ETHNO-CULTURAL HEALTH PROBLEMS IN GERONTOPSYCHOLOGY

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Abstract

Solving the urgent problems of older people, services and the qualified staff of social workers must be set up at all levels. From the point of view of the ethnic characteristics of the elderly, psychologists should take into account an individual approach for better and more successful solutions of the problems associated with the age-related changes. In Buryat traditional culture there were not orphans or abandoned old people, because their relatives always took responsibility for looking after them. Unfortunately, these values are being lost nowadays: the number of buryat orphans and lonely elderly is increasing in orphanages and social centers. The research of cross-cultural character was conducted in the “Doveriye” social service centre (Ulan-Ude, Buryat Republic). We studied the ethno-cultural characteristics of the elderly at the Centre in the amount of 30 people ranging in age from 65 to 83 years. Among these, there were 15 Buryats (group 1) and 15 Russians (group 2). The conditions of their stay in Buryatia are identical and are determined by long-standing tradition of positive communication and life of these peoples. The obtained results seem to be interesting results concerning elderly groups of Buryat and Russian nationalities in the context of psychological health.

Keywords: gerontology, psychological health, elderly age, ethnos, Russians, Buryats, disabled, personality

Relevance

Independent institution of social services of the Republic of Buryatia, Ulan-Ude

Comprehensive Social Services Center “Doveriye” (hereinafter referred to as the Center) is
a public institution for elderly persons and disabled. On average, 360 people live here, half of them are disabled, their average age is 60, up to 65% of residents are male. They often are in old age without a family, apartments and work. Among the residents there are 31 persons without fixed residence, 188 single persons, 17 persons released from a prison, 27 persons abusing alcohol and 15 persons with severe mental disorders between the ages from 20 to 30 years (Sanzhaeva, ed., 2012; Alperovich, 2006; Bazarov, 2012; Leont’ev, 2002; Monsonova, 2010). The staff consists of over 250 people, including more than 10 physicians. Many nurses have been working here for many years; the staff is experienced and kind-hearted. Regular medical examinations are provided every month. Outpatient care is also available. Regional departments of social assistance control accommodation issues. Permissions for accommodation are granted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Development of the Republic of Buryatia. Monthly maintenance costs up to six thousand rubles for each inhabitant. According to the common rule for living in houses of a social upkeep in the Russian Federation, each of the residents of the boarding house pays 75% of the pension. The remaining amount is subsidized by the state (Petrilli, 2001; Sanzhaeva, 1997; Chuck, 2007; Harper-Dorton, & Herbert, 2000).

Statement of the problem

The decision to live in a boarding house seems to be the best alternative for these people. Among the main reasons why people come to this place there are poor health and disability requiring medical care, the absence of their own homes, old age, loneliness and high accommodation costs (Auer, & Gatterer, 2012; Tesch-Römer, & Wurm, 2012; Burholt, Dobbs, & Victor; 2016; Smith, & Hung, 2012; Stepankova, Jarolimova, Dragomirecka, Sobotkova, Sulova, Bezdicek, Holmerova, 2012; Santacreu, 2012; Ferring, & Lang, 2012; Modestov, Novikov, Podkorytov, & Shevchenko, 2002; Modestov, Novikov, Shevchenko, Podkorytov, & Smerdin, 2001). These people’s well-being depends heavily on the ongoing state social policy and the level of pension provision.

Materials and methods

We have studied the ethno-cultural characteristics of the elderly at the age from 65 to 83 years. A total of 30 persons were examined. Among them there were 15 ethnic Buryats
(group 1) and 15 Russians (group 2). The conditions of their living in Buryatia were identical and were determined by the long-standing tradition of the positive communication.

To conduct the study we used a range of methods including empirical and psychodiagnostic ones. The empirical methods comprised testing, interviewing, and observation. Among the psychodiagnostic methods there was the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire of R. Cattell (16 PF), Form C. The Luscher Color Test was used to measure psychophysiological state of a person, the level of stress, activity and communication skills (Sanzhaeva, 1997). Psychological history taking was used to obtain the full information about the subjects. Methods of mathematical statistics (the Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient and the Student’s t-test) were also used in the study.

Table 1. Age of the study participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Buryats</th>
<th>Russians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60-74</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-90</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Results and their discussion

As a result of the interviewing it was revealed that in the first group four persons (27%) had higher education, eight persons (54%) had vocational secondary education, and three persons (20%) had secondary education. In the second group two persons (13%) had higher education, five persons (33%) had vocational secondary education, 4 persons (27%) had secondary education and 4 persons (27%) had primary education. After analyzing the data, it was revealed that the subjects of Buryat nationality give higher priority to education. The traditional values of the Buryats seem to account for this fact, since at all times the Buryats valued education, books and manuscripts (Sanzhaeva, 2012).

