

Psycho-Emotional State of Schoolchildren in Conditions of Quarantine Limitations and Distance Learning: Research Results

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ABSTRACT

The changes that occur at the psychological level have affected the ability to perceive reality and control emotional stress. Increased anxiety is associated with a feeling of loss of control and the inability to distance oneself from automatic negative thoughts that arise as a result of psychological contagion. The purpose of the study is to highlight the features of the psycho-emotional state of schoolchildren in conditions of quarantine restrictions and distance learning. A questionnaire was chosen as a methodological study, the purpose of which is to study the psychological state of schoolchildren and determine their attitude to the need for quarantine and, therefore, distance learning. Studies show that the negative effects of stress are deeper in children under 10 years old. Children of different ages react differently to stressful events. The development of recommendations for children of different ages in order to overcome the consequences of social isolation involves creating opportunities for children of different ages to acquire the necessary psychological knowledge, skills and abilities, which will reduce the effects of quarantine. The creation of a new social reality, due to inevitable changes in the minds of citizens of Ukraine and each individual state, is a systemic process that requires reconstruction of the focus of perception, increasing the vitality and awareness of each person. However, in our opinion, it is necessary to influence children first, because they are more receptive and only form worldviews and values. Eventually, their influence will be decisive in changing the attitude of older generations to the consequences of quarantine, which will establish an internal readiness for negative external factors and formation of adaptive coping strategies of behavior in conditions of social uncertainty and existential crisis.

Keywords: Social reality, Educational reality, Isolation, Pandemic, COVID-19, Pandemic, Psycho-emotional state, Distance learning

INTRODUCTION

The first half of 2020 marked changes for Ukraine in the social and economic situation of the population, and formation of a new social reality. At the psychological level, the changes affected the ability to perceive reality and control emotional stress. In particular, the increase in anxiety is associated

with a feeling of loss of control and inability to distance oneself from the automatic negative thoughts that arise as a result of psychological contagion.

Director-General of the World Health Organization Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus emphasizes public attention to the dangers of using psychoactive substances to reduce mental stress and distract from traumatic events. Such behavior significantly increases the level of domestic violence, conflict and other socially undesirable phenomena (Antiukhova, 2020). Thus, children are the most vulnerable category that needs targeted psychological and social support. Our study is designed to collect statistical information that would determine the position of schoolchildren in Uman schools in isolation.

The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic is covered in the works of I.I. Galetskaya, L.D. Klimanskaya, Yu.D. Gundertailo (Haletska, Klymanska, 2020) and etc. Articles by V.G. Panok, I.V. Marukhina, D.D. Romanovska (Panok, 2020), materials of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and other are devoted to the study of the results of implementation and the possibility of improving distance learning in Ukraine. Peculiarities of psychological health during quarantine are studied by V.V. Antyukhova (Antiukhova, 2020) and etc.

The issue of loneliness as a specific factor in the development of depressive symptoms is studied by J. Cachoppo and L. Hockley (Faculty of Psychology, University of Chicago). Researchers from the Department of Public Health and Child Development of the Norwegian Institute of Public Health (L. Larsen, M. Helland, T. Holt) determine the long-term impact on adult life of modern children may have preventive measures for the spread of coronavirus infection COVID-19. Changes in the information culture of the media caused by the pandemic and their impact on human health and psychosocial well-being in the new realities are covered in the works of K. Chambers and S. Meyer (Dalhousie University, Canada). The impact of COVID-19 on education and the quality of education was studied by R. Donelli, G. Patrinos, J. Grisham (University of Ottawa). In addition, they developed recommendations for Ukraine on the protection of the educational budget and the implementation of the reconstruction program of education (Vplyv stresu na orhanizm dytyny).

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the study is to highlight the features of the psycho-emotional state of schoolchildren in conditions of quarantine restrictions and distance learning. Objectives of the study are: to study the experience of a pandemic in children; to identify the most traumatic situations and/ or areas of life for Ukrainian schoolchildren; to develop recommendations for children of different age groups in order to overcome the consequences of social isolation.

RESEARCH METHODS

A questionnaire survey was chosen as a diagnostic and statistical method, the purpose of which is to study the psychological state of schoolchildren and

determine their attitude to the need for quarantine and, therefore, distances learning.

