

Psychological Approaches Helping Migrant University Students Cope with Depressive Disorders

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Abstract

The relevance of this research problem relates to the fact that adaptation of migrants is recognized by the international community as one of the most important in the world. The migration process is one of the most difficult psychosocial situations. It is associated with the high risk of mental disorders beginning, stress causing and formation of deprivation, isolation, despair and suicidal intentions, this problem is actually scientifically proven. It should be noted that the adaptation of migrant students to the educational conditions of the University is an important stage of socialization. Their professional and personal development takes place in the multicultural educational space.

In this regard, there is a need to create psychological technology that is aimed to diagnostics and adjustment to distress, contributing to overcoming negative experiences and successful adaptation of migrant-students. The purpose of the study was to develop a psychological technology aimed at adjusting and correcting depressive experiences of migrant-students. This technology is presented as a tool for increasing the effectiveness of their adaptation to difficult situations.

Keywords: distress, migrant students, depression, deprivation, psychological approach, training, time perspective

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Introduction

Migration is a complex and controversial phenomenon that is often associated with the loss of values, identity crisis, experience of helplessness and hopelessness, and it is characterized by maladaptation and distress (Berry & Gabay, 2009; Van Bochove, Rusinovic, & Engbersen, 2010). Numerous researches have proved that negative consequences of migration are as follows: lack of life perspectives, self-identity destruction, estrangement and, as a result, the emergence of depressive states (Soldatova, 2002; Faist, 2010, Kuo, 2014). Depression is one of the most frequent mental disorders in migrants, it manifests in mood decrease, fatigue, loss of interest and ability to enjoy previously attracted activities. Along with suicide proneness, there are other negative effects of depression in migrants. First of all, it concerns the decrease in mental activity productivity and academic performance, as well as the breach of relationships with surrounding people. Special attention should be paid to depressive disorders in young migrants as the problem is getting much more widespread and acute within this age group than other ones. The frequency of depressive disorders in young migrants and the severity of their consequences substantiate the relevance of the research into this issue. In this regard, the proposed psychological model for correction and prevention of emotional distress, as well as depressive experiences in migrant students is due to practical necessity to overcome maladaptation.

Psychological results of deprivation and isolation has a specific impact on the range of problems migrant people face with (Soldatova, 2002; Shaygerova, 2002). The main important idea to migration survey is the concept of acculturation stress introduced by Berry (1990). Acculturation stress can be comprehended as mental tension attended by different negative experiences arising in situation of cross-cultural adjustment. There is a assumption that the way of a "cultural shock" has the model of an U-shaped curve and establishes three stages: enthusiasm and high spirits, "up" position; frustration, depression and feeling of confusion ("down" position); feeling of confidence and satisfaction, again "up" position (Stefanenko, 1999). According to Olshansky (2007) idea we can say that "people who have experienced frustrations and possess high claims but deprived of an opportunity to realize them are inclined to radicalism, extremism and, as a result, to terrorism". Consequently, migrations are one of form of extreme impact on the highly frustrated personality. The current concept of Muslim migrants children adjustment does not stay within standard psychology-pedagogical foundation as when an correct and successful type of adaptation is created it is required to take into consideration social agents, personality characteristics and adaptation resources, and to think over hard situations and actions from viewpoint of personality's own inner world. The study subject is of special importance as Muslim migrants families' social and psychological adjustment in the condition of migration sets accultural stress beginning, experience of deprivation and isolation. Frequently the child's unreadiness to adapt in the frame of another confession atmosphere causes the emergence of ethnic hatred and hostility, religionism and extremism in teenagers. These circumstances supports the child's social and psychological problems and feeling of emotional vulnerability and aggravated perception of ethnic difficulties. We can indicate a high prevalence of deviant behavior in Muslim migrants children and teenagers. That means the increasing attention to cross-cultural diagnostics to support Muslim migrants children' adjustment.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The main purpose of this investigation is to develop a psychological technology aimed at correcting depressive experiences in migrant students as a tool for increasing the effectiveness of their adaptation to a difficult life situation.

