

Propensity for Suicide among Gifted Schoolchildren of General Secondary-Education Establishments: the Role of Deviant Behavior

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Abstract

The article deals with the analysis of the results of the research on propensity for suicidal behavior among gifted schoolchildren of general secondary education institutions. The research is focused on the analysis of the role of deviant behavior exercised by gifted schoolchildren with the signs of mono- and polydeviation in the development of propensity for suicidal behavior.

The diagnostics of the propensity of gifted schoolchildren for suicidal behavior is viewed upon as an important direction in preventive activities of institutions of general secondary education aimed at avoiding irreversible consequences of this phenomenon. The gifted schoolchildren from establishments of general secondary education of Ukraine aged from 10 to 17 took part in the research. The conclusion was made that gifted schoolchildren with an explicit propensity for polydeviation were characterized by higher indicators of the propensity for suicidal behavior if compared to monodeviant pupils.

Key words: diagnostics, gifted schoolchildren, establishments of general secondary education, prevention, deviant behavior, suicide.

Introduction

In Ukraine, the death rate connected with suicides makes 16.8 cases per 100,000 people which greatly exceeds the same figure in the majority of EU countries (“How to identify a potential suicide and to help him”, 2019). At the same time the death coefficient of suicides at the age between 5-14 years old makes 1.4 cases per 100,000 young people in Ukraine (“Preventing suicide”, 2017).

According to the data of the State Statistics Service of Ukraine the number of people who died at the age under 17 years old because of intentional self-injuries during the period from 2007 through 2013 constantly exceeded 150 people a year (State Statistic Service of Ukraine, 2017). Starting from 2014, the data represented by this competent agency cannot be given in full volume which is preconditioned by a difficult social and political situation in Ukraine and lack of objective possibilities to collect data on the territory of the conflict zone. Still, it is possible to state that there occur in general 100-150 suicide cases among children and youth per 8-9 thousand people a year. It is worth mentioning that the number of children and youth makes 16% of the total population of Ukraine (“Fight for life”, 2019).

It is noteworthy that the data in question contain information about the completed acts of suicide and do not reflect the number of potential suicidal attempts as well as the real attempts which did not result in fatal outcomes. When it goes about gifted children, it is necessary to state that the statistical data on the number of suicides among this particular category of children of the country is absent. The number of scientific papers made by Ukrainian scholars which aim at the analysis of the

children's and youths' propensity for suicidal behavior is rather limited which can be explained by the latent character and stigmatization of this phenomenon (Guzman & Sappa, 2019).

The diagnostics of the propensity for suicidal behavior of schoolchildren, especially the gifted ones, is an important direction in the preventive measures applied by educational establishments aimed at avoiding irreversible consequences of this phenomenon. The prevention of suicides is aimed at preserving the main value of the state, namely the human life which is fixed in Article 3 of the General Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Article 6 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Article 27 of the Constitution of Ukraine (1996), and it must have a prospect for the self-realization of an individual which has to ensure the conditions of his adaptation, comfort and development.

The analysis of the propensity for suicidal behavior of gifted schoolchildren will make it possible to receive certain scientific data which will help to organize the preventive activities aimed at decreasing respective negative consequences, to form in gifted children a relevant value of life, the view of the trajectory of their development and realization of their abilities.

Review of Literature

At present, there exist few empirical researches in which the activities of prevalence of propensity for suicides among gifted schoolchildren are represented. Among the scientific researches that focus on the propensity for suicidal behavior of children and youth, it is necessary to pay special attention to the empirical data which represent certain interest for our investigation.

For instance, N. Sabat who analyzes suicide as a psycho-social phenomenon indicates that 27.2% of children aged 10 to 17 sometimes lose a desire to live (Sabat, 2007). Other scholars operate with the data given by the Research Center of Childhood of the Ukrainian Scientific Research Institute according to which 27% of children aged from 10 through 17 have from time to time suicidal thoughts (Danylo & Skaletskyi, 2010; Medvedev & Shevchenko, 2011).

