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Emotional and Psychological Behavior of Children in the Context of Transforming Modern Society

Abstract: This study aimed to evaluate the dynamics of emotional and psychological behavior indicators in children aged 7–8 years in modern society. The study was conducted in 2018–2019 in Moscow (Russian Federation) and included a total of 600 children of the second – third grades in three secondary schools. The first group included children from families with high social status and higher education of both parents, the second group comprised children from middle-class families with secondary special education of parents, and the third group enrolled children from low-income families with incomplete secondary education of parents. Children were tested for aggressiveness as well as attitudes toward family members. It has been established that in the first group, the model of upbringing was dominated by hyper-socialization of the authoritarian type. In the second group, the model of education was more balanced, symbiosis and cooperation dominated, exceeding the other parameters by 1.3–1.9 times ($p \leq 0.05$). In the third group, average and high levels of aggression were stated to be significantly higher – 1.6–2.2 times ($p \leq 0.01$). In the third and first groups, there was a direct connection between the frequency of instrumental aggression and negative attitude towards siblings (0.65 and 0.84, respectively).

Keywords: *aggressiveness; authoritarian hyper-socialization; loser syndrome; primary school age children; social status; upbringing model*

INTRODUCTION

The population is known to be a polymorphic and complex object for sociological and psychological research (Sheidow, Henry, Tolan, & Strachan, 2014). One of the leading factors is the age composition of the population, as its research can indicate what role or function each of the age groups have in society (Shelleby et al., 2014). At the same time, children build up one of the principal population groups on which the future of any country largely depends (M. Kia-Keating, Nylund-Gibson, B. Kia-Keating, Schock, & Grimm, 2018). In some countries, children make up a fairly large proportion of the population. Thus, for example, according to the Federal State Statistic Service (n.d.), they represent a quarter of the country's population in Russia. The importance of children

as a population group is manifested not in their relation to other population groups, but in the fact that adequate upbringing and a decent level of social status for children will determine future social and psychological characteristics of the population (Choi, Palmer, & Pyun, 2014). The need for research into the psychological and emotional component of a child's development is because childhood is critical for full personal development (Spengler et al., 2015). In particular, it applies to such personality traits as mental and physical health indicators, as well as the normal development of such potential features as intelligence, cultural education, and the formation of moral foundations (Kaminski et al., 2013). A child's initial mental and emotional characteristics from an early age define the foundation of his or her personality, which is extremely difficult to change in adulthood (Kim & Um,

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2018). On the one hand, the successful progress of a child as a person makes it is easier for him or her to become an organic member of society. On the other hand, effective parenting enables children to identify progressive or regressive characteristics of society as a whole in the future (Choi & Pyun, 2014). Some experts point out that children should be more successful than their parents, which applies not only to social status but to the sustainability of mental and emotional processes as well (Alwaely, Yousif, & Mikhaylov, 2020). In case a whole generation does not get the opportunity to develop properly, there is a "social funnel" effect when this generation does not meet the increasing demands of modern society. Ultimately, it leads to an increase in crime level, mental illnesses, and suicide. Therefore, the mental and emotional health of children should be of high attention from an early age (Hardaway & Cornelius, 2014). Besides, the physical health factor is important, as well. In particular, congenital pathologies and disabilities of children are known to be increasingly common in developing countries. It can be attributed to the fact that parental health is deteriorating with each successive generation (Hempel, Wuermli, & Lundberg, 2012). The reason for this might be such social problems as declining welfare, deteriorating diets, and rising rates of alcohol or drug abuse and smoking. The deterioration in the quality of health care should be mentioned as a separate factor. All of these factors ultimately lead to a natural decrease in the wellbeing of entire generations (White, Liu, Nair, & Tein, 2015). Negative impact on the indicators of a normal child's mental, physical, emotional, or intellectual development determines the overall structure of his or her personality in the future.

By the level of significance, the factors can be arranged from the most to the less influential one: psychological family climate, environment (communication with peers), school overload in education (early education). Risk factors include poor family relationships, insufficient attention to the child at school or kindergarten, and negative relationships with peers. In early childhood, the most important factor is the climate in the family, while as the child gets older, the environment and the school overload factor become the main ones.