According to the results of the 16 PF test of R. Cattell, in the first group (the Buryats, n=15) 73% of the examinees (11 persons) gained high rates on factor G (emotional susceptibility – highly normalized behavior). This means that being persistent in the achievement of goals, accurate, and responsible, they consciously respect the standard and rules of behavior. A total of 11 persons (73%) gained high rates on factor Q₃ (low self-control – high self-control). Having a high level of self-control, purposefulness and personal integrity, these study participants demonstrated the abilities to accurately fulfill social requirements, follow
their own ideas, control their emotions and behavior, and bring every matter to an end.

A total of 10 persons (66%) gained high rates on factor O (assertion - anxiety). These examinees demonstrated anxiety, depressiveness, vulnerability, and sensitiveness.

A total of 9 persons (60%) gained high rates on factor A (introversion – sociability). This suggests that older persons are open and kind-hearted, sociable and good-natured. They are willing to work with people, active in resolving the conflict situations, trusting, not afraid of criticism and vividly responding to any emotion. Individuals of Buryat nationality have adequate self-esteem; they are aware of their own qualities and have a high level of self-acceptance as an indicator of their personal maturity.

As for results of the second group (Russians, n=15) in the 16 PF test of R. Cattell, 86% of the examinees (13 persons) gained high rates on factor G (emotional susceptibility – highly normalized behavior). These results suggest that these residents are also persistent in the achievement of goals, accurate, and responsible; they consciously respect the standard and rules of behavior.

A total of 12 persons from the second group (80%) gained high rates on factor A (introversion – sociability). This suggests that that older people of the Russian nationality are more open and sociable, kind-hearted and good-natured. They are characterized by the ease and naturalness in behavior, attention and kindness. They are kind-hearted in relations. They are willing to work with people. They are active in the elimination of conflicts. They are not afraid of criticism and quickly respond to any emotions. They are more extroverted than Buryats.

High rates on factor Q₃ (low self-control – high self-control) gained by 9 persons (60%) indicate that these residents have a high level of self-control, purposefulness and personal integrity, accurately fulfill social requirements. These subjects control their emotions and behavior, and bring every matter to an end. The Russian participants demonstrated adequate self-esteem, awareness of their own qualities and a high level of self-acceptance as an indicator of their personal maturity.

The average results were estimated in the three samples by means of each of the scales. These results are presented in Figure 1. As it can be seen from Figure 1, there were no significant differences between the groups concerning the studied factors. These results
suggest that personality traits of Russians and Buryats are similar, as well as older people have similar personality traits in general. This situation seems to be determined by the similar age peculiarities in both groups as well as by a three-century period of living together.

Figure 1. The scores on the factors of the 16 PF test of R. Cattell in three study samples.

The results of the study of personality characteristics of 30 old persons using the Luscher Color Test are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. The participants’ colour preference (n = 30).

The study participants were asked to choose from eight colors the one that they prefer. A total of 20 persons (68%) first preferred the “blue-green” and “violet” (2.5) colors. This suggests that examinees had experienced a mild anxiety, aspiration to become recognised and well-liked, desire to experience something exciting, increased attention to reactions of people around to their actions.
A total of 5 persons (16%) chose the “orange-red” and “blue-green” (3.2) colors. This suggests that examinees had a business exaltation, aspiration to reach their goals, to overcome the existing difficulties and to be highly appreciated.

The “violet” and “light-yellow” (5.4) colours were preferred by 3 persons (10%). These results stand for a high level of excitement, fantasy, and desire for bright events among these examinees.

There were 2 persons (6%) who preferred the “blue-green” and “brown” (2.6) colors. These residents’ sense of dissatisfaction, fatigue, reassessment of a significance of the other people’s attitude towards them seem to account for these results.

Less preferred colors included “zero” and “black”, “zero” and “blue”, “violet” and “black”, “light yellow” and “black”.

The “zero” and “black” colours were placed in the “aversion to the color” position by 18 persons (60%). This fact suggests that the subjects tend to get out of adversity and hope for good prospects in the future.

The “zero” and “blue” colours were placed in the “aversion to the color” position by 5 persons (17%), these persons having a feeling of dissatisfaction and emotional tension.

The “violet” and “black” colours were placed in the “aversion to the color” position by 5 persons (17%). They demonstrated emotional tension due to limitations of their autonomy, the desire for mutual understanding and plain speaking.

The “light yellow” and “black” colours were placed in the “aversion to the color” position by 2 persons (6%). These study participants demonstrated emotional tension, fear of losing something important or missing an opportunity, and suspense.