The Russian scholars A. Kholmogorova and S. Volikova study the prevalence of suicidal thoughts and intentions among children and teenagers of the 5th–10th forms of general secondary schools (n=209) and gymnasiums (n=179) pointing out that 14.4% of schoolchildren and 16.7% of gymnasium students think about suicide whereas 2.9% and 2.8% respectively have a strong wish to kill themselves (positive answers to the questions about suicide present in Children's Depression Inventory (CDI) by M. Kovacs were taken into consideration) (Kholmogorova & Volikova, 2012).

Among the researches that deal directly with gifted children, it is worth mentioning the following ones that contain empirical data. Analyzing victimness of intellectually gifted schoolchildren aged 14-16 years old (n=228), T. Kalyazina found out that gifted pupils disposed to self-destructive and self-injured behavior made the largest group – 53.2%. At the same time the scholar emphasizes that the level of self-destructive behavior rises with the increase of the level of intellectual giftedness (Kalyazina, 2018).

V. Dolgova examined 25 gifted high-school students who took an active part in academic competitions, contests and tournaments of different kinds and levels, attended various additional classes, went in for sports and studied at musical schools. The propensity for suicidal behavior was found in 18% of the respondents (Dolgova, 2018). One of the obvious drawbacks of that investigation was the low number of the sampling of respondents which proves a disputable character of the received results and conclusions that the scholar makes about the general population of gifted schoolchildren.

In general, the organization of the analyses connected with the propensity of gifted schoolchildren for suicidal behavior has its objective difficulties due to the specificity of this category of

people particularly because of the lack of statistical data regarding their total number. Only in 2013 the Bank of intellectual achievements of children in Ukraine was formed. It contains information about the accomplishments of gifted pupils of the 9th–11th forms of the general secondary schools – the winners of the international and all-Ukrainian academic contests and competitions, participants of the Junior Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (“On the approval of the Provisions on psychological service in the system of education of Ukraine”, 2018).

In other words, only exemplary intellectual and scientific achievements of the schoolchildren are taken into consideration while other kinds of giftedness such as artistic and esthetic ones, their leadership and psychomotor activity remain without any notice. Besides, the phenomenon of giftedness as well as the propensity for suicidal behavior has a latent character which causes difficulties in its identification and studying.

D. Dixon & J. Sheckel pay attention to the fact that though the sources of scientific literature on the interconnection between suicide and giftedness are not very numerous as well as the statistical data regarding the number of suicides among gifted teenagers, the characteristics of gifted schoolchildren are rather often viewed upon as the risk factors of suicides (Dixon & Sheckel, 1996).

The same circumstances are indicated in the works by T. Cross et al. (Cassady & Cross, 2006; Gust-Brey & Cross, 1999) in which the scholars say about the absence of reliable data about the prevalence of suicides among gifted children and emphasize the lack of empirical data regarding the general number of gifted people which is connected with the ambiguity of the identification of giftedness, the stigmatization of suicide and insufficient scientific development of this problem.

The authors believe that gifted teenagers as well as all teenagers in general commit suicides more often than they did 50 years ago. They have also found out that the level of suicidal thoughts among gifted schoolchildren does not differ from that of the general population of teenagers (Cassady & Cross, 2006). In this case there appears a question set by the scholars regarding the reliability of the empirical data received by them taking into account the indicated circumstances dealing with the stigmatization of suicide, the ambiguity of the notion of “giftedness” and therefore the indeterminacy of the total population of gifted people etc.

Besides, the data received by the scholars are characteristic for the population of teenagers who study in the USA. When it goes about other countries, there appear doubts because the statistical data regarding the level of suicides and factors that provoke them differ much from country to country.

It is necessary to state that in the works by T. Cross and others the most grounded review of the sources of scientific literature on suicides in gifted teenagers was made that contains empirical data (Gust-Brey & Cross, 1999). T. Cross indicates that it is less important to know that the level of suicides can be higher among gifted children (because of the lack of data which does not make it possible to make such statements) than to understand that gifted individuals can reach success in their suicidal attempts (Spyker, 2017).