According to some researchers, each successive generation should have better qualities than their parents, not only in terms of success but also in terms of abilities (Lee, 2020; Mah & Ford-Jones, 2012; Malczyk & Lawson, 2017). It must be in line with the demands of ever-increasing progress in society. In addition to the harmful habits of parents and congenital diseases in children, a significant impact on the mental, physical, and emotional health of children has their environment, in particular, society. First of all, this includes the school. According to some reports, the school has a negative rather than a positive impact on the health of schoolchildren (McConnell, Breikreuz, & Savage, 2010). Thus, according to the Federal State Statistic Service of Russia (n.d.) from 2019, pupils from junior and senior grades (1-8) were reported to have 8-12 times more frequent hearing and

vision pathologies and 10 times more frequent musculoskeletal disorders (dysplasia, etc.). Diseases associated with nervous system dysfunctions are encountered 15 times more frequently. Such pathologies of organs and their systems predetermine mental and emotional instability from the early grades, which results in a 90% more frequent incidence of emotional and mental deviations. There is also a group of diseases conditioned by the lifestyle of pupils in school. These include digestive problems, which are twice as more frequent in the last ten years among pupils of 1-8 grades compared to the previous decade, diseases or visual impairment (three times more frequent), and posture disorders (2.6 times more frequent). The availability of the Internet and passion for computer video games significantly contributes to the deterioration of schoolchildren's health, increasing the frequency of mental disorders by 1.5 times (Baker, Kainz, & Reynolds, 2018; Huang, Kim, & Sherraden, 2016). These disorders are usually caused by stressful situations and so-called informational disarrangements. Due to the lesion of the central nervous system, statistics on the level of intelligence also alter. Thus, according to studies on the mental abilities of schoolchildren, the number of schoolchildren with a high level of intellect decreased twofold in schools in rural areas and 1.5 times in urban schools in Russia (Federal State Statistic Service, n.d.). Every second schoolchild had a strong fear of possible academic failure, and about two-thirds had a feeling of discomfort with school conditions. One of the main reasons for this was the irregularity of success at school and, as a consequence, minimal recognition from peers, teachers, and parents. Thus, the emotional and mental components can be the reason for the formation of serious illnesses in early school age. Moreover, the very process of learning has been found to incite a deterioration in the health of schoolchildren, i.e., if at the age of primary school, half of the students have chronic diseases, in high school, this number comprises already about 80% (Rapp & Sullivan, 2014). Analysis of data from the past two decades has shown that only one in ten students meets physical, mental, and emotional health standards. It should be mentioned that these data apply not only to Russia but also to other post-Soviet countries, as well as most developing countries in general (Jackson & Vaughn, 2017; Reising et al., 2013).

As can be seen, younger school age is critical for the formation of the person, its mental and emotional potential. The discrepancy between the requirements of society and the real condition of health and opportunities of schoolchildren is obvious. Therefore, it is necessary to monitor the emotional and psychological behavior of children of primary school age. Research efforts on this topic are quite numerous, although they are mainly focused on psychological and emotional aspects separately (Baker et al., 2018; Kainz, Willoughby, Vernon-Feagans, & Burchinal, 2012; White et al., 2015). Part of the studies focuses on the impact of external factors like a family situation, education level, income level, interaction with peers (bullying, etc.), or the impact of the Internet and video games on schoolchildren's psycho-emotional health

(Alwaely et al., 2020; Kim & Um, 2018). This paper attempts to combine these areas and approach the assessment of children's emotional and psychological behaviors in a comprehensive manner.