Literature review

High frequency of depressive and sub-depressive states is evidenced by the results of studies of migrant students' emotional state conducted (Huhlaev, 2005; Makarova & Birman, 2016). These research data indicate a significant excess of permissible emotional distress level in the majority of respondents. Other research works testify to a rather high prevalence of suicidal attempts and intentions among depressed migrants (Soldatova, 2002).

One of the main approaches to the correction and prevention of migrant depression is a cognitive-behavioral approach that has had a significant impact on the development of programs for psychological prevention of depression. This approach is quite well known due to the works of its founders (Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1987). The idea that features of perception and thinking in depressed patients are not only manifestations but also reasons of their disorders makes the foundation of this approach to the treatment and prevention of depression. Obvious features of this kind include Beck's cognitive triad of depressive symptoms: negative self-images, negative evaluation of the world and external events, and negative future (Beck et al., 1987). Irrational cognitions are revealed in depressive patients at a deeper level - inadequate, unproductive patterns, beliefs and attitudes. Along with irrational cognitions, a number of cognitive correlates of depression include a certain style of explaining positive and negative events (attributive style). Investigations conducted by Seligman (2007) showed that a pessimistic attributive style is a significant risk factor for depression emergence in children and adults when they face serious life difficulties. In the context of the foregoing, the definition of "time perspective" should be specified. According to Zimbardo & Boyd (2008), temporal perspective is the main aspect in the construction of psychological time that arises from cognitive processes dividing person's life experience into time frames of the past, present or future. Since migration intentions and settings serve as regulators of complex migration behavior facing the future though based on past experience and current circumstances, it is logical to assume that they are in a certain way connected with the person's time perspective which, by Lewin's (2000) definition, means the influence of person's representations of the past and future on his/her behavior in the present.

Methodology

The leading diagnostic methods were the symptomatic questionnaire SCL-90, The Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory, Beck Depression Inventory, these methods allowed to indicate the level of distress and deprivation in migrant-students.

In this study, a specially developed training program was used for depressive experiences adjustment. At the first stage of this study, an assessment of the risk of occurrence of depressive experiences among migrant-students was carried out. The comprehensive phased psychological diagnostics aimed at identifying negative factors of "depression" risk groups. The following criteria were identified: the level of distress, the signs of depression, the preferred strategy of adaptation, the identification of "psychological crisis state" risk groups in migrant-students.

At the second stage of the study, in accordance with obtained data, the training program was implemented. The specifics and depth of the distress experience, characteristics and problems of migrants were taken into account. Psychological training is aimed at the formation of a positive identity and psychological stability. It has been established that the main criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of the presented psychological technology are the positive changes in adaptation strategies and a decrease in the level of distress in migrant students. It is shown that the applied psychological technology allows reducing

the intensity of the experienced distress, forms stress resistance and helps to select effective coping strategies.

The research work was carried out in higher educational institutions of the city of Kazan. Diagnostic results of 100 male and female migrant university students having the same experience of migration (from 1 to 2 years) made up the empirical base of the study.

In the first stage of the study, risk assessment of depressive experiences emergence in migrant students was carried out; it represents a comprehensive phased psychological diagnosis to identify negative factors of "depressive" risk groups. The psycho-diagnostic package worked out in accordance with the goals is based on the following criteria: identification of the distress level, manifestation of depression features, preferred adaptation strategy, singling out groups of "risk" comprising people from migrant students being in acute crisis state.

In the second stage of the study, a training program was implemented in compliance with the data obtained; it embraces the specificity and depth of distress experienced as well as peculiarities and problems of migrants as a social group. Psychological training promotes the formation of cognitive skills and abilities, a positive identity and psychological stability.