All this emphasizes the necessity and topicality of the analysis of the propensity of gifted schoolchildren of general secondary schools for suicidal behavior, however without comparing the received data with the level of suicides among the general population of pupils but with the aim of the prevention of lethal consequences of this phenomenon.

Materials and Methods

The aim of the article is to identify the peculiarities of the organization of diagnostic activity regarding the revelation of the propensity of gifted schoolchildren for suicidal behavior as a compo-

ment of the system of prevention of behavioral deviations in the establishments of secondary education.

The main research tasks are as follows:

1) to define the essence of diagnostic activities with gifted schoolchildren regarding the identification of the level of their propensity for suicidal behavior in context of the prevention of the deviant behavior of pupils;

2) to identify the level of propensity of gifted schoolchildren of establishments of general secondary education for suicidal behavior;

3) to analyze the propensity of gifted schoolchildren for suicidal behavior in context of their propensity for different types of deviant behavior.

In order to achieve the set goal and to solve the indicated tasks of the research, the following methods were employed: 1) theoretical methods of analysis, synthesis, comparison, generalization aimed at substantiating the theoretical backgrounds of the research; 2) empirical diagnostic methods of observation, documentation analysis, testing aimed at identifying the level of the propensity of gifted schoolchildren of establishments of general secondary education for different types of deviant behavior and suicidal behavior in particular; 3) methods of mathematical statistics aimed at revealing the initial level of propensity of gifted pupils for suicidal behavior and processing, evaluation and interpretation of the received results, confirmation of their confidence and significance.

The main diagnostic instruments are as follows:

1) PDB Test – test on propensity for deviant behavior (Ye. Leus, A. Solovyov) – aimed at identifying the propensity of schoolchildren for different types of deviant behavior including the suicidal one (Leus & Solovyev, 2016);

2) Procedure of studying of the propensity for suicidal behavior by M. Gorska which allows to define the level of propensity of an individual for suicidal behavior proper;

3) Test on revelation of suicidal intentions (O. Goncharenko, I. Melnikova, N. Shavrovska) which has a peculiarity which lies in hiding the diagnostic goal. Suicidal intentions of a gifted pupil are not assessed by means of making accent of his attention to the goal of the test but with the help of a game-test to define the level of his intellect (Rybalka, 2007).

Results and Discussion

In prevention of behavioral deviations of gifted schoolchildren of establishments of general secondary education an important role belongs to the subjects that make a direct impact on those pupils. In the system of education of Ukraine, such subjects are psychologists, social pedagogues, supervising teachers, school nurses, educators, parents of gifted schoolchildren, heads and instructors of school hobby groups and extracurricular activities.

In preventive activities, an important role is played by a timely diagnostics of the emotional and individual development of a gifted schoolchild (Belyaeva, 2013; Bogoyavlenskaya, 2005) which makes it possible to help him in the most efficient way and avoid negative consequences (in our case – lethal ones) to which suicidal attempts of a gifted child can lead.

Thus, diagnostics of the propensity of gifted schoolchildren for suicidal behavior is a component part of the system of prevention of behavioral deviations in the establishments of general secondary education. When carrying out these activities, it is necessary to take into account modern tendencies regarding the use of integration and systematic approaches (Dudnyk, 2010; Kadiyevskaya & Karanfilova, 2013; Kharchenko, 2016; Parfanovych, 2016) which are combined with other important approaches such as the individually oriented, complex, resource, activity ones, etc.

School psychologists and social pedagogues are the main subjects of psychological service of an establishment of general secondary education. They organize their diagnostic activities described in the Regulations on psychological service in the system of education of Ukraine the provisions of which indicate that the goal of the psychological service lies in ensuring the creation of conditions for the social and intellectual development of pupils, protection of their mental health, for rendering them psychological, pedagogical and social assistance.

Psychological service instructors are involved in carrying out individual diagnostics having a child's parents' consent or the consent of his legal representatives. They have to carry out their functions and make unbiased evaluative judgments regarding the participants of the academic process in particular regarding their behavior, its correspondence to social standards ("On the approval of the Provisions on psychological service in the system of education of Ukraine", 2018).

