doesn't fully reflect the modal range of emotions experienced by modern children, in particular, we found emotions like shame, guilt, contempt, disgust, and suffer to be rarely experienced.

The comparative meta-analysis of the fears experienced by young school-age children at various periods of socio-economic changes showed that although the range of fears remained roughly the same (zoomorphic, fear of death, medical, educational, social, etc.), the quantitative ratio of their types had changed. Fears of modern young school-aged children are different from those of their pre-perestroika era peers. The most common at that time fear of "not being someone one is ought to be" gave up its leading position to the fear of death. The way children manage both conditioned and induced social and technological fears (war, terrorist attacks), has also changed dramatically. The content of young school-aged children's projective fears also reflects socio-economic instability ("parents losing their," "becoming beggars," "being homeless," etc.).

The results of our research revealed the dependence of the content of fears of young school-aged children on the conditions (objective and subjective aspects) of their social situations of development. For example, rural children fear large open areas, streets, whereas city children have more social and technological fears and much more pronounced fears of animals than their rural peers. We have noticed the geographically-dependent gender asymmetry of fears among children living in rural areas: indicators of all types of fears (conditioned, induced, internally generated) in girls are significantly higher than those in boys (with a maximum difference within the induced group of fears). Young

school-aged children from private schools have more pronounced social fears and fears of physical harm, while fears of their peers from public schools are more of death and medical procedures. The primary school first- and second graders fear the surrounding space, while third graders have more social fears. Predominant fears of young school-aged children who temporarily reside in social rehabilitation centres are fear of falling asleep at bedtime, and ambivalent fears of “getting in a foster family” and “not getting in a foster family”; at orphanages children fear criminals, attacks, and waking up at night.

We have defined a set of regulation methods that, if arbitrary and purposeful, transcend themselves into the self-regulating strategies in children. They include: a) *objective-oriented external regulation* in which a child is subject to external influences (the processes and states are regulated by the external tools such as natural and social environments, technical devices, food products, medication, etc.) in order to optimize the fixed-emotional state; b) *subjective-oriented external regulation* – externally organized, subject-oriented regulation (the child is included in various activities as working, sporting, cultural, recreational, cognitive, art, and other activities) in order to optimize a particular emotional state in each case; c) *the psychomotor (physically oriented) regulation of emotional states* – a system of adequate classes on relaxation, dancing or other physical activities; d) *emotional-volitional regulation* involves replacement of one emotion with the other that is opposite to or associated with it (fear – anger, fear – interest, fear – excitement, etc.) which is made by an adult or another person, or by a child herself; e) *cognitive regulation of emotional state* which requires the child’s cognitive activity (externally or internally induced) aimed at a specific emotional experience in order to develop socially acceptable coping skills.

The analysis of the research results allowed us to define main self-regulating strategies in situations of experiencing fear, such as active and passive defence, inaction, distraction, self-calm, appeal to the help of parents, appeal to higher powers. Different social situation of development bring different strategies of coping with negative emotional states. Young private school children employ such fear-regulation strategies as self-calm, inaction, appeal to the help of parents and/or active defence. Their public school peers are more likely to employ inaction and less frequently – active defence. Different types of deprivation (sensory, intellectual, social) determine regulatory capabilities and the choice of

fear-coping strategies: passive defence predominates in children living in orphanages, and children temporarily residing in rehabilitation centres most commonly employ active defence; hearing-impaired children are significantly more likely to seek help from adults in the situation of fear, while developmentally challenged children commonly resort to inaction.

Also we found differences between verbal and figurative expressions of fear among young school-age children. Verbal form is common for expression of fears of darkness and animals, whereas symbolic form is employed to express fears of death and everything in the world beyond.

The children's fears are common phenomena associated with ontogenetic transformation of emotional, cognitive, and personality areas of children. However, the questions of how affective responses are influenced by the changing social conditions and how big is the contribution of these extraordinary conditions to the list of the age-appropriate "normal" fears, still stand. It is important to know what role childhood fears as a phenomenon of self-control play in social and cultural domains of their development.

The methodological apparatus of the study of emotional states, especially, fears, comprised structural questionnaires of children's fears, the picturesque projective tests, and the "Pupil's emotional profile" method.

