Psychosocial adjustment and subjective assessment of the mental health of adolescents in terms of gender

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ABSTRACT

Key words: psychosocial adjustment, mental health, adolescents.

The aim of the study is to establish the relationship between psychosocial adjustment and mental health for adolescents in terms of gender.

Materials and methods. Adolescents (14 to 15 years old) were randomly selected from Kaunas City secondary schools. The participants of the study were 521 students (285 females and 236 males). The measurement of psychosocial adjustment included the modification method developed by Roger and Daimond. The measurement of mental health included the modification method by Stepanov. Research tasks for mental health among adolescents were gathered from answers to the questionnaire developed by Malinauskas.

Results. The results obtained showed that mental health is good among 8.7 % females and 9.8 % males; the average mental health was found in 39.1 % females and 55.7 % males while the poor mental health was referred to by 52.2 % females and 34.5 % males. After the analyses, we established that the psychosocial adjustment level among adolescents were superior in females (score: 56.13±12.82) in comparison with males (score: 51.33±11.38) (p<0.01).

Conclusions. The main conclusion showed that the psychosocial adjustment levels among adolescents were superior in females in comparison with males while the self-assessment is higher in females than males. However, the mental health and self-feeling are better in males than females.

SANTRAUKA

Reikšminiai žodžiai: psichosocialinė adaptacija, psichikos sveikata, paaugliai.

Tyrimo tikslas. Nustatyti paauglių psichosocialinės adaptacijos ir psichikos sveikatos sąsąją lyties aspektu.


Rezultatai. Tyrimo duomenimis, 8,7 proc. paauglių mergaičių ir 9,8 proc. bendraamžių berniukų psichikos sveikata yra gera. Vidutinės psichikos sveikatos yra 55,7 proc. tirtų berniukų ir 39,1 proc. mergaičių. Tiekia paauglių grupė (52,2 proc. mergaičių ir 34,5 proc. berniukų) yra prastos psichikos sveikatos. Tirtų mergaičių psichosocialinės adaptacijų yra geresnė (56,13±12,82 balo) negu berniukų (51,33±11,38 balo) (p<0,01).

Tyrimu nustatyta, kad paauglių mergaičių psichosocialinė adaptacija geresnė negu berniukų, mergaičių savęs vertinimas taip pat palankesnis negu berniukų. Vis dėlto paauglių berniukų psichikos sveikata yra geresnė negu to paties amžiaus mergaičių, jų savijauta – vienas iš psichikos sveikatos rodiklių taip pat geresnė.

INTRODUCTION

On the basis of the exploration of publications and researches of the recent time, one may claim that the issue of psychosocial adjustment of the adolescents raises increasing worries of pedagogues and the general society [1]. The adolescence is one of the critical stages of the development of a personality. Due to rapid physiological alterations in the body and because of still underdevel-
oped psychological and social maturity, adolescents are less resistant to the impact of the stressors of the environment, and their psychosocial adjustment is disturbed more rapidly concerning the adolescents’ ability to adapt to the requirements which are set at school, to the norms regulated by the society and to relate adequately with the environment under the conditions which are present in the current social system, as important in shaping psychological and behavioral adjustment as the transition from middle school to Universities [2, 3]. It has also been proven that for the proper psychosocial adjustment, one needs the support not only of the family, but also of friends [4]. Those students who due to various reasons face difficulties in communicating with peers experience seclusion, isolation from the environment while frequent failures in the everyday activity decrease their trust in their own powers [5]. De-adapted students are manifested by their inferior self-esteem, poorer academic achievements and inferior social skills [6], they face more issues of emotional and general psychosocial adjustment [2].

Good physical health of students is one of the key presuppositions for the regular development and successful studies. An essential factor regarding physical health is the individual qualities of a personality depending on gender, age and ancestry; however, the activity of health reinforcement is inevitably related with social and environmental factors [7]. Both Lithuanian and foreign scholars established in their researches a positive impact of physical activeness on the physical and psychical health. Physically more active adolescents are of higher self-esteem, they develop superior skills of social integration [8]. The following superior indicators of the components of psychosocial adaptation have been established: treatment of others, emotional comfort and integrity [9]. It is believed that it is essential to reveal the opportunities for self-implementation. Besides, the relationship of the psychosocial adjustment and psychical health of students during lessons of physical education is to be revealed as the subject of physical culture in its essence boosts the opportunities for the implementation of personality needs. Besides, the relationship of psychosocial adjustment and psychical health at school in students has not been adequately revealed, and there is still lack of scientifically grounded data.