443 schoolchildren from Uman Secondary School of Cherkasy Region took part in the survey. The age of the respondents ranges from 6 to 17 years. Note the distribution of schoolchildren by age groups: primary school age (6 to 10 years) – 17.6%, age of adolescence (11 to 15 years) – 71.6%, early adolescence (from 16 years to 17 years) – 10.2%. 0.7% of respondents did not indicate their age.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Studies show that the negative effects of stress are deeper on children under 10 years old. Children of different ages react differently to stressful events. If a 6-year-old child is not yet able to explain what he/she is feeling, cannot distinguish between emotions and feelings, then the adolescent child is already sufficiently self-guided to develop his attitude to the traumatic situation.

Adolescents have the following manifestations: emotional (depression, irritability, excitement, alienation, helplessness), physical (headaches, exhaustion, dizziness, loss of appetite), behavioral (fussiness, indifference, carelessness) and cognitive (forgetfulness and difficulty in concentration) (Kravchenko, 2020).

According to the gender parameter, the respondents were distributed as follows: 51.6% of females and 48.2% of males, 0.2% of schoolchildren did not provide such information. The study identified another important parameter, namely “Family composition”. According to the results, it was determined that children from nuclear families make up a majority of respondents, namely 67%, from single-parent families, namely 18.1%. Inaccurate answers were given by 14.9% of schoolchildren.

According to availability of special educational needs, the answers of the respondents were distributed as follows: 2.3% of schoolchildren chose the option “Yes”, 72.2% “No”, 113 children did not understand the question, which is 25.5% of the total number. Children with special educational needs (SEN) are characterized by the following features: difficulties in establishing contact with peers, distrust of them, fear of being rejected, increased anxiety, insecurity, a tendency to experience doubts, difficulties in making decisions. Such children will always experience psychological barriers in society.

The question “What could you do during quarantine?” allows to orient schoolchildren on useful and pleasant pastime during quarantine. Children chose the following options: “read a book” (46%), “spend more time outdoors” (43.9%), “learn a foreign language” (40.1%) practice “sports, dancing” (35.9 %) or “make something with your own hands” (34.1%). Less popular activities among schoolchildren are “board games” (28.3%), “collecting” (13.2%), “visiting online theaters, museums, virtual travel” (10.5%). Schoolchildren have chosen useful strategies for leisure, provided the preservation (restoration) of productivity, interest in activities, the stability of maintaining a positive mood, reduce the level of stress under these living conditions.

The question “Do you like the form of distance learning?” provides research on the problem of distance learning in Ukrainian schools. The main forms

of online communication are defined as: video conferencing, forum, chat, blog, e-mail, questionnaires, social networks and various mobile applications. The most common web resources for distance learning are platforms Moodle, Google Classroom, services Zoom, Skype, Classtime, LearningApps.org (Orhanizatsiia dystantsiinoho navchannia v shkoli, 2020).

The answers of schoolchildren were distributed as follows: 45.3% of schoolchildren believe that it is difficult to learn complex material on their own; 31.8% of respondents believe that this form of education is very convenient; 15.9% of schoolchildren shared the opinion that they have difficulties with access to educational materials; about 3% of schoolchildren do not like distance learning. Thus, by properly organizing the process of explaining the material, you can achieve the maximum level of satisfaction with distance learning.

The issue of compliance with quarantine rules became very painful. That is why it was included in the questionnaire. 41.9% of schoolchildren try to comply with the relevant norms during quarantine, but they claim that it is difficult. The "Always" option was chosen by 40.4% of schoolchildren. The "Sometimes comply with the rules" option was chosen by 14.3% of schoolchildren and 2.2% of respondents do not want to do it at all. Most small citizens are conscious of the established restrictions, which demonstrate a high level of responsibility to themselves and others.

Some researchers identify 3 main types of preventive behavior during quarantine: persons, who mostly adhere to quarantine restrictions; persons, who diligently wear a mask, but ignore antiseptics; people, who rarely wear a mask, but constantly wash their hands and use antiseptics (Osvita v Ukraini: vyklyky ta perspektyvy, 2020). It is no coincidence that children spend more time in front of computer monitors. It was determined that 31.2% of respondents spend 2-3 hours a day online, 26.5% of schoolchildren - 1-2 hours, 21.5% of schoolchildren - more than 4 hours and 13.9% of children - 3-4 hours.