The purpose of this work was to study the indicators of emotional and psychological behavior of children aged 7 to 8 in modern society. The objectives of the study were: a) to examine these parameters concerning the gender identity of students; b) the same, concerning the social status of parents; c) the same, but taking into account the level of education of parents; d) similarly, taking into account the family composition. The authors suggest that among the external factors that build a child's inner world, the abovementioned factors will have a determining meaning.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Materials

The research was conducted in 2018-2019 in three secondary schools in Moscow (Russian Federation) during the school year. The research was attended by 600 children of 2nd and 3rd grades. The average age was 7.3 ± 0.5 years. Children of primary grades (1st and 2nd grades) were divided into 3 groups of 200 people each. Group 1 comprised children from families, where parents had higher education and income above average (in the Russian conditions – more than 1000 USD for two parents). The second group was made up of children from families with income from 500 to 1000 USD for two parents (also 200 people). Family income data are taken from the 2019 Rosstat report (Rosstat, 2019). According to the report, the average income amounts to 520 dollars per family. Parents from these families had secondary special education. Finally, the third group included 200 children from low-income families with a total income of up to \$500 per two parents. Parents of children from the third group had no higher or specialized secondary education. In each of the three groups, there was an equal number of children from full and single-parent families, namely, one hundred each. The gender distribution of children in each of the groups is the following: Group 1–97 boys and 103 girls, Group 2–99 boys and 101 girls, Group 3–102 boys and 98 girls.

There are no statistically significant differences between the number of boys and girls in the groups, which allowed for an adequate comparison of the groups with each other.

Table 1. Gender distribution of pupils from three groups

No. of Group	Number of Boys	Number of Girls
1	97	103
2	99	101
3	102	98

Source: author's own work

Besides working with students, parents of children in all three groups were interviewed. A total of 637 parents were surveyed, including 207 parents in the first group, 230 parents in the second group, and 200 parents in the third group.

Design of the study

The research implies a comprehensive work with both children and their parents. Each of the children's parents was interviewed to inform them about the goals and objectives of the survey. The research is designed to help understand the reasons for failures in shaping children's emotional and psychological behaviors that are socially acceptable. After the research was conducted and the results were processed, each of the parents was consulted, with specific data on their child, and suggested possible ways to correct the emotional and psychological areas of personality, as well as possible ways to change the approach to parenting. The research was conducted only with the parents' written consent. Parents were informed about the anonymity of the research, as well as about compliance with ethical and moral norms of international law. Parents that did not sign the agreement were not included in the study. Similarly, children of these parents were also not included in the research sample. All students were taught under the same conditions, which enabled them to adequately compare children from different social status groups. The level of social status (middle class in Russian economic conditions) and level of education was chosen as a criterion for dividing children under study into groups as they are interconnected. Usually, high-paid positions are associated with at least one higher education, while low-paid positions do not require this.

Methods of research

When children interact with each other, one of the most striking features of negative emotional behavior is aggression. In this regard, the method of observation of junior grade students during lessons and corresponding changes was applied. The following parameters were considered at observation: external signs of aggressive behavior, vegetative characteristics of aggression, the child's attitude towards help from adults, own attitude towards own aggression, presence-absence of compassion towards peers, and cases of aggressive behavior towards peers and adults. Among the complex of aggressive reactions, the aggression of verbal type and physical aggression were singled out. For the definition of the basic features of the child's relations with his environment, a color test of relations developed by A. M. Atkinde was employed. This technique was used to determine the features of the child's relationships, and important people from the child's environment, such as parents. The attitude color test is based on the assumption of a direct correlation between the color associations that arise in a person in interaction with various elements of reality, and his or her attitude toward these elements., Bypassing the defense mechanisms of consciousness, the test allows seeing the unconscious components of relations.

Also, the method of R. Gilles was used, which examines the interpersonal relationships of the child. The technique allows identifying conflict zones in the child's system of interpersonal relations, thereby making it possible to influence the further development of the child's personality by transforming these relations. To assess the level of anxiety, the Tammel's method of selecting the right faces was applied. The levels of emotional intelligence were studied using a children's questionnaire authored by D.I. Lucin. Besides, tests based on associations and the display of inner feelings through drawings were used for this task. The technique is designed to study the degree of positive or negative emotional state of children from 4 to 8 years old.

Analysis of data from children's parents was conducted using the Eidemiller questionnaire, as well as Varga-Stolin (Parental Relations test). These methods clarify what type of parenting dominates in this family and allows estimating true attitude of parents towards their child.

