VALUE PREDICTORS OF PERSONAL PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH

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Abstract

The aim of the present research is to reveal and to operationalize value indicators of personal psychological health. We consider psychological health in the framework of personal development process. These are “adaptation” and “axiological” paradigms of personal development which are the subjects to analysis. We point out personal development markers which serve as indicators of personal psychological health. It is proved that some characteristics of the personal value system, such as the level of development of a person’s value orientation system, value orientation, value potential of personal development, may serve as significant indicators of a person’s psychological health. We suggest new authors’ variants of the methodology by R. Inglehart and M. Rokeach for assessing value indicators of personal psychological health, and present some preliminary results of their testing and standardization. These indicators are relatively stable and can perform a prognostic function and therefore they can be simultaneously considered as personal predictors of psychological health. We conclude that the usage of the proposed methods of personal value sphere research allows enhancing both diagnostic and prognostic reliability of the program of psychological health study within the framework of studying the entire process of personal development.

Keywords: psychological health, personal development, adaptation, self-actualization, value orientations

Relevance

The problem of constructing an adequate model of personal psychological health assessment and identifying its indicators, apart from specifying the notion of “psychological health” and...
health”, requires the definition to what exactly we imply by personal development, what its goals and driving forces are, because psychological health is a factor, that largely determines the process of personal development, performs the function of its efficiency indicator.

A variety of existing psychological theories and traditions are manifested in different answers to this question and it is one of the key elements of personality psychology. In the present paper we find it sufficient to characterize only major and in many ways contradicting paradigms of personal development: “adaptation” and “axiological”, originating from “depth” and “vertex” psychologies respectively. It is due to the fact that existing approaches to the definition of psychological health can be divided into two groups: psychological health as the ability of an individual to satisfy his psychological needs and to adapt to new conditions, and psychological health as consciousness and meaningfulness of an individual himself, the world in general, his interaction with the world.

In our understanding of psychological health, we rely on the definition of V.E. Pakhalian who treated the phenomenon as “...a dynamic state of inner well-being (consistency) of personality, which presents its essence and allows actualizing their individual and age-psychological abilities at any stage of development” (Pakhalian, 2006). In our opinion, this definition settles the existing methodological argument concerning the nature of personal psychological health, quite clearly differentiating it from the notion of “mental health” and at the same time combining biological (physical, physiological), psychological and social aspects of personal development, suggesting sustainable, adaptive functioning of a person at different levels of life activity (vital, social and existential).

In the framework of adaptation’s paradigm the process of personal development presents adaptation of an individual to ever-changing external environment. The main task of a constantly ongoing adaptation process is maintaining the homeostatic state of a person. Psychological homeostasis is defined as the state which satisfies the whole system of primary and acquired needs. Non-satisfied needs are the causes of stress, frustration or conflict expressed in anxiety. The protective mechanisms of anxiety elimination described in “depth” psychology represent mechanisms of psychological adaptation. Thus anxiety is a determinant of psychological adaptation and the main source of human activity. Such understanding of
psychological mechanisms of personal development has been criticized by psychologists of both existential and humanistic approaches. The driving force of the process of personal development in “vertex” psychology, in contrast to the psychoanalytic tradition, is not the need for homeostasis, but equilibrium resistance, constant growth in personality (G. Allport); the internal growth or development (C. Rogers); the exercise of personal meaning (V. Frankl), self-actualization (K. Goldstein, A. Maslow).

Humanistic theories of personality deal with its value and sense sphere that set the parameters of personal development. As known, according to A. Maslow’s theory, the system of personal value orientations is the main regulator of a person’s activity and the orientation of his development. C. Rogers believed that realizing the personal meaning of one’s own behavior is a condition for psychologically healthy development. Thereby, according to our approach, the driving force of personal development is considered to be the development of value and meaning systems that serve as the sources of personal behavior (Francis, & Crea, 2015; Schleider, Abel, & Weisz, 2015; Malkina-Pykh, & Pykh, 2016).