Having considered the above presented statements, the importance of such explorations is manifested. That is why the aim of this research is to establish the relationship between psychosocial adjustment and psychical health in adolescents in terms of gender. Hypothesis: a presupposition is drawn that the psychosocial adaptation and psychical health is better in males rather than in females.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**STUDY DESIGN**

In September 2009, when performing the declarative exploration, an independent batch was construed. The research employs a two-stage random selection, i.e. schools of all the regions of Lithuania are to possess equal probability of getting into the sample. The explored batch consisted of 521 students of general education schools of Kaunas City (8th and 9th forms, aged 14 to 15, 285 females and 236 males). The students were selected for the research by employing the method of probability representation: schools were selected and the exploration was performed in entire classes containing adolescents. The age average of the explored batch is 14.7±0.51 years.

The questionnaire employed modified methodology by Rogers and Dymond for exploration of psychosocial adjustment [10, 11]. The modified questionnaire by Rogers and Dymond consists of 101 questions. The subjects when replying questions had to select one of the seven variants of answers: „This is definitely not about me”=0; „This does not look like me”=1; „I doubt that this could be applied to me”=2; „I do not dare to apply it to me”=3; „This is similar to me, but I am not sure”=4; „This is similar to me”=5; „This is definitely about me”=6. The subjects were informed that they had to assess statements concerning the methodology of lessons of physical education. The fundamental subscale which optimally reveals the psychosocial adjustment of personality is „adjustment” (the compatibility of the subscale is calculated in terms of Cronbach alphas criterion (0.76)). It involves most statements of this methodology. The authors of the methodology (Rogers and Dymond) in their model of psychosocial adjustment in addition to the generalized fundamental adaptation-defining value presents a subscale of self-esteem assisting to reveal the psychosocial adjustment of a personality. This subscale is assessed as one of the components supplementing the psychosocial adjustment of a personality, and its integrity is calculated according to Cronbach alpha criterion (0.69).

Stepanov psychical health exploration questionnaire was applied in order to receive the value of students’ psychical health. It consists of 7 questions [12]. According to this questionnaire, the subjects were suggested answering the presented questions and selecting the variant which most closely corresponds to the description of their feelings or behavior. The answers were assessed in points, and the lower amount of point’s exhibits a higher level of psychical health: 0-17 points: high level; 18-35 points: medium level; 36-50 points: low level. The questions were adapted, and the quality of the questionnaire was assessed. The intrinsic compatibility of the questionnaire was calculated according to Cronbach alpha criterion (0.79).

Health of students was also assessed on the basis of their
answers to a question from the modified questionnaire by Malinauskas [13]: „I feel bad; I want to give everything up and to hide somewhere”. Having assessed the answers, we state that the psychosocial adaptation of students is insufficient if the question is replied as „This looks like me, but I am not sure” or „This looks like me”.

Statistical analysis of the data was performed by using SPSS version 13.0 program package. Hypotheses on the average of two quantitative features and on the equality of two percentual values were checked by t and z criteria accordingly. Hypotheses on the interrelation of markers were checked on the basis of chi square ($\chi^2$) criterion. Data differentiation is statistically significant in case of p<0.05.

RESULTS

Data of the research has established (Table 1) that the question „I feel bad, I want to give everything up and to hide somewhere” was replied as „This looks like me, but I am not sure” in 26.1 % researched males and 39.1 % females while the answer „This looks like me” was selected by 12.3 % researched males and only 5.3 % females. On the basis of the data of the two responses to the question we may claim that one of the markers of psychological health, self-feeling, is better in medium schooling age males than in females ($\chi^2=95.7; \ p<0.05$).

On the basis of the results of Stepanov psychological health questionnaire (Fig. 1), 8.7 % of female adolescents and 9.8 % of their male peers have good psychological health ($\chi^2=62.9; \ p<0.05$), medium psychological health was exhibited in 39.1 % of the researched females and 55.7 % males while the group of insufficient psychological health is constituted of 52.2 % females and 34.5 % males.

Table 1. Psychological health and self-feeling of adolescents (percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Investigators</th>
<th>„This is definitely not about me“</th>
<th>„This does not look like me“</th>
<th>„I doubt that this could be applied to me“</th>
<th>„I do not dare to apply it to me“</th>
<th>„This is similar to me, but I am not sure“</th>
<th>„This is similar to me“</th>
<th>„This is definitely about me“</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All investigatives</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.3*</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$p<0.05$ to compare males and females results

$\chi^2=95.7; \ lls=6; \ p<0.05$

Fig 1. Psychological health level of adolescents

$\chi^2=62.9; \ lls=3; \ p<0.05$ to compare males and females results
males was established: among females, it is higher (p=0.001) than among their peer males (Fig. 2). The psychosocial adjustment of the females is better (56.13±12.82 points) than that of males (51.33±11.38 points). The difference of the indicators of psychosocial adjustment of the female and male students is statistically significant (p=0.001); the level of the psychosocial adjustment of females is higher.

Having performed the statistical analysis, it has been established that the researched females of this age group show a high level of self-esteem (76.71±10.51 points) (Fig. 2). The self-esteem of the males is also relatively high (66.64±9.82 points), but it is lower than that of females (p=0.001). Thus as the general self-esteem already develops at school, the initial necessary step is an attempt to have students their positive self-esteem formed.

