

Experience of Emotional and Physical Violence and Psychological Boundaries of Personality of Psychology Students

Experiencia de violencia emocional y física y límites psicológicos de la personalidad de los estudiantes de Psicología

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ABSTRACT:

The research objective was to study the specifics of the markers of the psychological boundaries of personality of psychology students: codependence, control, sovereignty of the psychological space, as well as the peculiarities of psychological defense mechanisms of personality, depending on the experience of violence. The following diagnostic tools have been used in the study: ICAST-R which is a retrospective questionnaire for studying the experience of violence in children and adolescents aged 11-18; a coping-test by R. Lazarus and S. Folkman; a questionnaire "Sovereignty of the Psychological Space" by S.K. Nartova-Bochaver; a questionnaire "Testing Personal Qualities for Codependence" by B. Weinhold and D. Weinhold; a questionnaire "Locus of Control" by J. Rotter. A posteriori criteria, Kruskal-Wallis H-criterion, the correlation and factor analysis, and IBM SPSS Statistics 23 Program have been used to verify the findings. Statistically significant positive relations of

RESUMEN:

El objetivo de la investigación fue estudiar las especificidades de los marcadores de los límites psicológicos de la personalidad de los estudiantes de Psicología: la codependencia, el control, la soberanía del espacio psicológico, así como las peculiaridades de la defensa psicológica mecanismos de personalidad, dependiendo de la experiencia de la violencia. En el estudio se han utilizado las siguientes herramientas diagnósticas: iCast-R que es un cuestionario retrospectivo para el estudio de la experiencia de la violencia en niños y adolescentes de 11-18 años; una prueba de afrontamiento de R. Lazarus y s. Folkman; un cuestionario "soberanía del espacio psicológico" por S.K. Nartova-Bochaver; un cuestionario "probando las cualidades personales para la codependencia" por b. Weinhold y d. Weinhold; un cuestionario "locus of control" de J. pudrier. Se han utilizado un criterio de posteriori, el criterio H de Kruskal-Wallis, el análisis de correlación y factores e IBM SPSS Statistics 23 Program

codependence, control, internality, and sovereignty of the psychological space with the experience of physical and emotional violence in psychology students have been revealed in the empirical study. The experience of violence stipulates the high level, complexity and inconsistency of the structure of psychological defense mechanisms of personality, among which the search for social support loses its immediacy and is associated with confrontation (emotional violence); planning (physical violence); escape (physical and emotional violence).

Keywords: violence, codependence, control, internality, sovereignty of the psychological space, psychological defense mechanisms, psychology students.

para verificar los hallazgos. Las relaciones positivas estadísticamente significativas de la codependencia, el control, la internalidad y la soberanía del espacio psicológico con la experiencia de la violencia física y emocional en los estudiantes de psicología han sido reveladas en el estudio empírico. La experiencia de la violencia estipula el alto nivel, la complejidad y la incoherencia de la estructura de los mecanismos de defensa psicológica de la personalidad, entre los que la búsqueda de apoyo social pierde su inmediatez y se asocia a la confrontación (violencia emocional); Planificación (violencia física); escape (violencia física y emocional).

Palabras clave: violencia, codependencia, control, internalidad, soberanía del espacio psicológico, mecanismos de defensa psicológica, estudiantes de psicología.

1. Introduction

Violence is becoming worldwide in modern society; it becomes a characteristic of social life and relationships. Cruelty is evident in family life and becomes a means of family and public education. Researchers state a significant increase in violence and cruelty against children in the family interaction (Sanchez, 2012; Ilyina, 1998; Volkova, 2011; Irfan, & Cowburn, 2004; Fontes, 2002); in children and adolescent communities (Gladden *et al.*, 2014; Volkova, 2016).

The problem of delayed violence effects on personal development in adulthood is considered by researchers in the context of the etiology of personality disorders (Erozkan, 2015; Glaser, 2002; Herman *et al.*, 1986); the post-traumatic stress disorder, addictive and delinquent behavior (Meyers *et al.*, 2016); key relationships of the entire life cycle (Shelley, 2010; Fletcher, & Schurer, 2017).