Taking into account the mentioned above peculiarities of the organization of diagnostic activities regarding the revelation of the propensity for suicidal behavior as a direction of prevention of behavioral deviations in the establishments of general secondary education, our diagnostic and analytical research was built on integration bases which lay in coverage of schoolchildren with different types of giftedness (intellectual, academic, artistic and esthetic, leadership, psychomotor, professional ones), consideration of their age-specific, individual and psychological peculiarities. Gifted schoolchildren from the 5th–11th forms aged 11 to 17 years old took part in our research (n=308).

Those were winners and prize-holders of academic competitions and contests of the regional, all-Ukrainian, European and international levels. The research was made on the basis of 25 establishments of general secondary education of Ukraine. The parents of gifted schoolchildren gave their consent for carrying out experimental research with their children. As a result, experimental platforms were formed on the basis of educational establishments. All the gifted schoolchildren took part in our experiment on their own accord which corresponds to the ethic principles of conducting researches with the participation of people as objects of activity.

The tables represented in the text of this article were compiled by the authors (Stepanenko, 2020); data processing was made with the use of the computer program Statistica 12 (StatSoft. URL: <http://statsoft.ru/>).

A special psycho-diagnostic methodology was used in our research which is recommended by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine for the realization of preventive activities of suicidal tendencies among schoolchildren ("On prevention of suicidal tendencies among pupils", 2014). In order to get additional information, the analysis of documentation was made (studying personal cases, social passports of classes and schools, medical statistics regarding physiological activities of the state of health of gifted schoolchildren, etc.).

During the diagnostic and analytical phase of our research, the propensity for suicidal behavior of gifted schoolchildren aged 10-13 years old was defined according to the results of two tests simultaneously (the PDB Test by Ye. Leus and A. Solovyov, and the test on revelation of suicidal intentions by O. Goncharenko, I. Melnikova and N. Shavrovskaya); the pupils aged 14-17 years old – by the results of all the three diagnostic methods mentioned above. The gifted schoolchildren aged 10-13 years old were not tested with the use of the procedure of studying of the propensity for suicidal behavior by M. Gorska because it has certain age limitations and can be employed in diagnostics of children who reach 14 years of age.

The use of several diagnostic methods regarding the revelation of the propensity of gifted schoolchildren for suicidal behavior was aimed at receiving more reliable data.

During the diagnostic and analytical phase of our research it was found out that the general indicators of prevalence of propensity of gifted schoolchildren for different types of deviant beha-

viator in establishments of general secondary education have a standard distribution (K-S $d=0.10751$, $p>0.2$; Lilliefors $p>0.2$; Shapiro-Wilk $W=0.96732$, $p>0.5$) and make $38.5\pm 14.4\%$ (CI: 32.6%; 44.5%). The indicators of the propensity of the gifted schoolchildren for suicidal behavior are also regulated by Gauss's Law (K-S $d=0.13029$, $p>0.2$; Lilliefors $p>0.2$; Shapiro-Wilk $W=0.93405$, $p=0.1$) and make $28\pm 14.5\%$ (CI: 22%; 33.9%) – see Table 1.

Table 1. General Indicators of Propensity of Schoolchildren for Different Types of Deviant Behavior and Suicidal Behavior (Descriptive Statistics)

| Indicator | Mean % | Confidence - 95% | Confidence 95% | Median | Minimum | Maximum | Lower Quartile | Upper Quartile | Std. Dev. | Standard Error | Skewness | Std Err. Skewness | Kurtosis | Std. Err. Kurtosis |
|---|--------|------------------|----------------|--------|---------|---------|----------------|----------------|-----------|----------------|----------|-------------------|----------|--------------------|
| Propensity for different types of behavioral deviations | 38.5 | 32.6 | 44.5 | 40 | 0 | 65 | 31.8 | 50 | 14.4 | 2.9 | -0.57 | 0.46 | 0.79 | 0.9 |
| Propensity for suicidal behavior | 28 | 22 | 33.9 | 27.3 | 0 | 50 | 20.8 | 38.5 | 14.5 | 2.9 | -0.38 | 0.46 | -0.07 | 0.9 |

The total sampling was divided into 4 groups of gifted schoolchildren. The first group made the pupils without the propensity for deviant behavior (61.4% of the total sampling, $n=189$).