The test is designed to examine parental influence in the upbringing of a child or adolescent and examine the errors in parenting. The test also allows diagnosing the unwanted and incorrect influence of family members on each other, violations in the performance of roles in the family, and interferences with its integrity. The axes on the graphs show the values of the test scores.

Statistical analysis

Statistical data processing was carried out using the Statistica program v.7.0 (StatSoft Inc., USA). Due to the distribution of features beyond the values of normal, the non-parametric methods of statistical analysis were applied. Spearman's correlations were calculated between such characteristics as social status, gender, parents' education level, and family composition, and differences

between them were tested using the Mann-Whitney test. The differences between the features were taken as significant, starting from $p \leq 0.05$.

RESULTS

Relationships between parents and children in the family

The survey of parents revealed significant differences in the approach to upbringing and relationships between parents and children in different groups (Figure 1). Thus, in the first group, with the highest social status and level of education, hyper-socialization of the authoritarian type dominated, with insignificant differences between boys and girls. This suggests that in the families with high levels of material wealth and higher education, the raising of children was dominated by the authority of one or both parents, which built a basis for their relationship with children. The remaining parameters of 0.5 (acceptance-rejection and symbiosis) – 2.0 (failure syndrome and cooperation) are less significant ($p \leq 0.05$). In the second group of children and parents from the middle class, upbringing is more balanced, as symbiosis and cooperation play a principal role, also exceeding the other parameters by 1.3-1.9 times ($p \leq 0.05$). Thus, among middle-class parents, there is a greater focus on interaction with the child itself than there is on pressure from parental authority, as was the case in Group 1. There are no differences between boys and girls either, except for loser syndrome, when boys are 1.5 times more likely to be negatively influenced by their parents ($p \leq 0.05$). Finally, in the third group represented by parents with no higher education and no material well-being, parental pressure on children is the highest. The dominant parameter in parenting is loser syndrome and the authority of one

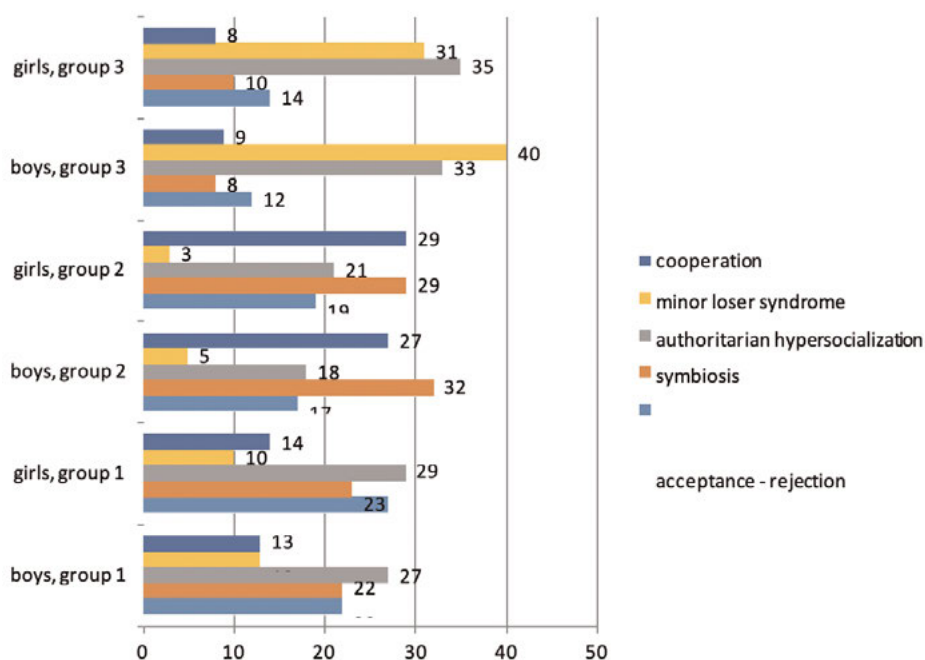


Figure 1. Survey results by type of family relations (Varga-Stolin test)