The categories of emotional (psychological) and physical violence that are viewed as emotional abuse and negligence towards a child and are difficult to recognize and promptly determine due to the absence of pronounced effects, are primarily distinguished in the problem of violence experienced by a child and a teenager (Shelley, 2010; Glaser, 2002). Physical violence is defined as causing harm to a child through a physical trauma (for example, punching, kicking, beating, etc.). Physical violence is often used as a disciplinary method, it may not have significant physical effects, for example, slapping and pulling, but at the same time, it has delayed psychological effects on the personal development (Sanchez, 2012).

The violence experienced in childhood and adolescence, which had no pronounced effects (physical trauma and clinical disorders), is also manifested in the hidden personality deformations of a sufficiently adapted adult (Fletcher, & Schurer, 2017). We think that the violence experienced in childhood, which had no pronounced and legally documented effects, primarily lays the mechanism of violation of the psychological boundaries of personality. We agree with the approach of S.K. Nartova-Bochaver, who links the effects of physical and psychological violence with disrespect and violation of the sovereignty of physical and psychological boundaries of personality (Nartova-Bochaver, 2008).

Researchers associate the understanding of the psychological boundaries of personality with the privacy as a regulatory process of control of openness-closedness and selectivity of a person in interpersonal relationships (Altman, 1975; Westin, 1967); as a level of the ability of a person to maintain authenticity and resist external pressure (Rapoport, 1973); as freedom of choice and control over one's own behavior (Nartova-Bochaver, 2008). The features of personality control, sovereignty of the psychological space of personality, codependence of personality in relations with others, the profile of psychological defense mechanisms as the ways of responding to the violation of personal boundaries are considered as the markers of the state of psychological boundaries of personality. The experience of violence reduces internality (Ajake *et al.*, 2013; Fay, 2015); enhances codependence and victimization (Fletcher, & Schurer, 2017; Subby, &

Friel, 1984; Orr, 1991; Meyers *et al.*, 2016; Karpman, 1968; Katbe, 2012); reduces the effectiveness of coping strategies in students and adults (Elsayed, & Elyas, 2014; Crowley, 2003; Dumont, & Provost, 1999; Sternberg *et al.*, 2006; Antsyferova, 1994).

Thus, the children and adolescent experience of violence creates deferred developmental risks in a more mature age: it violates the sovereignty of physical and psychological boundaries of personality, reduces the quality of self-control and self-regulation, updates ineffective psychological defense mechanisms, and increases the likelihood of development of codependence and victimization. The student age is sensitive to the conscious processing of the psycho-traumatic experience of personality, the enrichment of consciousness with transformative coping strategies; it creates conditions for the timely systematic prevention of personal deformities in future psychologists within the psychological service of a higher education institution.

2. Methods

It seems relevant to study the specific influence of the variants of conjugation of physical and emotional violence on the state of psychological boundaries of personality in adolescence. We have assumed that the experience of violence is reflected in the following features of the markers of psychological boundaries of personality: codependence, control and its internality, sovereignty of the psychological space and uniqueness of psychological defense mechanisms of personality.

ICAST-R, a retrospective questionnaire for studying the experience of violence in children and adolescents aged 11-18 in the modification of E.N. Volkova and O.M. Isaeva (Dunne *et al.*, 2009); a coping test by R. Lazarus and S. Folkman adapted by T.L. Kryukova, E.V. Kuftyak, and M.S. Zamyshlyeva; a questionnaire "Sovereignty of the Psychological Space" by S.K. Nartova-Bochaver (Nartova-Bochaver, 2008); a questionnaire "Testing Personal Qualities for Codependence" by B. Weinhold and D. Weinhold; a questionnaire "Locus of Control" by J. Rotter adapted by E.F. Bazhin, S.A. Golykina, and A.M. Etkind have been used in the research.

The factors of the external invalidity of the study were controlled by stratified random selection, respondents' false memories – by the anonymity of the survey. In our study, we did not study the facts of sexual violence, to the memories of which a concept of a false memory syndrome is often applied (Frude, 1998). Two sections of the ICAST-R questionnaire have been used: section 4 (physical violence: at home and at school) and section 5 (psychological violence: at home and at school).