The second group consisted of the gifted schoolchildren with a situational propensity for one concrete type of deviant behavior: aggressive, addictive, delinquent or suicidal one (19.5% of the total sampling, $n=60$).

The third group was compiled of the gifted schoolchildren with an obvious propensity for several types of deviant behavior at the same time (15.9% of the total sampling, $n=49$).

The fourth group made the gifted schoolchildren with a deviant behavior on the basis of hyperabilities which are characterized by the absence of propensity for any of the mentioned above types of deviant behavior (aggressive, delinquent, addictive, suicidal, etc.), lack of orientation on a socially conditioned behavior, dominance of individualization, lack of reaction to grouping with peers (3.2% of the total sampling, $n=10$). The peculiarity of the fourth group of gifted schoolchildren is that this type of deviant behavior is observed among an insignificant number of gifted pupils. This actually correlates with the data represented by V. Mendelevich who points out that this type of deviant behavior is observed in about 2% of gifted individuals (Manual on addictology, 2007).

The verification of the distributions of the general indicators in the mentioned groups showed that the majority of them do not agree with Gauss's law. This caused the necessity to use distribution-free methods of mathematical statistics.

According to the goal of our paper, let us analyze the peculiarities of the discrimination of the second and third groups of the gifted schoolchildren. The inclusion of the gifted schoolchildren with the propensity for at least one type of deviant behavior (aggressive, addictive, delinquent, suicidal) was preconditioned by the fact that at the initial stage the propensity for any type of deviant behavior can be provoked by the same factors of the personal (internal) and social (external) charac-

ter, what differs is the cause, i.e. the situation due to which a gifted pupil chooses this or that type of deviant behavior.

Specific features of a concrete type of deviant behavior are formed later, when the transition to the next stage of the development of deviant behavioral manifestations takes place (Bezpal'ko, 2009; Zmanovskaya, 2003). The selection of the gifted schoolchildren to the third group is predetermined by the presence of such a feature as propensity for polydeviation.

The comparison of the second and third groups according to the indicators of the propensity for suicidal behavior with the help of Mann-Whitney U-criterion showed a statistically significant difference in the indicators of the propensity for suicides of the mentioned groups of the gifted schoolchildren aged 14-17 years old ($U=192$, $z=4.02$, $p<0.001$) by the procedure of studying of the propensity for suicidal behavior by M. Gorska – see Table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of Indicators of Propensity for Suicidal Behavior in Groups II and III of Gifted Schoolchildren by Procedure of Studying of Propensity for Suicidal Behavior by M. Gorska

| Rank Sum III group | Rank Sum II group | U | Z | p-value | Z Adjusted | p-value | Valid N III group | Valid N II group | 2*1 sided exact p |
|--------------------|-------------------|-----|------|----------|------------|----------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 1355 | 598 | 192 | 4.01 | 0.000061 | 4.02 | 0.000059 | 34 | 28 | 0.000031 |

The median of indicators of the propensity for suicides in Group II made $Me=37$ (35 – 42), y III rp. – $Me=47$ (43 – 49) – see Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Indicators of Propensity for Suicidal Behavior in Groups II and III of Gifted Schoolchildren by Procedure of Studying of Propensity for Suicidal Behavior by M. Gorska

| Group | Valid N | Mean | Confidence - 95% | Confidence 95% | Median (Me) | Minimum | Maximum | Lower Quartile | Upper Quartile | Std. Dev. |
|-------|---------|------|------------------|----------------|-------------|---------|---------|----------------|----------------|-----------|
| II | 28 | 38 | 35,2 | 40,3 | 37 | 22 | 56 | 35 | 42 | 6,4 |
| III | 34 | 46 | 43,1 | 49,2 | 47 | 28 | 69 | 43 | 49 | 8,8 |

The received results confirm that the gifted schoolchildren of this age with the presence of the propensity for several types of deviant behavior at the same time are characterized by a higher level of propensity for suicidal behavior. In other words, the manifestations of polydeviations and a high level of propensity for suicides can be viewed upon as interdependent phenomena.