Let's look closely at the revealed pattern of symbolic expression of fears in children's drawings. The important advantage of letting children to draw their fears is in that the figurative form children use allows noticing the repressed fears that are rarely discovered with verbal methods. Children's drawings tell us something that is not always possible to put into words, and 'through drawings it is possible to understand children's interests, their deep, not readily shared experiences and use them to deliver children from fears' (Zaharov, 2000, p. 128).

Children's drawing their fears has not only diagnostic, but also therapeutic aspect which underlies the most drawing methods of managing children's fears. The analysis of children's drawings sufficiently adds to the data received with verbal techniques.

Children's drawings depicting their fear of death were the most numerous in our study – the fact explained by V.V. Abramenkova (2002) as: "the topic of death occupies more and more space in the world picture

of the modern child". She pointed out that "many cultural forms, such as children's folklore are lost or are in degradation stages, and occurrence and a wide circulation of new forms in last decades, for example 'black humor', hard pranks, 'sadistic' rhymes, are shifting children's consciousness towards topics of death" (Abramenkova, 2002, p. 14).

The significant part of our research collection of children's drawings in one way or another depicts themes connected with death. The image of death in drawings is often represented by a skeletal figure carrying a scythe and clothed in black robes; and sometimes by an image of a funeral, a coffin, a cemetery or of a dead person with bared teeth. Despite variations in social-economic and geographical background of children (children from Samara, Bolshaia Chernigovka, Sevastopol), they draw these images almost identically. It should be noted that drawings of modern children more often depict the characters from Hollywood movies and Disney cartoons ("The It", "Aliens", "Mummy" etc.) than the characters from Russian folklore.

The second most frequent fear depicted in children's drawings is the fear of darkness, when virtually all the space of drawing paper is painted over with black, dark blue, violet or red-black colors, or when there is a black square or dark corners and room walls in the drawing. As it is proved by color-based tests, people commonly associate these colors with feelings of anxiety and fear.

The same sample of drawings contained large number of drawings depicting fear of animals. The pets that are common in cities – dogs, cats, small rodents, or, more rarely, snakes and lizards are the same animals that reside in children's fears, and the most of them are fears of dogs. In their written explanations children say that they aren't afraid of all dogs, but of aggressive, big and biting ones, or afraid of "scary evil look in their eyes". The fear of snakes and spiders is also frequently depicted, especially by girls, which coincides with the data obtained by A.I. Zaharov (2000). When depicting animals, children try to draw them with their natural color (crocodiles are green, bears are brown, etc.). But there are drawings where animals that cause fear, are intentionally drawn multi-colored, or in bright colors as if children try to calm themselves by drawing something scary with lively colors (the pink or green doggie, the blue-red lion, a blue bear cub etc.).

School fears are manifested in the drawings of school notebooks full of teacher remarks in bright red and many poor school marks. Interest-

ingly, a letter “2” (Russian equivalent of the mark “F” commonly used in American schools) is sometimes drawn looking like a curved belt – symbolizing fear of punishment.

Working on the map of children's fears (Akopyan, 2003) in addition to the symbolic aspects of drawings we also analyzed their positioning. The work of M.V. Osorina studies general topography of children's drawings, claiming that a child “perceives the space of a sheet of paper as a living space for the about to be drawn characters, where there must be a ground beneath their feet, a sky above their heads... And characters are lined up in between the sky and the ground. They occupy their own respectful space and don't invade each other's space” (Osorina, 2000, p. 25). This can be observed most of the time in children's drawings, including in the ones that we had in our sample. However, depiction of fears in some drawings doesn't coincide with the stated rule. Fears are depicted groundless, floating in some sort of a subjective space. Sometimes they fill the entire sheet of drawing paper, or sometimes are minuscule and located in a corner of it. A child draws a frightening object small, insignificant, as though convincing himself of its “unscaryness” (one of the strategies of coping with fear).

Also the peculiarity of socially deprived children's drawings should be noted. The depicted fear causing situations have drawings of certain supporting elements in them intended for help or rescue. The common fear of children residing in orphanages – the fear to waking up at night and finding oneself one on one with the fear – is commonly depicted in the shape of a black square. The fear of darkness often manifests itself in drawings through dark grey or black colored squares or in the form of heavily shaded sheet of paper, and in some cases it can be drawn as a furnished room with nobody in it. Interestingly, such drawings often have a window in them, sometimes lit with bright yellow light or filled with stars. A window (an opening) can symbolize a possible escape (exit) from a frightening situation.