3. Results

Psychology students from Nizhny Novgorod universities took part in this research. The age of research subjects was 17-18 years old. The total sample of the subjects included 100 first- and second-year full-time students. There were 46 male and 54 female students. To determine the samples studied, we focused on the markers of emotional (psychological) and physical violence, as well as on their combination in the respondents.

The following tasks were set: to study the specifics of the distribution of the categories of violence experienced by students; to study the markers of the state of boundaries of the psychological space of students' personality: codependence, internality, self-control, sovereignty; to examine the structure of students' psychological defense mechanisms and the features of their conjugation with the markers of the state of psychological boundaries, depending on the category of violence experienced.

Based on the results obtained by means of the ICAST-R retrospective questionnaire, the subjects were divided into four samples: students with no experience of violence; students with the experience of physical violence; students with the experience of emotional violence; students with a combination of experience of physical and emotional violence in childhood and adolescence.

The distribution of the types of the experience of violence is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Distribution of categories of experience of violence

Categories of experience of violence	Number of subjects	Percentage
Lack of experience of violence	34	34.0
Experience of physical violence	11	11.0
Experience of emotional violence	17	17.0
Experience of physical and emotional violence	38	38.0
Total number	100	100

Table 1 showed that about a third of students did not experience violence (34.0%); 11% of respondents told about the experience of physical violence; 17.0% of students experienced emotional violence; responses containing markers of the combination of physical and psychological violence were given by more than a third of students (38.0%).

The distribution of the types of violence experienced in childhood among male and female students is presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Distribution of types (categories) of violence experienced by male and female students

Category of experience	Male students		Female students	
	Number of respondents	Percentage	Number of respondents	Percentage
Lack of experience of violence	11	23.9	23	42.4
Experience of physical violence	9	19.6	2	4.3
Experience of emotional violence	0	0	17	31.2
Experience of physical and emotional violence	26	56.5	12	22.1
Total number	46	100	54	100

Table 2 showed that the lack of experience of violence was more typical of female students (42.4%) than of male students (23.9%). At the same time, the experience of physical violence

was more typical of male students (19.6%), while this experience was very rare among female students (4.3%). The experience of emotional violence was noted by a third of female students (31.2%) and did not occur in case of male students. More than half of male students (56.5%) and only one fifth of female students (22.1%) indicated a combination of experience of physical and emotional violence.

Then we were interested in the markers of the state of boundaries of the psychological space of personality: codependence, internality, self-control, sovereignty of the psychological space (sovereignty), as well as the students' psychological defense mechanisms, depending on the type of experience of violence (Table 3).

Table 3
Markers of the state of boundaries of the psychological space of students' personality, depending on the experience of violence (in mean values)

Markers of the state of boundaries of the psychological space and psychological defense mechanisms of personality	No experience of violence		Experience of physical violence		Experience of emotional violence		Combined experience of violence	
	Mean value	St. dev.	Mean value	St. dev.	Mean value	St. dev.	Mean value	St. dev.
Codependence	40.2	6.0	39.0	6.0	43.6	7.3	47.0	7.7
Internality	4.6	1.7	6.3	2.4	5.5	2.4	5.3	1.8
Self-control	50.3	13.1	64.1	12.7	52.0	17.4	58.8	13.9
Sovereignty of the psychological space	33.3	25.5	36.5	16.1	29.6	19.3	27.8	21.4
Search for support	58.0	15.5	52.5	22.9	55.2	13.3	67.6	15.1
Responsibility	56.6	18.0	59.6	26.6	57.2	18.4	67.7	20.5
Planning	58.7	14.6	71.1	9.7	60.2	16.6	63.7	13.5
Positive reassessment	52.5	15.7	69.3	11.5	52.7	14.5	58.5	20.2
Confrontation	48.9	11.7	58.2	9.8	49.2	15.1	54.2	11.4
Distancing	42.1	13.0	40.5	13.5	44.6	15.9	51.4	17.3
Escape	49.7	15.1	40.2	18.9	46.6	20.7	56.5	17.8

As follows from Table 3, the highest codependence in relationships was typical of students with the experience combining physical and psychological violence (47.0). A posteriori comparison criteria showed statistically significant differences between this sample and the sample with no experience of violence (the mean difference was 6.833, $p < 0.004$), as well as the sample with experience of physical violence (the mean difference was 8.000, $p < 0.004$). Besides, the comparison of samples with the use of the Kruskal-Wallis H-criterion showed significant

differences in codependence (11.305, $p < 0.01$).

