Socio-psychological Needs of Parents and Characteristics of Relationships in Family

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Abstract

In the article, the basic socio-psychological needs of parents (inclusion, control, affection) are considered as a factor of relationships in the family. The article presents the results of a study of couples and their preschool children, which showed that the socio-psychological needs of the mother and father determine the interaction parameters in pairs “mother-child”/“father-child”, attitude of mother/father to the family, husband/ wife, the child's attitude to mother/father. It is shown that the degree of the need for inclusion sets a high intensity of the positive attitude towards the family of both men and women; that the need for control/dependency of the parents plays a special role in shaping the child's attitude towards his mother and father; that the mother’s need for affection from other people determines the interaction parameters with her child; that the socio-psychological needs of fathers, less than mothers, determine the characteristics of their interaction with their child.

Keywords: person attitude factors; family relationships; socio-psychological needs; need for control; controlling personality.

1. Introduction to the issue

The issue of attitudes and relationships of the person is the central issue of the social psychology [1]. N.N. Avdeeva [2], R.J. Mukhamedrakhimov [3], G.G. Filippova [4], referring to the analysis of the factors affecting the formation and development of the relationship system of the person, pay great attention to the study of

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interactions between mother and child in early ontogeny. Modern studies have found [3, 5, 6] that the relationships between mother and child, formed in the early period of life, influence the characteristics of child’s attitude towards oneself, others, formation of attitude towards the world (trust/mistrust), characteristics of his socialization and personality formation. Also a large number of studies are devoted to the study of the phenomenon of fatherhood, father's influence on the formation and development of the child’s personality [5, 7].

One of the most important factors affecting the characteristics of the family relationships in the early period of a child's life, which play a significant role in the further socialization of the child, is the “personality factor”, to which the scientists refer a variety of psychological and socio-psychological characteristics of parents. One can note the considerable amount of works devoted to the analysis of the influence of a range of mother’s personal parameters on the formation of the relationships between mother and child: characteristics of mother’s personality self-actualization [8], situational behavior of the mother and different level characteristics of her individuality [9], psychological readiness of mother to the relationships with the unborn child [7]. At the same time, there are not enough works that: 1) consider psychological characteristics of the fathers along with the studied psychological parameters of the mothers, and 2) would consider the characteristics of the need-motivational sphere of parents as a factor in the formation of relationships between mother/father and child. Thus, the study of socio-psychological needs of parents as a factor in the formation of relationships with their child is of current interest.

The aim of our study was to examine the correlation between the socio-psychological needs of parents and characteristics of relationships in the family. As the socio-psychological needs in our work we address the needs that emerge, form and can be satisfied in the process of communication with another person. There are many classifications of needs in psychology. In our work we have used the classification of needs by William Schutz [10], which clearly shows the connection of satisfaction/dissatisfaction of the basic socio-psychological needs and relationships with other people formed on this basis: relations in the sphere of social contacts (inclusion), power and responsibility (control), close emotional relationships (affection). As family relationships in our study were considered: 1) attitude of mother/father towards the child, husband/wife, family; 2) child's attitude towards the mother, father, family; 3) characteristics of interpersonal interaction in pairs “mother-child” and “father-child”. We have formulated the following hypothesis: socio-psychological needs of parents may determine the characteristics of family relationships. Empirical objectives of the study were: 1) analysis of correlation of the socio-psychological needs of mother/father and family relationships: attitude of mother/father towards the child, husband/wife, family; child's attitude towards the mother, father, family 2) analysis of correlation of the socio-psychological needs of mother/father and interaction parameters in pairs “mother-child”/”father/child”.

2. Characteristics of study sample

Study sample consisted of 22 two-parent families with one, two or three children: men and women who are officially married and one of their children (first or second by birth), who at the time of the study was from 3 to 7 years old. A total of 66 people participated in the study: 22 women, 22 men, 22 children.