Taking into consideration the order of the participants’ choice of colours in the Luscher Colour Test, it is expedient to conclude that elderly persons experience a mild anxiety, aspiration to become recognised and well-liked, desire to experience something exciting, increased attention to reactions of people around to their actions. They tend to get out of adversity and hope for good prospects in the future. All these findings indicate that the factor of accommodation conditions is very significant for elderly people at the Center.

The Luscher Color Test interpretative coefficients developed by Orlov and G.A. Amineva were used to make the statistical analysis of the data. On the basis of the factor analysis the authors
defined six coefficients: heteronomy (H), concentricity (C), balance of personal capabilities (BP), balance of the autonomous (vegetative) nervous system (VB), performance capability (P), 0 - 40 points, and the presence of a stress (S), 0 - 21 points. In estimating the H, C, BP and VB coefficients values up to −9.8 were considered as maximal ones, while values up to +9.8 were minimal.

Initially, the Luscher Colour Test analysis was performed for the entire sample, which comprised 30 elderly people, including Buryats and Russians. These findings provide a general information about the psychophysiological state of a personality, this personality’s activity and ability to handle stress. This study results are presented below in Figure 3.

In the first group (the Buryat nationality) low levels of heteronomy (H) were revealed (-1.56). These findings mean that participants of this group are autonomous, initiative, independent, they tend to dominate, have a need for achievement and self-assertive ambitions. As for the level of the concentricity coefficient (C), it was moderate in participants of the first group (0.9). These results suggest that the elderly Buryats – participants of the study are moderately concentrated on the problems and are interested in an environment as an object of influence or a source of help. The first group rates on the BP coefficient are higher than the average ones. Therefore, contradictory and unstable behaviours are characteristic for the the first group participants. The first group rates on the VB coefficient are lower than the average ones (-0.7). It means that the parasympathetic nervous system neurotony is characteristic for these subjects.

![Figure 3. The scores on the Luscher Color Test interpretative coefficients in three study samples](image)

As for the level of the performance capability coefficient (P), it was moderate in the first group participants (18.26). The first group members demonstrated low levels of the stressful state coefficient (4.8), this indicating the absence of stress in the examinees of the Buryat nationality. Perhaps this is due to the calm living conditions and retirement, allowing them to avoid contacts with the extreme working conditions.

In the second group (the Russian nationality) low levels of heteronomy (H) were revealed (-3.66). These findings mean that this group participants are autonomous, initiative, independent, they tend to dominate. As for the level of the concentricity coefficient (C), it was moderate in the second group participants (0.79). These results suggest that the elderly Russians – participants of the study are moderately concentrated on the problems and are interested in an environment as an object of influence or a source of help. The second group rates on the BP coefficient were moderate, this suggesting sufficient harmony of the Russian study participants. The second group rates on the VB coefficient were also moderate (0.79), this suggesting tranquility of the Russian study participants. This group demonstrated a moderate level of the VB coefficient (18.14). As for the level of the stressful state coefficient (S), it was low in the second group participants (7.38). The absence of stress in the Russian examinees seems to be due to the calm living conditions and retirement.

**Conclusion**

For a comparative analysis of the personality characteristics of the two samples the Student’s t-test was used. As it was revealed, in general, all the elderly are characterized by anxiety, depression, vulnerability, susceptibility. Also, they are open and kind-hearted, sociable and good-natured. They are characterized by the ease and naturalness in behavior, attention and kindness in relations. They are willing to work with people, active in resolving the conflict situations, trusting, not afraid of criticism and vividly responding to any emotion. Elderly Russians and Buryats have the same characteristics as that are revealed for the whole sample, but there are some differences. Thus, elderly persons of the Buryat nationality are characterized by lower sociability and introversion, while elderly persons of the Russian nationality are more straightforward, natural, and demonstrate inartificial behaviors (t = 2.12; p <0.05). Buryats are more prudent, shrewd, sensible and sentimental than Russians,
this indicating that they give higher priority to education ($t = 2.96; p < 0.05$). The Russians tend to overestimate their capabilities ($t = 2.06; p < 0.05$) Both the Buryat and Russian people respect the norms and rules of behavior; they are persistent in achieving their goals, have a high level of self-control and accurately fulfill social requirements.

Analyzing the scores on the Luscher Colour Test interpretative coefficients in both study samples allows concluding that there are no significant distinctions between the examinees of the Buryat and Russian nationality. The only coefficient where the scores of the Buryat nationality are higher is the BP coefficient (balance of personal properties) ($t = -2.23; p < 0.05$). These findings suggest that Buryats have more contradictory and unstable behaviours since they are more worried about their present state. However, these concerns are associated with the Buryat traditional way of life, where the elders were never left by relatives.

In general, a mild anxiety, aspiration to become recognized and well-liked, desire to experience something exciting, increased attention to reactions of people around to their actions, intention to get out of an adverse situation and hope for good prospects in the future are peculiar to all elderly people.

References