parent ("Because I said so"). These parameters surpass the others within Group 3 the most among all groups, namely, by 3-4 times ($p \leq 0.01$). The leadership in hyper-socialization is undoubtedly similar to the parents from Group 1 in Group 3, although in this context, the parents' authority is reduced to orders but not to justify the correctness of a parent's opinion, as it was observed in Group 1. Another difference between Group 3 and Group 1 is the strongly pronounced negative impact on children's psyche expressed in the statement that 'you are a loser'. It may be because parents of children from poor families often blamed their children for the failures to achieve own certain life goals.

It should be noted that the pressure on boys in the families of Group 3 is higher in comparison with girls implying the incidence of a failure syndrome 0.5 times more frequent ($p \leq 0.05$).

Similar upbringing trends were observed when analyzing the relationships of children and their parents in the three study groups (Figure 2).

Hence, in the first group, the dominant hyper-protection prevails, especially among boys (0.5 times more often than girls from this group, $p \leq 0.05$). Among girls from this group, the dominant tendency is indulging hyper-protection (1.2 times more often compared to boys, $p \leq 0.05$). Thus, parents of children in the first group are more likely to influence boys, but at the same time, are more likely to indulge their daughters in fulfilling their desires and needs. The other parameters were two to three times less likely to be noted among children in this group ($p \leq 0.001$). In the second group, the trend is similar, but it is also significant that parents are more demanding of their children's moral responsibility. Differences between boys

and girls remain valid between the level of condoning hyper-protection (1.3 times in favor of girls, $p \leq 0.05$) and prevailing hyper-protection (0.5 times in favor of boys, $p \leq 0.05$).

Levels of aggression in the groups studied

Among children, depending on the style of upbringing in the family, varying levels of aggression were observed (Figure 3). Thus, low levels of aggression prevailed among children in the first group (Figure 3A), which was 0.5-2.0 times higher than the other two levels (compared to the average level of aggression, $p \leq 0.05$) and 5-8 times higher, respectively ($p \leq 0.001$). Thus, children from the first group are characterized by low aggressiveness. At the same time, hostility to a particular person prevails among different forms of aggression. This parameter is approximately the same in boys and girls. It can be assumed that children choose one person as the outlet for their aggression. Among children in the first group, an impulsive form of aggression that is expressed through demonstrative behaviors prevails. This form of aggression is more than the other two in 2-2.2 times ($p \leq 0.05$) in the first group. In the second group, similar behavioral reactions to children in the first group were observed, namely, the prevalence of impulsive aggression as well as hostility toward a particular person (Figure 3b).

The striking differences are demonstrated by the behavior of children in the third group. First of all, it should be noted that the medium and high levels of aggression here significantly overcome those compared to children in the first and second groups, namely, 1.6 to 2.2 times higher, respectively ($p \leq 0.05$, Figure 3c). Hostility toward a particular person becomes a major behavior,