Results

The technology designed to correct depressive experiences in migrant university students includes two blocks: diagnostic and psycho-corrective. In the first stage, people of the so-called risk groups were identified in the respondents' group; they had the greatest deviations from the norm according to the following indicators: scales of the SCL-90-R check list - interpersonal sensitivity associated with the sense of personal inferiority, low value, especially in comparison with others, self-condemnation, anxiety, discomfort in the process of interpersonal interaction; these manifestations were identified in 34.9% of respondents; 42.2% of respondents showed phobic anxiety, persistent fear response to certain people and situations leading to avoidant behavior; 37.2% of respondents revealed paranoia hostility and suspicion; somatization, complaints and headaches were identified in 27.9% of respondents. 41.6% of people had values higher than norm on the scale of obsession-compulsion. A group of respondents with mild and moderate degrees of depressive experiences on the Beck scale was also specified. Analysis of the data obtained using the symptomatic check list SCL-90-R showed significant deviations on the scales of interpersonal sensitivity, phobic anxiety and paranoia which can be explained by migrant's distress. This group of respondents is characterized by: suspiciousness, avoiding behavior, conviction that in public places or during studies the respondents "notice special" views turned on them, see how people laugh at them, discuss their appearance; they are sure that others are aware of their migrant status. Significant relationships were identified between paranoia scales, interpersonal sensitivity, and moderately manifested depression on the Beck scale ($p < 0.05$). It was reliably proved that respondents' high indices on the scale of interpersonal sensitivity and phobic anxiety corresponded to a displayed level of depression (average score -24) on the Beck scale of depression ($p < 0.05$). Analysis of results obtained using the Beck scale testified that significant differences between groups were received on items reflecting personal frustration degree and asthenia ($p < 0.05$). Special mention should be made about a reliable relation between the sense of meaninglessness of existence and pessimistic view of the future (hopelessness) within the frame of response to the key question of the Beck hopelessness scale "My future seems bleak to me". Respondents with severe depressive symptoms focused on past events that indicated a low degree of eventfulness and life realization in the present; while respondents with mild depression were pessimistic about their future

and chose the negative option out of a variety of future variants, the respondents with moderately severe depression showed the impossibility to forecast at least some suppositional version of the future perspective ("There is no future"). Focus on past events and complexity in anticipation of future was an important unfavorable diagnostic marker testifying to the depth of distress. It was identified that respondents with moderate severity of depressive experiences had tendency to consider past events as especially significant ones, and at the same time they displayed inability to predict the future ($p < 0.05$). A specific feature of these respondents was the manifestation of pessimism, negative assessment of the present with a positive attitude towards the past.

Respondents (34,7%) with anxiety (ANX), hostility (HOS), phobic anxiety (PHOB), paranoid tendencies (PAR) indicates indisposition to let in their "Self", inconsistency in social situations, division of the world on "ours" and "others" and a high level of social apartness; respondents demonstrated that they are ready neither privately nor socially contact with people of another faith and nationality.

Significant differences were found in both groups participants regard to their past, present and future. They (27,1% of respondents of the first group and 44,3% of the second group) described their past giving it positiveness.

According to Beck's cognitive theory of depression, depressed people are characterized by the so-called depressive triad: a negative attitude towards oneself, own future and current experience (Beck et al., 1987). Therefore, we assumed that beliefs about the world, self and relationship between "I" and the world should have a negative relationship with depressive symptoms manifestation. Revealed correlations testify that negative beliefs about the world and self are characteristic for people with a high level of depressive symptoms manifestation.

Further in the second stage, after obtained diagnostic data were analyzed, a correctional training was held aimed to identify an attributive style that could allow us to realize and change a usual way of thinking about causes of events, to determine the degree of person's faith in success and perseverance in difficult situations, and to form skills of assertive behavior, overcoming of negative thoughts, analysis of own expectations. Cognitive-behavioral training was followed by the diagnostics to test the effectiveness of this program.

Analysis of the program effectiveness data evidenced in favor of the fact that after training a statistically significant decrease in symptoms of depression was observed.