Students with no experience of violence had the lowest level of internality (4.6), students with the experience of physical violence had the highest level of internality (6.3); the differences were manifested at the tendency level.

Students with the experience of violence had higher mean values of self-control in general. The respondents, who experienced physical violence, had the highest mean value of self-control (64.1), while students with no experience of violence had the lowest values (50.3). A posteriori comparison criteria showed statistically significant differences between this sample and the sample with no experience of violence (the mean difference was 13.833, $p < 0.044$).

Sovereignty indicators were the highest among students, who experienced physical violence (36.5), as well as among students with no experience of violence (33.3). The lowest mean values of sovereignty were observed among students with a combination of experience of physical and emotional violence (27.8), as well as with the experience of emotional violence (29.6); the differences were manifested at the tendency level.

In complicated and conflicting life situations, students of the studied samples had the expressed peculiar tendencies to behave in a certain way in order to indicate their boundaries.

The most typical and expressed psychological defense mechanisms used by students with the experience of both physical and emotional violence in difficult life situations, both within the sample and in comparison with other samples, were, on the one hand, the search for support (67.6) and responsibility (67.7), and, on the other hand, expressed distancing (51.4) and escape (56.5). Moreover, a posteriori comparison criteria showed statistically significant differences between this sample and the sample with the experience of physical violence (the mean difference was 15.100, $p < 0.047$), as well as with the sample, where students had the experience of emotional violence (the mean difference was 12.377, $p < 0.05$).

Taking into account the highest level of codependence of students of this sample (47.0) and the lowest sovereignty of the psychological space (27.8), this position in defending personal boundaries could be defined as ambivalent and unstable, subject to external pressure and manipulations. If privacy was considered as a regulatory process of control of openness-closedness and selectivity of a person in interpersonal relationships (Altman, 1975), then the personal boundaries of this group of subjects could be defined as the most permeable.

Students with the experience of physical violence in difficult life situations resorted to planning (71.1), positive reassessment (69.3) and confrontation (58.2) more often than other categories of subjects. At the same time, they searched for support least often (52.5). Besides, they resorted to the positive reassessment statistically significantly more often than the students with no experience of physical violence (the mean difference was 16.833, $p < 0.042$).

Distancing (40.5) and escape (40.2) were not characteristic of them in comparison with other samples. A posteriori comparison criteria showed statistically significant differences between this sample and the sample with the combined experience of violence (the mean difference was 16.333, $p < 0.05$). If we took into account the maximum mean value of sovereignty of the psychological space (36.5) and internality (6.3), students with the experience of physical violence showed the most expressed stability, rationality, independence and aggressiveness in defending their boundaries, resistance to external pressure. At the same time, as for the process of control of openness-closedness of boundaries and selectivity of a person in interpersonal relations (Altman, 1975), this position in interpersonal relations could be defined as rigid, inflexible, while personal boundaries could be defined as the most closed.

As follows from Table 3, the profile of personal characteristics of students with no experience of violence was the smoothest, harmonious and close to the standard average ones by methods. Search for support (58.0), responsibility (56.6), planning (58.7) dominated among less than most students with the experience of violence; confrontation (48.9) and distancing (42.1) were expressed. At the same time, there was a similarity with the profile of students, who experienced emotional violence; no statistical differences were found for any indicator. On the

other hand, they were more codependent, more internal, they had lower sovereignty of the psychological space, they were more distanced and less likely to search for support in complicated interpersonal situations, relationships and conflicts. In general, the position of students with no experience of violence could be defined as more open and oriented toward social support.

The study of the coherence of psychological defense mechanisms depending on the category of violence by using the factor analysis (a method of analysis of principal components and Varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization) made it possible to reveal the following.