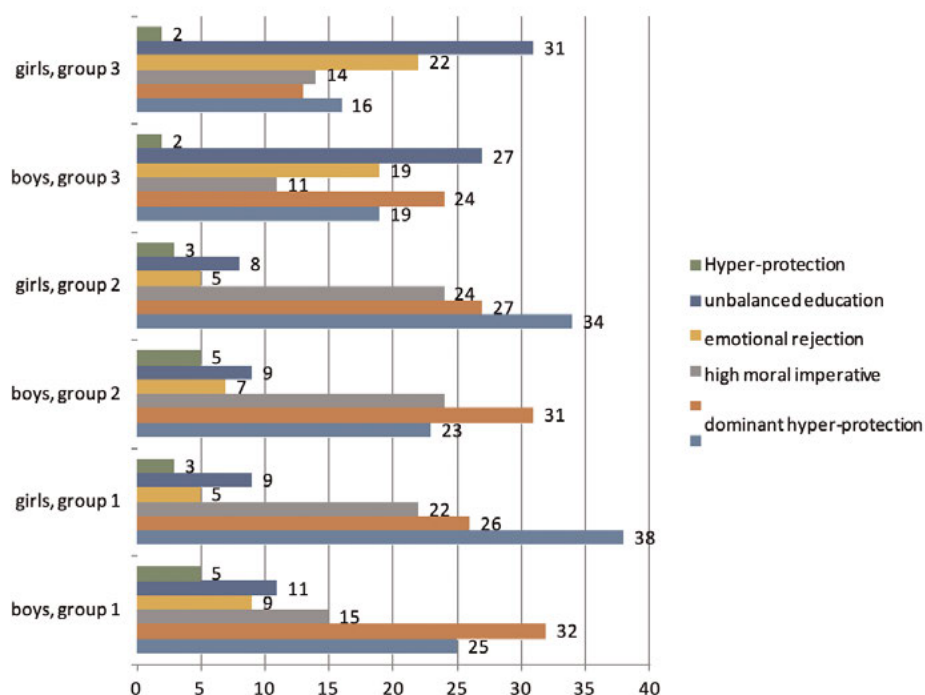


Figure 2. Results of Eidemiller test for parents in all the three groups of children studied