The results of research show that children are coping with fears using all the available means: they “domesticate” their fears or try to cajole them or make them look ridiculous, convincing themselves that “they're not scary”. It is revealed, that many children regulate their emotional state as they draw their fears, for example they paint a frightening image in bright colors, and in some cases add pictures of their own clothing as though saying: “It is the same as I am, it will not harm me”.

Some girls before drawing the fear say that they want to draw something nice first. For example, first they draw a princess and only then a wicked witch. Some girls added a positive image after drawing their fear, like a girl who drew a mermaid after drawing scary shark. Such behavior can be viewed as a coping strategy that counterbalances negative emotions.

Facial expressions and gestures in depiction of a fearsome object include widely open round eyes, sometimes with no or red pupils; threateningly opened mouth with huge bare teeth. The very frightening action is drawn in the form of an extended hand holding a knife with its blade black or tip red. Children depict themselves in such situations near the frightening object with their head tucked into their shoulders, hands idly down or raised in "I surrender" gesture, corners of their mouths bended down and eyes widened. Sometimes they write "Don't kill me please" or "seeing this dream over and over again has got to me". Children residing in orphanages more often resort to passive defense in situations of fear. However there are drawings depicting fears of depth or drowning, where children draw not only a figure of the drowning person, but also a fragment of shore (symbolizing support) with a person ready to come to the rescue standing on it. On one picture a girl depicted herself standing on the roof of a tall building with two of her brothers drawn standing on the ground holding a stretched cloth. She explained that if she fell, brothers would catch her.

The works of V.A. Labunskaja point out that fear is often expressed through pantomimic elements and gestures (Labunskaja, 1999). Numerous children's drawings show that children take great interest in depicting human body. When drawing fear, children express it through poses and actions. At one of the drawings we saw a group of children and a dog running away from a ghost. Children's hands were up in the air, eyes round with finely drawn pupils, knees bent, bodies pulled back, all of them seem to be soaring in the air, groundless.

The carried out research not only widened our understanding of young school-aged children's fears, but also revealed differences in their content, dependent on social, economic and cultural changes our society underwent in the last decades. While the spectrum of fears had remained the same (medical, educational, social, fear of death, fear of animals etc.), the quantitative ratio of their types had changed. The fear

of "not being someone one is ought to be" (Zaharov, 2000) gave up its leading position to the fear of death (Akopyan, 2002). Fears of modern young school-aged children are different from those of their pre-perestroika era peers. The content of young school-aged children's projective fears also reflects socio-economic instability ("parents losing their," "becoming beggars," "being homeless," etc.). The characters from city legends of past generations (Black Hand, Queen of Spades) in modern children's drawings gave way to new characters from Hollywood movies and cartoons ("The It", "Aliens", Dracula, Freddy Krueger etc.).

The comparative analysis of verbal and symbolic forms of fear expression revealed certain differences among young school-aged children. The fears most frequently expressed in verbal form (questionnaire) include fears of darkness and of animals; city children, unlike their rural peers, have no fear of open spaces (big squares, streets); children residing in orphanages, unlike their peers living in families, fear waking up at night. The fears most frequently expressed in symbolic form (thematic drawing) include fears of death and everything that represents "the other side". Fears of physical harm and height are typical for city children, but are not observed in rural children. Numerous fears of various natural disasters such as fire, and hurricane are mostly experienced by city children while their rural peers seem to be prepared for them.

Young school-aged children can independently cope with fear using various coping strategies such as active and passive defence, inaction, distraction, self-calm, appeal to the help of parents, appeal to higher powers (Akopyan, 2008). Nonverbal coping strategies manifested in children's drawings are different. They include transformation of a frightening object into one that is not scary (scaling down, coloring in with bright colors); "counterbalancing" the central image of fear with the positive one (before or after the frightening object or plot), confirming the assumption previously made by the author of the immanent nature of self-regulating processes that regulate coping with fear; depicting objects that provide help and used for rescue. Therefore nonverbal pattern of fears is distinctly different from the verbal one in both content and coping strategies. That is why preventive and correctional work with young school-aged children should employ a combination of verbal and nonverbal tools, giving children the opportunity to explore their own strategies of coping with fear.

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