Discussions

The obtained data associates with data in other studies – a high level of stress load in migrants and interrelation between the level of stress, depression and alexithymia (Kotelnikova, 2006, Klygina, 2004). Migrants' adjustment is linked with the level of post-traumatic stress and pattern of tolerance; accordingly, distress and negative expectations concerning any contacts with other people, irrational reactions of fear lead to isolated lifestyle. It is found that maladjustment positively linked with frustration and deprivation (Palagina, 2007; Masoud, 2005). These results show that when the migrant is not able to adjust to a new ethnic environment they experience negative transformation in personality. Their psychological state changes, physical health worsens, many social attitudes decay, their view of the world and people transforms. Such transformation leads to various consequences: from separatism and ethnic nihilism to extreme fanaticism and nationalism where the expressed negative image of ethnos is formed, and the individual behavior follows this image (Palagina, 2007).

Analysis of investigatoin (Khoshaba & Maddi, 1999) on the problem of personality's adjustment

during crisis periods of life determined that actions of disadaptation mechanisms are clear, and they show the problem of breaking down stereotypes that is general for solution crisis and change of values system.

The research involving children and teenagers aged between 7-13 years conducted by Oppenheimer (2010) shows that higher cognitive complexity differs the image of "enemy" in senior children from that in younger children. These results determine the age dynamics of cognitive complexity development of interpersonal understanding and identification, an attitude to see the world through the eyes of another.

In this study we follow Erikson's (1994) idea that socialization and acculturation have the same criteria of success. Many issues devoted to migrants' adjustment skills in connection with the research of the personality constructive beginning are conducted within the context of humanistic concept in psychology and education.

The most important direction of research is to study the ways migrants cope with problems and difficulties in life circumstances, and what features and characteristics support them to overcome stress and frustration (Konstantinov, 2004; Neykhts, 2006). Currently, researchers begin to move to new paradigm connected with the understanding of difficult situations and human's actions in them from view of their own inner world. Such personal reality is focused on their life space relying on their own system of important values that act as a peculiar system of coordinates, in relation to which external events are interpreted (Antsyferova, 1994). It was established that anticipating as an ability to reflect orders of the environment in the structure of previous experience, to form strategy of behavior predicting the course of situations is a state of successful adjustment (Mendelevich, 2003; Sergienko, 1997). Mendelevich (2003) presented the idea which considers neurozogenesis as a result of personality's anticipating inability to the course of circumstances and own behavior in frustrating and stressful situations caused by anticipatory insolvency of "the potential neurotic". It is found that any individual's interaction with the world suggests interrelation of the past and the future through the present; the main purpose of activity includes implicitly the assumption of a result integrated through the choice of an correct strategy of interaction process (Mendelevich, 2003). Zimbardo's "a balanced temporary orientation" means a psychological structure which allows flexible switching between the past, future and present according to requirements of life, personal and social resources. Personal behavior with such temporary orientation will be given by a balancing between contents of previous experience, representation of the present and future consequences. This temporary orientation is psychologically and physically healthier for personality functioning in the society (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008).

Despite of the different approaches to the analysis of migrants' adjustment potential, an significant point of this study is the comparative analysis of temporary prospect assessment, anticipating of the future, psychosocial and emotional state of Muslim migrants.

Conclusion

The study revealed that a systematic integrated approach is a necessary condition for the success of psychological technology implementation in overcoming distress. The essence of psychological technology implementation is presented in diagnostic and training models combining. Psychological technology aimed at overcoming depressive experiences of students-migrants and personality resources development. Adequate psychodiagnostic tools gives an objective assessment of effectiveness and impact of psychological training on the personal dynamics in migrant-students. The results of psychological training application clearly illustrate significant differences in the level of distress in migrant-students who

participated in pre-training and post-training surveys.

The complex psychological technology can be used as a tool to test the effectiveness of the influence of special psychological programs on the success in overcoming problems and facilitating the adaptation of migrant students in educational institutions.

These results and technology implementation can be used in the activities of managers of different levels in the education system, social workers, and practical psychologists in the education system.

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