**DISCUSSION**

The hypothesis of the research was confirmed only partially, namely, the psychical health of males is superior to that of females, but the psychosocial adjustment of females is of higher level than that of males.

Physical activeness has a major impact on the psychosocial adjustment and the psychical health of adolescents [14]. When doing sports during the lesson of physical education, close interpersonal relationships with peers do not let the students of adolescents experience loneliness. Experiences of loneliness as well as other negative events / situations in life are related with the increased psychological discomfort further complicating the harmonious psychosocial adjustment to the surrounding environment. When analyzing the factors impacting the psychosocial adjustment, namely, the factors of aggression, somatic disturbances, depression, anxiety and insufficient self-esteem are emphasized more and more frequently [2]. Students’ care for their own health in most cases is related with the regulation of their mental work ability or protection of the nerve system as well as regular physical activeness. On the basis of the data of this research we may claim that the level of psychosocial adjustment of females is higher than that of males, but the psychical health of males is superior to that of females. More than a third of males at school are disinterested; they have harmful habits and do not participate in extra-curricular activities. We believe that these causes impose on the fact that males see a relationship between the peculiarities of their personalities (issues in studies and communication, excessive agility, harmful habits, non-participation in extra-curricular activities, inability to concentrate attention) and their failures in schooling studies [15]. Thus the inadequate self-esteem of students of medium schooling age (in this case males) causes issues in their interrelations, while due to deteriorated relations, various signs of emotional and psychosocial de-adaptation may develop [16]. A. Markevičiūtė et al. established that the health problems of students impose major harm on their psychosocial adjustment [2]. It was established that due to issues with mood, lack of energy and low self-esteem as well as inclination to seclusion, adolescents experience difficulties in communication with their peers, and their learning motivation decreases, or, to the contrary, delinquent behaviour manifests [17]. K. Lindfors et al. performed a questioning in order to establish the relationship between self-image, ego development and depression during the period of adolescence. The study showed that in boys, the relationship between pubertal maturation and psychosocial adjustment can vary depending upon the level of ego development. In late maturing boys, advanced ego development was associated with elevated levels of anxiety and depression [18]. The
data of our research confirms the similar data of other scholars [19] claiming that superior psychosocial adjustment of adolescents helps overcome various critical situations more easily, which shows the importance of the interrelations of students as a major factor of psychosocial adjustment. S. Suldo and E. Huebner [20] compared to students with average life satisfaction, students with very high life satisfaction had higher levels on all indicators of adaptive psychosocial functioning, except extraversion. Moreover, students with very high satisfaction had the lowest scores on all measures of emotional and behavioral problems. However, rates of clinical levels of behavior problems did not differ significantly between the very high and average groups. Finally, several necessary, but not sufficient factors for very high life satisfaction were identified. Taken together, the findings support the notion that very high life satisfaction is associated with positive psychosocial functioning. Furthermore, adolescents’ reports of their life satisfaction revealed differences in adjustment that were not captured by measures of psychopathology [21]. The scores from the scales provide valid assessments of socialcognitive variables that are putative mediators or moderators of change in physical activity. The revised scales can be used in observational studies of change or interventions designed to increase physical activity among girls during early adolescence.

M. H. Ussher et al. performed an experiment, during which adolescents, were they reported physical activity levels, patterns of sedentary behaviour (TV/computer/video usage) and completed the strengths and difficulties questionnaire. Results showed that low levels of self-reported physical activity are independently associated with diminished psychological wellbeing among adolescents [22]. The data of the research revealed that there are statistically reliable differences between male and female students in terms of positive self-esteem as a marker of psychosocial adjustment during the lessons of physical education (p<0.05). Similar results were received when sports practicing adolescent males and females were compared [9]; it was established that the psychical health of sports practicing males was superior (p < 0.05) than that of females of the same age. The research did not confirm the presumption that males evaluate themselves better during lessons of physical education. That is why it is possible to claim that both female and male students equally assessed their physical abilities during the lessons of physical education. The above mentioned data corroborates analogous data [13] of other researchers that means of psychosocial impact affect the psychical health of males. Besides, it has been established that the positive feeling of self-control is related with the improvement of psychical health. Thus in order to reveal the psychosocial adaptation and psychical health issues of students regarding their gender, further research is necessary.

This research fills in some gap in researches dealing with the psychosocial adaptation of students and its relationship with psychical health. The performed research may be important not only in theoretical but also in practical aspects when developing education programs for the improvement of psychosocial adaptation and psychical health of students.

CONCLUSION

Female students show better psychosocial adjustment than males; their self-esteem is higher than that of their peer males. Psychical health of males is better that that of their peer females and their self-feeling is also significantly better.

REFERENCES