3. Description of study methods

1. Questionnaire of interpersonal relations by William Schutz (FIRO), adapted by A.A. Rukavishnikov [11]. FIRO is used to diagnose the basic socio-psychological needs of the person that are presented at the level of expressed (e) behavior and behavior wanted from others (w): need to belong to different social groups, to be included in their activity (eI); need to control others (eC), need for close relationships (eA); need for others to include the subject in their activity (wI); need for control (wC) and affection (wA) from other people. 2. Attitude color test (short version) [12]. ACT was used to study the intensity of emotional, partly unconscious attitude of mothers/fathers towards family, husband/wife, child, and to explore the attitude of child towards family, mother
and father. High scores obtained by this test were interpreted as positive attitude, emotional acceptance, low-negative attitude, emotional rejection. 3. Profile studies of emotional side characteristics of child-parent interaction by E.I. Zakharova [13]. It was used to study the characteristics of maternal/paternal sensitivity, attitude towards the child and the nature of child-parent interaction. The questionnaire contains three blocks: “Sensitivity” block: 1) ability to perceive the child’s state of being, 2) understanding the causes of the state of being, 3) sympathy. 2. “Emotional acceptance” block: 1) feelings that mother has during the interaction with child, 2) unconditional acceptance, 3) attitude towards oneself as a parent, 4) prevailing emotional background of interaction. 3. “Behavioral manifestations of emotional interaction” block: 1) seeking body contact, 2) provision of emotional support, 3) focus on the child’s state of being during the construction of interaction, 4) ability to affect the child's state of being.

4. Study results

Let us consider the results of the Spearman correlation analysis of values of socio-psychological needs of mothers of children aged 3 to 7 years, obtained by technique of William Schutz, values of emotional, partly unconscious attitude of mother (towards child, husband, family) and child (towards mother, father, family) obtained by ACT technique and parameters of emotional interactions between mother and child, obtained by technique of E.I. Zakharova.

First, it was found that there is no correlation between the social needs of mother and her attitude towards the child (this value is expressed to the maximum extent in all studied mothers, average score 7.64), as well as the attitude of child to her and to the family.

Second, a number of interesting correlations between the socio-psychological needs of mother and attitude of mother (towards her husband, family) and child (towards father) were found. The greatest number of correlations was found between the socio-psychological needs of the mother and emotional, partly unconscious attitude of mother towards the family: attitude toward the family is in directly proportional connection with the mother’s needs for inclusion \((r = 0.569)\); need to be controlled by other people \((r = 0.624)\), need for establishing close emotional relationships, for affection \((r = 0.430)\).

Also it was found that the mother's needs for establishing close emotional relationships at the level of the wanted behavior from others (need for affection from other people) is in directly proportional correlation with the intensity of attitude of mother towards her husband (partner). That is, mothers who need affection from other people (to be loved), have a greater intensity of positive attitude towards husband.

Also we have found correlation paradoxical at first glance: mother’s need to control other people \((eC)\) and attitude of her child towards father \((r=-0.469)\). Children of "controlling" (taking the responsibility, seeking to make decisions, controlling their partner) mothers have less positive attitude towards their father, they emotionally "reject" him.

Third, from the six studied socio-psychological needs of mothers with parameters of emotional interaction with child only two are correlated: need to be included in the various social groups \((eI)\) and need for affection from other people \((wA - need to be loved)\). The need for inclusion is in inversely proportional connection with the “attitude towards oneself as a parent”. The more pronounced this need in the mother (she tends to be beyond the family situation and dyadic interaction with her child), the less degree of positivity she has to herself as a parent, less accepts herself as a mother.

The second of the abovementioned mother’s needs - need for affection from other people – is in directly proportional correlation with six parameters of emotional interaction with her child, grouped in blocks of “sensitivity” (“ability to perceive child’s state of being”, \(r=0.521\); “understanding the causes of the state of being”, \(r=0.531\); “sympathy”, \(r=0.518\)) and “behavioral manifestations of emotional interaction” (“seeking body contact”, \(r=0.416\); “focus on the child's state of being during the construction of interaction”, \(r=0.490\); “ability to affect the child's state of being”, \(r=0.533\)). Thus, it is the mother’s need for love from other people that sets the
socio-psychological characteristics of her interaction with her own child. “Seeking love” mother is more sensitive to her child: she is able to read the child's emotional state, understand the reasons which led to the emergence of a variety of emotional states of the child, she is more capable of empathy. Also such mother displays certain behavioral characteristics: she seeks body contact with the child (more often strokes the head, takes the child in her arms, hugs and kisses him), during the construction of interaction with him she is more focused on the emotional state of the child and she can affect it (monitors emotional state of the child, can reassure him, set to a specific activity, etc.).

Summarizing the obtained data on the sample of mothers, we can draw the following conclusions: 1. The degree of the socio-psychological needs of the mother determines the emotional, partly unconscious to the personality of the mother attitude towards the family and partner, child's attitude towards his father, as well as a number of interaction parameters of mother and child. 2. Mothers with a high level of need for establishing close emotional relationships with other people have a greater intensity of positive attitude towards husband (partner), demonstrate a high level of sensitivity to child, seek body contact, feel confident and able to affect the emotional state of child during the construction of interaction. 3. Mothers who have a high level of need for inclusion into different social groups (desire to belong to social groups, to participate in their activities), accept their parental position to a lesser extent, have less positive view of oneself as a parent. 4. Emotional, partly unconscious attitude of women to their family is determined by a variety of social needs: need for inclusion, affection and to be controlled by other people (dependency).