Consistently, studying in the remote mode, the pupil spends many times more time than required by the rules. In addition, in isolation, the need to communicate on social networks increases significantly, which leads to the fact that a child spends both his "working" time and leisure time interacting with computer technology? In severe cases, the child may develop a computer addiction.

The question of the organization of distance learning allows us to anticipate possible shortcomings in order to further eliminate them. It was found that the main strategy of most schoolchildren is to allocate a certain amount of time to complete tasks, after which children go about their lives (55.2%). Fewer schoolchildren (30.9%) complete tasks throughout the day, periodically distracted from their work. However, there are children (12.6%) who start learning when parents and teachers force them to do so. Several other options have been identified that some respondents study only what they think is necessary; perform tasks in advance; do not have a clear system. The first two strategies are equally effective, but it is necessary to take into account the psychophysiological features that determine the level of fatigue and the ability to concentrate.

It was found that the forced transition to distance learning has led to a number of problems: organizational (uncoordinated schedule, unbalanced scope of tasks, low level of material acquisition through its unreasonableness, deprecated of teaching), psychoemotional (low level of motivation, excessive workload, lack of communication with friends and teachers, rejection of distance learning); technical (difficulties of connection, insufficient level of ICT competencies of teachers, lack of a standardized online platform for distance learning) (Haletska, Klymanska, 2020).

Communication is the most important value, an aspect of our existence, one of the main needs, which provides the exchange of a powerful energy resource that charges the participants of communication. It was found that schoolchildren communicate mostly through social networking websites (72.4%) and telephone (46.2%), fewer through Skype (7.6%). Such data confirm that the respondents spend a lot of time in front of monitors, which has a detrimental effect on health and general well-being. Some (30.3%) go for a walk as before, thus violating the established rules during quarantine. Almost 16.6% of children do not communicate, which is to a greater extent due to the type of temperament of the child, such as melancholic or phlegmatic. In addition, children with an openly extroverted type of character are known to find it much more difficult to adapt to isolation than self-absorbed introverts.

The question “What kind of activity provides the greatest satisfaction and has a positive effect on your social-psychological state?” involves identifying areas of activity that provide effective psychotherapeutic impact and research on the possibility of providing schoolchildren with psychological self-help.

The largest number of schoolchildren (77.8%) prefers walking in the fresh air, a smaller number (40.1%) believe that they get the greatest satisfaction from action-oriented games and outdoor activities and 37.9% of respondents said that tourism and travelling have a positive effect on their condition and bring them the greatest satisfaction. Apparently, the period of isolation will allow children to re-evaluate their lifestyle, and now, instead of computer games or social networking, they will resume the traditional sculpting of snowmen, collecting plants for collections and herbariums, and so on.

It is interesting, that 30.5% of schoolchildren said that they feel much better during the process of communicating and playing with animals. In fact, animal therapy allows a child to relieve stress, normalize the nervous system, and harmonize interpersonal relationships. In addition, 27.1% of respondents believe that their condition is influenced by a variety of artistic practices, because art helps to relieve stress and switch from one activity to another. It was also found that 12.3% of children prefer aquatic recreation. Individual answers included sports, dancing, watching movies, computer games, books, music, and etc.

Self-diagnosis by schoolchildren of their condition allowed determining the following features of their experience of the pandemic:

- Difficulty in explaining their own emotions and feelings in primary school children;
- A large percentage of schoolchildren from nuclear families allow us to conclude that they have a higher level of adaptability, vitality in contrast to

children from single-parent families. In addition, their economic situation significantly affects the mental state of the adult and, consequently, the child;

- Most schoolchildren demonstrate prudence and positive perception of the required quarantine measures, adhere to the associated rules and restrictions, that is the first step to accept the situation, and therefore have a sufficient level of awareness and stress;
- Schoolchildren experience irritability, mood swings, apathy, “causeless” anxiety, change of daily routine, disorganization (due to low level of ability to plan and manage activities), poor sleep, lack of appetite or excessive food intake (which together with a sedentary lifestyle led to weight gain), misunderstandings and quarrels, as well as the inability to share thoughts and feelings;
- Large number of schoolchildren spent time in quarantine very effectively and usefully (perhaps giving socially acceptable answers): reading books, sports, collecting, and etc.;
- An acute problem is the increase in time spent by children in front of the monitor (because now they are trying to combine online learning with emotional recreation online);
- It will be easier for schoolchildren with an internal locus to continue learning in the same rhythm, follow instructions and treat themselves and others responsibly.