The students with no experience of violence were characterized by three factors of conjugation of psychological defense mechanisms in the process of responding to complicated situations of interpersonal interaction and conflicts. The first factor combined confrontation (0.914), distance (0.809), escape (0.706) and responsibility (0.629). The second factor included planning (0.934) and positive reassessment (0.827). The third factor, search for support (0.924), was considered as an independent behavior strategy. Such a reaction of the protection of personal boundaries could be defined as active and direct, constructive and open, based on trust.

Students with the experience of emotional violence were characterized by the following three factors of contingency of psychological defense mechanisms. The first factor combined such forms of behavior as planning (0.911), positive reassessment (0.896) and responsibility (0.675); the second factor included distancing (0.899), escape (0.888) and responsibility (0.617); the third factor included the search for support (0.898) and confrontation (0.603). Some inconsistency and discrepancy were observed in the content of these strategies: responsibility was associated with distancing and escape; the search for support was combined with defending one's own boundaries. At the same time, the positive reassessment of the situation included behavior planning; a similar strategy was seen among students with no experience of violence.

Students with the experience of physical violence were characterized by three factors of contingency of psychological defense mechanisms. The first factor combined such forms of behavior as positive reassessment (0.968), distancing (0.832), confrontation (0.576) and responsibility (0.629). The second factor included escape (0.949) and responsibility (0.846). The third factor included planning (0.854) and search for support (0.710). The rationalization of the situation, the reduction of distance as a readiness to repel physical aggression and confrontation were primarily observed in this response of the protection of personal boundaries.

Students with the experience of combined violence were distinguished by the following three factors of contingency of psychological defense mechanisms. The first factor combined such forms of behavior as positive reassessment (0.892), responsibility (0.848) and distancing (0.526); the second factor consisted of confrontation (0.807), responsibility (0.617), distancing (0.690), and planning (0.595); the third factor included search for support (0.894) and escape (0.787). Here we see the intensification of distancing (it is included in the first two factors), even search for support is accompanied by escape as a form of distancing.

Thus, in the defensive behavior of students with the experience of violence the search for support is associated with confrontation (emotional violence); with planning (physical violence); with escape (physical and emotional violence). Students with no experience of violence directly search for support, so their personal boundaries are more open and manageable. The Kraskel-Wallis H-criterion in case of a grouping variable of the experience of violence showed statistically significant differences between the samples exactly in terms of the support search parameter (7.547, $p < 0.05$).

It is seen that students with no experience of psychological violence have the lowest indicators of psychological defense, as well as a simple and open structure of defensive behavior.

4. Discussion

The data obtained (Table 1) showed that two-thirds of psychology students had experienced

violence in the process of schooling, only one third of students did not indicate the markers of the experience of violence. Besides, the most traumatic experience, the experience of combined physical and emotional violence, occurred more frequently (38%).

The studies provided the data of the connection between physical and emotional violence, which was $r = 0.499$, $p < 0.05$ (Sanchez, 2012). These data correlated with the data we obtained, although the level of connectivity of physical and emotional violence was slightly lower in our sample.

Nevertheless, for a future psychologist such an experience cannot but affect the personal development deformations. Russian psychology bachelors attend personal growth trainings and workshops already since the first year of study. It is important that they also include the work both on overcoming the experience of violence and on regulating the psychological boundaries of personality.

In addition, in the Russian psychological practice, most experts are women. Since in the women's sample 57.6% of women have experienced violence, 31.2% of them have had the experience of emotional violence (Table 2); therefore, it is especially important to pay attention to the sovereignty of the psychological space in the process of communication with a client.

The study of markers of the state of boundaries of the psychological space of personality (codependence, internality, self-control, sovereignty) made it possible to reveal their statistical dependence on the category of students' experience of violence (Table 3).

The most distinct differences between the samples, depending on the experience of violence, were observed as for codependence ($p < 0.01$). The highest codependence in relationships was typical for students with the experience of combined physical and psychological violence.

The connection between the experience of violence and internality obtained in our study is ambiguous. Students with no experience of violence had the lowest level of internality; students with the experience of physical violence had the highest level of internality. Differences in internality are observed at the tendency level.

The studies have shown that a significantly larger proportion of senior school children with a high level of abuse have the external localization of control or externality (Ajake *et al.*, 2013). As for samples of psychology students, a reverse trend has been observed in our study: the experience of violence is more closely related to the internality of personality ($p < 0.02$), which requires the conduct of clarifying research.