Source: author's own work

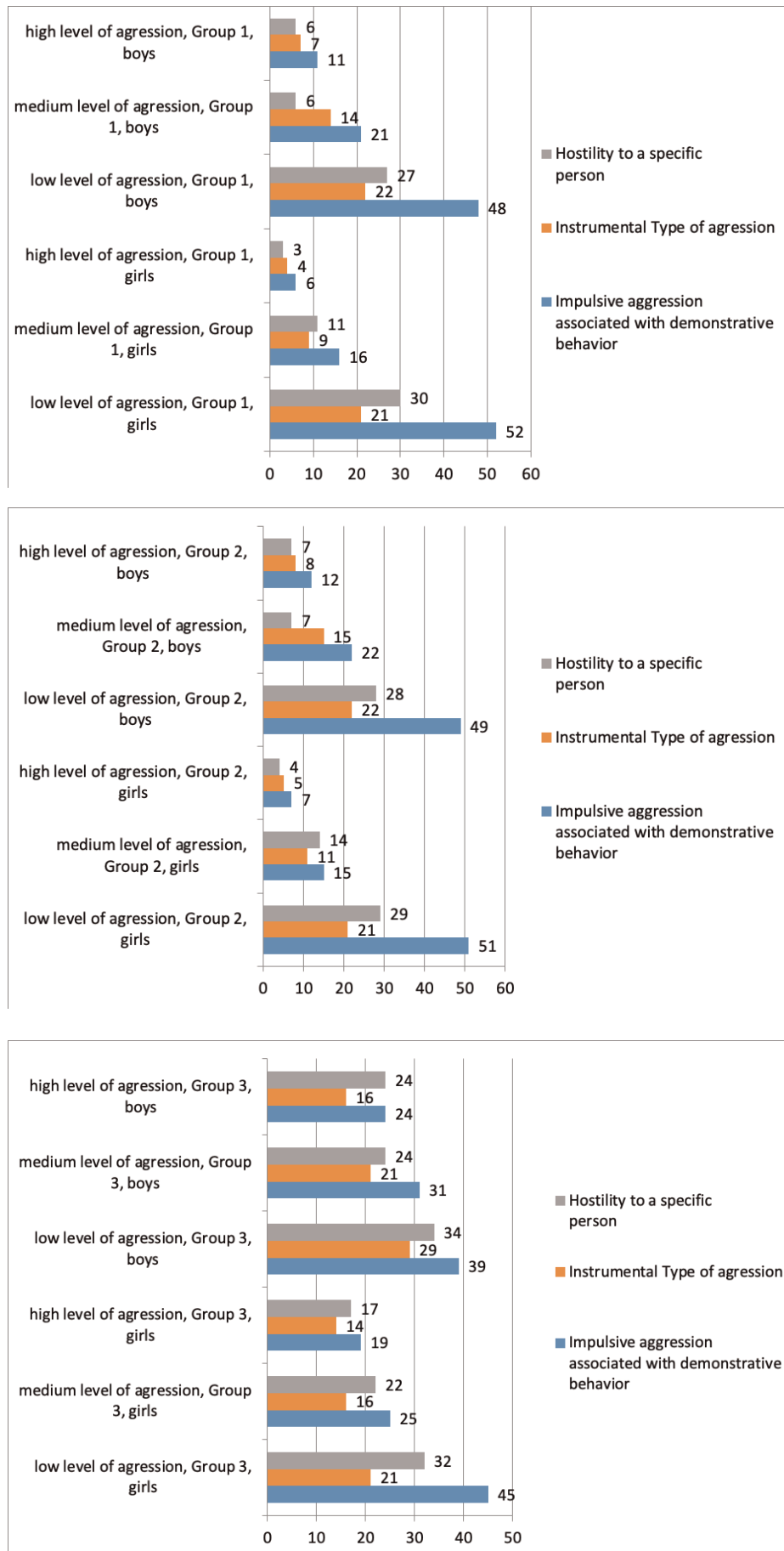


Figure 3. Aggression levels among children in the three groups surveyed.
3a - Group 1, 3b - Group 2, and 3c - Group 3

especially among boys, when this parameter is either equal to or slightly inferior to impulsive aggression.

A relation of significant changes to the response to parenting among children in the third group can be argued.

The links between the factors determining the relationships within the family

Moreover, significant correlations between the considered parameters were found. Thus, the level of social status is directly related to the level of education (correlation 0.81), a high level of aggression is related to belonging to the third group (correlation 0.68), which is characterized by a low level of education and well-being of parents. The family composition has a significant impact on the model of education, the relationship between girls and condoning hyper-protection was 0.69, while between boys and the dominant hyper-protection, this value was 0.57.

For the third group, a direct connection between demonstrative behavior (instrumental aggression) and negative attitudes of children towards one of the family members ($0.71, p \leq 0.05$) was revealed. For children from all groups, there was no significant hostility toward the teacher, but there was aggression toward one individual (correlations for the first, second, and third groups were 0.58, 0.61, and 0.77, respectively). Negative attitude towards parents was correlated with the father (0.64, 0.78 in the first and third groups, respectively), there were no significant correlations with the mother. In the third and first groups, there was a direct connection between instrumental aggression towards siblings (0.65 and 0.84, respectively). Loser syndrome also played a negative role. Thus, a direct connection between belonging to the third group, and frequency of this syndrome amounting to 0.92 was found. Besides, the impulsive form of aggression is associated with high levels of anxiety which is confirmed by the correlation factors of 0.54 in the first group, 0.53 in the second one, and 0.87 in the third one. Loser syndrome formed a negative attitude toward themselves and their abilities among children in the third group, and partially among the other two groups. The correlations between the frequency of failure syndrome in the three groups and the negative self-esteem of the younger children were high and amounted to 0.53, 0.55, and 0.93 for the first, second, and third groups respectively.

Thus, children in the three groups demonstrated different levels of aggression, which is directly related to the quality of education. Child aggression is a response to poor-quality parenting. Apparently, this phenomenon is most often found among children from low-income families and parents with low levels of education.

DISCUSSION

As has been shown in this and other studies, an instrumental form of aggression is quite common among children of primary school age. This form of aggression is not any defense response or a way to attract parents' attention but is rather a norm of behavior (DeI Giudice,