The main factors of discomfort are the impossibility of healthy face-to-face communication, high-quality personal enrichment (through attending discussion groups and elective courses) and outdoor games (lack of new experiences and self-development), as well as the low level of distance learning. According to schoolchildren, this form of education is inconvenient and not always available. That is why they advise to improve it, check and only then implement.

DISCUSSION

From a scientific and practical point of view, the works of V. Panok on the study of the negative social-psychological consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for the organization of the educational process are important. According to the scientist, important role is given to practical psychologists and social educators, whose main purpose in overcoming the negative social-psychological consequences of quarantine measures is the actualization of adaptive and compensatory resources of the individual, stabilization of the emotional sphere, mobilization of psychological potential of educational process and formation of stress tolerance. The main tasks of psychological service exerts in this period are the following: formation of constructive ways of solving difficult life situations and adaptive coping strategies for all participants of the educational process; stabilization of the emotional sphere of the individual, the formation of a positive life outlook; activation of processes of self-knowledge, self-perception, self-regulation and self-control; formation of

psychosocial resistance to stress; prevention of discrimination and stigmatization of people who are ill or have become ill; prevention of emotional burnout in parents and teachers; increasing the adaptive capacity of teachers to new conditions for the organization of the educational process; mediation between the educational institution, families and local communities in resolving and preventing interpersonal conflicts, domestic violence (Panok, Marukhina, Romanovska, 2020). In addition to the above mentioned, in our opinion, it is reasonable to develop appropriate recommendations for children of different ages to overcome the effects of social isolation, which provide an opportunity for children of all ages to acquire the required psychological knowledge, skills and abilities to reduce the effects of quarantine:

- Learning skills of self-organization, planning, modeling and programming behavior, formation of the habit of self-analysis and own behavior, development of awareness (keeping a personal diary, observance of a certain daily ritual);
- Increasing motivation for learning and self-development;
- Expanding ways to express their emotions and feelings, updating the vocabulary of emotions;
- Harmonization of emotional state (development of self-analysis, resolution of internal conflicts) by means of sand, dance, bibliotherapy, puppet therapy, visual art therapy, and etc.;
- Increasing confidence, forming positive attitude towards yourself and others;
- Whetting skills of collaboration and teamwork online, establishing a safe space on the Internet;
- Development of critical thinking and observation (Cubing, Six Thinking Hats method);
- Programming behavior in request and denial situations;
- Expanding opportunities for self-expression through creative activities, development of imagination and creative thinking;
- Encouraging freedom and independence in the process of self-knowledge of the individual.

The following forms of work may be useful: implementation of compulsory (online) psychology lessons; recording video lectures on relevant topics for children; creation of podcasts and TV programs focused on a certain age category (for children of more entertaining and educational nature, for parents of organizational and motivating, for teachers as an auxiliary resource in working with students); placing reference materials on educational web-sites and platforms; creating a selection of literature on various topics; printing books and printed notebooks on psychology for children of different ages; development of crossword puzzles and tasks, their subsequent publication; organization of online quests and educational games.

CONCLUSION

The creation of a new social reality, due to inevitable changes in the minds of citizens of Ukraine and each individual state, is a systemic process that

requires reconstruction of the focus of perception, increasing vitality and awareness of each person. However, in our opinion, it is necessary to influence children first, because they are more receptive and only form worldviews and values. Eventually, their influence will be decisive in changing the attitude of the older generations to the consequences of quarantine, which will establish an internal readiness for negative external factors and formation of adaptive coping strategies of behavior in conditions of social uncertainty and existential crisis.

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