When studying the suicidal tendencies of schoolchildren, it is also necessary to pay attention to the indicators of rigidity. High rigidity can indicate the presence of inadequate stereotypes of behavior which an individual clutches at when solving situational tasks. Such stereotypes can cause incapability of an individual to correct his activity according to the situation (Sharipova, 2014). In such cases, the situation seems extremely difficult and the inability to solve it creates a risk of emergence of suicidal behavior.

The indicators of rigidity defined by the procedure of studying of the propensity for suicidal behavior by M. Gorska are not regulated by Gauss's law (Shapiro-Wilk $W=0.96236$, $p=0.015$). Therefore, distribution-free methods of mathematical statistics were employed for the evaluation of the results of our research. The median of indicators of rigidity in Group II made $Me=10.5$ (9 – 13), in Group III – $Me=13.5$ (12 – 16) – see Table 4.

Table 4. General Indicators of Propensity of Gifted Schoolchildren for Different Types of Deviant Behavior and Suicidal Behavior (Descriptive Statistics)

| Rigidity | Mean | Confidence - 95% | Confidence 95% | Median | Minimum | Maximum | Lower Quartile | Upper Quartile | Std. Dev. | Standard Error | Skewness | Std Err. Skewness | Kurtosis | Std. Err. Kurtosis |
|-----------|------|------------------|----------------|--------|---------|---------|----------------|----------------|-----------|----------------|----------|-------------------|----------|--------------------|
| II group | 10.9 | 9.9 | 11.9 | 10.5 | 7 | 16 | 9 | 13 | 2.5 | 0.48 | 0.35 | 0.44 | -0.83 | 0.86 |
| III group | 13.6 | 12.6 | 14.7 | 13.5 | 6 | 20 | 12 | 16 | 3.1 | 0.53 | -0.1 | 0.4 | 0.12 | 0.79 |

With the help of Kruskal-Wallis H-test, it was determined that the difference in the indicators of rigidity of Groups II and III has a statistical significance ($H=36.48$; $p<0.001$). A posteriori comparisons were made by means of Mann-Whitney test with Bonferroni correction which confirmed the difference between the indicators of rigidity in the analyzed groups ($U=233$; $z=-3.45$, $p<0.001$) – see Table 5.

Table 5. Statistical Data of A Posteriori Comparisons of Indicators of Rigidity in Groups II and III of Gifted Schoolchildren

| Rank Sum II group | Rank Sum III group | U | Z | p-value | Z Adjusted | p-value | Valid N II group | Valid N III group | 2*1 sided exact p |
|-------------------|--------------------|-----|-------|---------|------------|---------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 639 | 1314 | 233 | -3.43 | 0.00006 | -3.45 | 0.00057 | 28 | 34 | 0.000442 |

The received data prove that the indicators of rigidity are higher in polydeviant gifted schoolchildren if compared to monodeviant ones which indirectly confirm a higher risk of suicidal behavior in this group.

Conclusions

The results of our research made it possible to state that the indicators of the propensity of gifted schoolchildren for suicidal behavior against the background of their propensity for all other types of deviant behavior – $38.5\pm 14.4\%$ (CI: 32.6%; 44.5%) are rather high and make $28\pm 14.5\%$ (CI: 22%; 33.9%).

It was proved that gifted schoolchildren with the signs of propensity for polydeviation if compared to monodeviant pupils demonstrate higher indicators of propensity for suicidal behavior which is indirectly confirmed by higher indicators of rigidity.

Further analysis can be aimed at studying the peculiarities of gifted schoolchildren in the main spheres of activity which serve determinative sources that influence their development and formation and which at the same time can be both the resources of prevention of behavioral deviations of gifted schoolchildren in the establishments of general secondary education and provokers of different deviant manifestations in their behavior such as suicidal intentions in particular.

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