2018). The bullying that has spread in recent years is not as characteristic of younger schoolchildren as it is of teenage children. On the other hand, negative self-esteem is often associated with parental oppression of the child's psyche. Such children tend to throw out the aggression accumulated inside, not in an instrumental form but the form of direct aggression. In the younger children's group, such children tend to become uncommunicative because they are ignored by their peers. It can lead to even greater emotional and psychological exclusion and subsequent marginalization as they grow up (Fergusson, Boden, & Horwood, 2013). It should also be noted that low-income families are often formed by marginalized parent couples when at least one family member has bad habits like alcohol or drug abuse. Therefore, such children are simply given to themselves and do not attract parents' attention. They are brought up on the street. There are cases when children, mostly teenagers, formed street gangs that were engaged in robbery and violence. This phenomenon is common not only in the former Soviet Union countries but even in developed Western countries. The basis for this behavior is parents' education, their attention to the child, and their problems, however far-fetched and petty they may seem to their parents (Flouri, Mavroveli, & Tzavidis, 2010). In the interactions with primary school-age children, the most direct aggression was observed in the third group, which only confirms the assumption of a possible relationship with the level of well-being, parent education, and quality of parenting. Most often, these children would choose a weaker adversary to be the target of violence in advance. Children that are known to be aggressive enough often and regularly were also known to be treated fairly biased by their classmates and teachers (Krishnakumar, Narine, Roopnarine, & Logie, 2014). This is because both peers and teachers expect such children to act antisocially, even if the child is not committing them at the moment. Regularity of comments from teachers and negative attitudes of parents towards a child's possible failure in school contribute to low self-esteem. In the future, this self-esteem can be realized through violence against their peers.

All forms of child aggression have their own characteristics. Thus, for children with a predominance of instrumental-demonstrative forms of aggression, dislike towards their brothers and sisters is typical, which was revealed in the first and third groups. Besides, aggression towards one of the parents (father) was also noted, which was shown in the example of the third group. Such children are reportedly characterized by the need for parental attention as well as recognition. However, since these children usually do not demonstrate obvious success in their studies, the only alternative for them is to attract attention to themselves through instrumental aggression. The instrumental form of aggression is a behavioral act designed to draw attention to the child's person. That is, this form of aggression hides a certain intention. Children of preschool age have not yet learned how to fight or show other forms of aggression, so they use the most appropriate and familiar way to attract the attention of parents or

teachers in kindergarten, i.e., apply instrumental aggression. In school years, instrumental aggression already transforms into other forms directed basically on particular peers, i.e., physical and verbal aggression.

In the case of targeted aggression against a particular person, links with low self-esteem, poor attitude towards the father, and negative attitude towards the place where this pupil receives low grades, i.e., the school (Kwon & Wickrama, 2014), has been identified. The same phenomenon was revealed among children in the third group.

Children from such families need psychological assistance aimed at correcting their self-esteem and developing cognitive skills. Also, the negative correlation between the time spent visiting social networks and playing video games and the quality of schoolchildren's studies is a known fact (Roper, George, Nelson, Yorgason, & Poulsen, 2016). Still, these features are more characteristic of older children, which leaves space for further research. Thus, the results of the study allow concluding that family income is a very important factor, providing more opportunities for the child in his education and leisure. Undoubtedly, it contributes to the development of personality. On the other hand, in the case of parents' authoritarianism, the income factor is leveled, and the main issue among children from the second group (middle class) becomes mutual understanding between parents and paying due attention to a child.

CONCLUSIONS

The level of social status, as well as parental education, has been established to be directly related to the quality of childrearing. While the first group is characterized by authoritarianism from at least one parent in their upbringing, the second group, represented by middle-class families, is characterized by a balanced upbringing of children. At the same time, there are no significant differences between the level of aggressiveness among children in the first and second groups. In the third and first groups, a direct correlation between the frequency of instrumental aggression and negative attitudes towards siblings (0.65 and 0.84, respectively) has been revealed. Loser syndrome in the third group is also significant, implying a direct connection with frequency of this syndrome in the third group (0.92). Moreover, the impulsive form of aggression determines a high level of anxiety: their frequency of occurrence is interconnected and amounts to 0.54 in the first group, 0.53 in the second and 0.87 in the third. Loser syndrome was determined to be the principal reason among children in the third group, and partly from the other two groups of children who formed negative attitudes toward themselves and their abilities, i.e., underestimated self-esteem. The correlations between the frequency of failure syndrome in the three groups and the negative self-esteem of younger children were the highest in the third group (0.93) and the lowest in the first and second groups (0.53 and 0.55 respectively) were observed. Thus, parent education determines many aspects of the psycho-emotional state of junior high school children.

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