The existing opposition between adaptation and personal development is quite common in modern human sciences. We consider that such opposition is not well-grounded with psychological adaptation, which is implemented in the vital process of every person, is its base, the background, and which determines the conditions for social interaction of personality and one’s development. It is obvious that personal development can be presented in the form of several interrelated and parallel processes, processes of adaptation and self-actualization in particular. Therefore, to assess and predict both personal development and psychological health, not only adaptation, we should take into account value characteristics. Using the indicator of personal adaptation potential as a parameter of personal development, which, in our opinion, allows assessment of its “resource” base, we consider it necessary to take into account developmental quotients of personal value sphere as well (Başar, Öz, & Karakaya, 2016; Dittmar, Bond, Hurst, & Kasser, 2014; Amérigo, Garcia, & Sánchez, 2013; Ryff, 2013; Zubova, 2009).

State of the problem

As follows from the above, it is important to deal with the question concerning the choice of developmental quotients in the framework of the axiological paradigm,
which are simultaneously indicators of personal psychological health at different levels of human activity. Categoric framework of axiological paradigm of personal development can be represented by such elements as: the object, determinants, processes, mechanisms, purpose, and result of the development. The object and simultaneously, the determinant of personal development in this paradigm is the personal value sphere, and, more specifically, its level of development and maturity. As the major process of personal development it is possible to consider the formation of one’s unique, independent inner personal world that is the process which different authors refer to as individualization, autonomy or self-actualization. A mechanism, that is the driving force of personal development here, is internalization – conscious and active perception of the world, and active reproduction of accepted norms and values in their activities. In addition, internalization implies taking responsibility, interpreting important events as the result of one’s own activity. The purpose and result of personal development in this case is a mature, autonomous personality with such integral features as authenticity and intentionality, characterized by meaningfulness and efficiency of life and activities. Thus, the level of development of value sphere and its individual characteristics may be considered as the generalized indicator of personal psychological health.

Materials and methods

According to A. Maslow’s theory, value orientations of a self-actualizing person represent a kind of a standard, natural for a psychologically healthy person’s value system. A. Maslow distinguishes two main groups of values: the highest B-values (being values) – developmental values typical for self-actualizing people, and the lowest “D-values: (deficiency values) – homeostatic, regressive, protective values determined by anxiety and frustration (Maslow, 1968). R. Inglehart, developing this theory, emphasizes “materialistic” (physiological) and “post-materialistic” (social and autonomous) values (Inglehart, 1997). On the basis of R. Inglehart’s approach we have developed our own research methodology that allows to identify personal orientation towards adaptation values (survival and security), socialization (social approval) or individualization (independence and self-development), which present the successive stages of value system development, its current level (Yanitskiy, 2012).
Theoretical ideas lying at the basis of the described methodology can be summarized as follows:

- At different stages of individual development, following the norms and values of the social environment is consistently determined by the desire to avoid punishment and gain approval, by orientation towards important others. These stages follow each other throughout a person’s life. In addition, each stage may be the last one, and the level of development achieved by this moment becomes the individual type.

In the formation of the system of personal value orientations the process of personal dynamics becomes consistently dominant at this stage. These processes include: adaptation, implying anxiety elimination and maintenance of equilibrium in the system ‘man – environment’ through modifying value orientations; socialization that reflects the acceptance (or rejection) of values of important others, and individualization aimed at developing one’s own autonomous value system.

- The given processes consistently create “protective”, “borrowed” and “autonomous” levels or “layers” of the system of personal value orientations. The fixation at any stage of personal development determines the dominance of the corresponding level in an individual value system, which, in its turn, generates the same type of personality: “the adapting type”, “the socializing type” or “the individualizing type”.

The procedure of the study is based on the testees’ choice of the most important values from the list that includes indicators of orientation towards the given groups of values.