Mean values of self-control were higher among students who experienced violence. Students with the experience of violence had the highest mean values of self-control, students with no experience of violence had the lowest values with the significance of differences $p < 0.044$. In this case, the tension of control of openness-closedness of personal boundaries was observed (Altman, 1975; Westin, 1967).

People with the experience of physical violence, as well as students with no experience of violence, had the highest indicators of sovereignty of the psychological space of personality; the differences were manifested at the tendency level.

For a future psychologist the markers of the psychological boundaries of personality are tools for building relationships between a client and a psychologist. The ability to be open, observe and respect sovereignty, calm control and internality are the psychologist's professional and personal qualities, the development of which, as is seen, depends on the experience of violence. It is important to consider this dependence in the practice of working with students both in training and clinical practice.

Considering psychological defense mechanisms as a level of a person's ability to resist external pressure (Rapoport, 1973), we observed the highest mean values of psychological defense mechanisms among students, who experienced the combined violence, both constructive (search for support, responsibility, planning) and destructive ones (distancing, escape); differences with other samples appeared at the confidence level $p < 0.05$.

Students with the experience of physical violence had the most expressed rational psychological defense mechanisms: planning, positive reassessment and confrontation, while they rarely searched for support.

Planning, responsibility and search for support dominated among students with the experience of emotional violence, confrontation and distancing were expressed among less than most students with the experience of violence; search for support, responsibility and planning also dominated among students with no experience of violence, confrontation and distancing were expressed among less than most students with the experience of violence.

The search for support was the key psychological defense mechanism, which caused statistically significant differences in the studied samples ($p < 0.05$). For students with no experience of violence, the search for support was a direct reaction to the difficulties of interaction. The factor analysis of the structure of psychological defense mechanisms showed that in the defensive behavior of students with the experience of violence the search for support was connected with confrontation (emotional violence); planning (physical violence); escape (physical and emotional violence).

5. Conclusion

Thus, our study aimed at studying the indicators of the state of psychological boundaries of personality and the ways of their regulation, depending on the type of violence experienced by psychology students, allowed confirming the hypothesis on the main points.

About one third of psychology students had no experience of violence, one third of students had experienced physical or emotional violence, and more than one third of students had the experience of combined violence. Moreover, the experience of combined physical and emotional violence, as well as physical violence, was the most characteristic of male respondents, while the lack of experience of violence and emotional violence was characteristic of female respondents.

The experience of violence reveals the dependence of the markers of boundaries of the psychological space on the category of violence experienced. Thus, the experience of physical violence exacerbates self-control, increases a tendency to super-sovereignty; the combined experience of violence causes the increased codependence.

In general, the markers of psychological boundaries of personality and the ways of psychological defense show the influence of the experience of violence on the degree of their openness-closedness and psychological tension related to the nature of regulation, the structure and constructiveness of psychological defense mechanisms in situations of social interaction.

Students with no experience of violence have the most open, manageable and the least tense psychological boundaries: high sovereignty and low codependence related to the responsibility in relationships and the direct orientation to social support, defense of sovereignty is carried out through simple and constructive defensive behavior strategies.

Students with the experience of emotional violence do not show significant differences with the sample of students with no experience of violence. However, they differ in the contradictory structure of interrelations of the studied properties. In interrelations there are negative links of codependence with the search for support, internality and sovereignty with responsibility; the search for support is associated with the escape in complicated interaction situations. Taking into account rather low sovereignty, this allows assuming the weakness and contradictory nature of the regulation of the psychological boundaries of personality.

Students with the experience of physical violence have the most closed psychological boundaries (the highest values of sovereignty, self-control, internality) and defend their sovereignty through control, rationalization and confrontation, reducing the distance, considering and limiting the opportunities of social support.

Students with the combined experience of physical and emotional violence have the most strenuous and permeable/diffuse psychological boundaries (the highest codependence, the lowest sovereignty and the highest need for social support) and defend their right to sovereignty using conflicting strategies: internality and self-control are related to distancing, the search for support – to the escape.

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