Similar to the above statistical procedure, Spearman correlation analysis was also applied to the data obtained on the sample of fathers. In general, it was found far fewer correlations (only four) between the socio-psychological needs of man and studied parameters of attitudes and relationships: 1) attitude of man towards the family was found to be in directly proportional correlation with the need for inclusion (r=0,440); 2) man’s need to be controlled by other people (need for dependency) is in inversely proportional correlation with the intensity of his child's attitude towards the mother (r=-0,509); 3) need to be included in social groups by other people is in directly proportional correlation with such interaction parameter with the child as “sympathy” (r=0,569); 4) need to be controlled by other people is in inversely proportional correlation with the “seeking body contact” parameter (r=-0,439).

Thus, the high intensity of the positive attitude towards one’s family sets the basic social need for inclusion for both men and women. We can assume that, on the one hand, actualization of this need is associated with establishing by partners of a formal alliance (official marriage), on the other hand, with its preservation.

We have also found an interesting pattern: children of men with need to be controlled by other people (prone to depend on others) do not accept, emotionally reject their mother. Conversely, children of “independent” fathers (whose need to be dependent on others is minimally expressed) with maximum degree of intensity have a positive attitude towards the mother.

In general, socio-psychological needs of fathers in less degree than mothers, determine the parameters of their interaction with their child: more “independent” men (low degree of need to be controlled by other people) maintain body contact with their children, fathers with the need for inclusion (at the level of behavior wanted from others) show greater sensitivity (empathy) in interaction with their child.

5. Discussion of results

This study extends the existing in social psychology concept of “personality” factor of attitudes and relations of the person and the role of socio-psychological needs in the development of his relations with other people. [1] It is shown that the complex of socio-psychological needs of mother and father determines the characteristics of interpersonal interaction with their own child, their attitude towards their family, as well as the child's attitude towards his mother and father.
The study revealed a complex interplay of social needs of mother, father and their child's attitude towards them: emotional, partly unconscious attitude of child towards the mother (emotional acceptance/rejection) is connected with the need-motivational sphere of the father (low/high degree of need for dependency), and conversely, emotional acceptance/rejection by the child of the father correlates with a low/high degree of mother's need to control other people. This fact is another empirical confirmation of the fundamental assumption on the functioning of the personality relations as a complex system, as formulated both at the level of fundamental social psychology [1] and within the framework of the different approaches to the correction of person's attitudes and relations [14]. As famous family therapist Carl Whitaker metaphorically writes, basing his approach to family therapy: “I do not believe in people – only in families!” [14, p. 103]. In addition, the obtained data refers to the special role of need for control/dependence of parents in shaping the child's attitude towards his mother and father which extends the knowledge of the controlling personality, to analysis of which is devoted one of our studies [15].

The results also show that the characteristics of interpersonal interaction in a pair of “mother-child” are more “determined” by the personality factor (we had 6 basic socio-psychological needs in our study) than the parameters of interpersonal interaction in a pair of “father-child”, which confirms the differences found in numerous studies on the phenomena of motherhood and fatherhood [4, 5].

6. Conclusion

The study showed that the socio-psychological needs of mother and father determine the interaction parameters in pairs of “mother-child” and “father-child”, as well as the attitude of mother/father towards the family, husband/wife and the child's attitude towards mother/father:

1. Mother’s need for affection from other people sets the interaction parameters with her child. Mothers with a high level of this need have a positive attitude towards the husband, demonstrate a high level of sensitivity to the child, seeking body contact, feel confident and are able to affect the child's emotional state during the construction of interaction. Socio-psychological needs of fathers in less degree than mothers, determine the parameters of their interaction with their child: more “independent” men (low degree of need to be controlled by other people) maintain body contact with their children, fathers with the need for inclusion (at the level of behavior wanted from others) show empathic ability in interaction with their child.

2. Basic social need for inclusion sets a high intensity of the positive attitude towards the family by both men and women; moreover, the attitude of women towards the family is determined by a variety of social needs: in addition to the need for inclusion there is also the need for affection and to be controlled by other people (dependency).

3. Parents’ need for control/dependency plays a special role in shaping the child's attitude towards his mother and father. Children of the “controlling” mothers have less positive attitude towards the father, they emotionally “reject” him and the children of the “independent” fathers with maximum of intensity have a positive attitude towards the mother.

References