The testees are given a card that contains 9 points representing three sets of three items each:

1. Lack of poverty, material wealth.
2. Family well-being.
3. Possibility of intellectual and creative self-realization.
5. Good, prestigious job.
6. Possibility to enjoy democratic rights and freedom.

Points 1, 4, 7 are indicators of orientation towards adaptation values; points 2, 5, 8 – towards socialization values; points 3, 6, 9 – towards individualization values.

The testees are asked to choose which of the points in the card they believe are the most important (they can specify from 1 to 3 options). The choice of one variant, as well as two or three same-type variants, determines the corresponding value type; with the choice of three points the corresponding value type is determined if the orientation of two out of the three variants coincides; the choice of two or three divergent variants diagnoses the intermediate value type.

The value types identified and previously described by us are “the adapting type” (focusing on order, health, material wealth), “the socializing type” (focusing on family, career, public recognition), and “the individualizing type” (focusing on self-actualization, freedom, tolerance), represent fundamentally different life strategies that allows to use the proposed methodology to study not only the achieved level, but also the orientation of the development of personality, to identify its main “value vector” corresponding to vital, social and existential levels of psychological health (Yanitskiy, Seryy, 2010).

The value orientation of the development can also be examined using the methodology by M. Rokeach that allows revealing preferable, insignificant and rejected human values (Rokeach, 1973). This technique allows building separate hierarchies of terminal values (values - goals) and instrumental values (values - means) of an individual. The personal internalization of social values automatically implies the creation of the individual hierarchy of values, which, as a rule, is a sequence of well-distinguished “blocks” representing an ordered system. If none of the patterns can be revealed, then we can say that the individual system of value orientations has not been formed, which defines a relatively low level of psychological health. The weakness of M. Rokeach’s methodology is the ambiguity of the subjective criteria of value-ranking. Obviously, the preference of these or those values may be due to perceiving them
as absolutely significant to society and humanity as a whole, or due to their current subjective importance. So the testees are to consider not only the importance of a value, but also the degree of its realization in percentage. Specifying the percentage of the realization of a particular value is essential for diagnosing the system of values more meaningfully, since together with ranks it allows to define the nature of the value. It can be existential or deficit. We can also identify indicators reflecting the level of personal development.

The interpretation of M. Rokeach’s methodology which we propose is designed for assessing and predicting the psychological health of a person. For this purpose, while analyzing the results of the study, we introduce the following coefficients to determine the nature of values significant to a person (existential or deficit):

1. The average percentage of the realization of the preferable (the first six in the individual hierarchy) terminal values (Tr);
2. The average percentage of the realization of the preferable (the first six in the individual hierarchy) instrumental values (Ir);
3. The difference between the realization of the preferable terminal and instrumental values (calculated as the subtracted difference between Ir and Tr: ΔIr-Tr = Ir – Tr).

Results and their discussion

The methodology we developed on the basis of the theory by R. Inglehart was tested while conducting a public opinion poll of the adult population of Kemerovo. The survey was conducted with the method of street interviews from a representative quota sample. The study involved 1,000 respondents, which allows us to consider the results representative with an error not more than 4% at a confidence figure of 96%. According to the choices made, the testees were assigned to one of the three value types: “the adapting type” (orientation towards order, health, material wealth) – 44%, “the socializing type” (family, career, public recognition) – 29%, “the individualizing type” (self-actualization, freedom, tolerance) – 4%. The remaining 23% of the participants were assigned to the intermediate type. Similar results were obtained from other samples and several independent studies performed in different sociocultural groups (Krieger, 2010; Zelenin,
2012; Pfetzer, 2014), which confirms the validity and certain cultural independence of the proposed methodology.

The described value types revealed authentic differences in a number of personal parameters, such as the level of internality, life meaningfulness, the peculiarities of self-attitude and achievement motivation (Yanitskiy, 2012). The intermediate type is characterized by the incompleteness of the system of value orientations, the lack of the ranked hierarchy of values. Irrationalism, a primitive cognitive apparatus, general psycho-social ill-being are characteristic for this type. The adapting type is determined by the presence of the value system formed by psychological protection mechanisms. High anxiety and frustration tension are observed. Also a certain tendency towards alcoholism, which, in this case, is of a compensatory nature, is noticed. The socializing type is, to the greatest degree, focused on socially accepted norms and values. Its features are conformity, dependence and externality. The individualizing type is characterized by independent judgments and opinions, the presence of “autonomous” regulation of behavior. Such psychological features as high meaningfulness of life, internality, positive “I-concept” are inherent.

The above-mentioned socio-psychological characteristics once again confirm the level (layered) nature of the value structure of individual and mass consciousness, where the lowest level of the development corresponds to the system of values of the intermediate type, and the highest level to the individualizing type. It allows us to speak about a certain correspondence between belonging to a particular value type and the psychological health condition of a person.

The testing the authors’ interpretation of the methodology by M. Rokeach was carried out from a sample of students of Kemerovo State University with the total number of 775 people. In this sample we set the statutory values of the difference \( \Delta \text{IrTr} \). As a result of standardization, we defined the normative intervals of values of the indicator of the difference \( \Delta \text{IrTr} \), which form three types of the differences – high, medium (optimal) and negative. The types of the differences with numeric values of intervals and interpretation of their psychological content are shown in Table 1.
Table 1.

Types of the differences between the realization of the preferable terminal and instrumental values ($\Delta IrTr$)

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<th>Difference</th>
<th>$\Delta I_{rTr}$ Interpretation</th>
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<td>High</td>
<td>$\Delta I_{rTr} &gt; 23.2$ The development of personal qualities (the realization of values - means) significantly outstrips the process of achieving life results (the realization of values - goals). It often indicates the presence of objective barriers to achieve goals. It is observed among students who are not able to fully realize life goals (to work, raise a family, etc.) because of the objective involvement in the educational process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Optimal</td>
<td>$0 &lt; \Delta I_{rTr} &lt; 23.2$ The development of personal qualities (the realization of values - means) optimally outstrips the process of achieving life results (the realization of values - goals), which is necessary for effective self-realization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>$\Delta I_{rTr} &lt; 0$ The development of personal qualities (the realization of values - means) lags behind the process of achieving life results (the realization of values - goals). It indicates the violation of the value-meaning sphere of personality (pseudo-self-actualization, existential problems, inadequate self-esteem, etc.).</td>
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The absence of fundamental differences between the realization of the preferable terminal and instrumental values should be interpreted as the absence of significant actual potential of personal development. The bigger realization of the terminal values indicates that a person achieves more than what he can objectively claim for, which probably corresponds to “pseudo-self-actualization” in A. Maslow’s terminology. The sharp predominance of the realization of the instrumental values may indicate the weakness of goal-setting, low level of aspirations, low meaningfulness of one’s own life. And, finally, the moderate predominance of the realization of the instrumental values may be considered as having a value potential for personal development and, consequently, psychological health of a person.

**Conclusio**

The described characteristics of the value sphere of personality such as the level of development of the personality’s value orientation system, value orientation, value potential of personal development, may be indicative of the individual’s psychological health. This is because they reflect a wide spectrum of human interaction with reality at all levels of its functioning, allowing to consider not only the subject attributes (age and gender, individually psychological, personal characteristics), but also the object attributes of this interaction which are expressed in norms and beliefs set by the social environment. Since these indicators,
being relatively stable, can perform a prognostic function, they can be considered also as personal predictors of psychological health. Using the proposed methods aimed at diagnosing the described value characteristics and developed in the framework of the axiological paradigm will improve diagnostic and prognostic reliability of the psychological health research program in the context of studying the entire process of personal development.

References


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