

Research article

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The Communicative Orientation of a Consulting Psychologist as a Factor of Preparedness to Consult Women with Psychological Infertility

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Abstract

Introduction. The relevance of the research topic is due to the objectively existing contradiction between the growing number of women with psychological infertility, their requests for qualified psychological help and the lack of investigation on the problem of training psychologists to provide such assistance. The purpose of this study was to identify the typological features of women with psychological infertility and the level of their satisfaction with relationships with counseling psychologists, depending on different communication orientations. **Methods.** The study was carried out in two stages: in the first series, the types of women with psychological infertility were identified by processing empirical data on their personality traits, manifested in interpersonal interaction. 312 women with a diagnosis of unspecified infertility were examined. The second series of the empirical study consisted in identifying the relationship of female clients with a predominance of different personality types, with their counseling psychologists with different communication orientations (n=72). **Results.** There have been identified five types of women with psychological infertility and the peculiarities of their relationship with counseling psychologists of different communicative orientation: most women of aggressive-masculine type demonstrated satisfaction with communication interaction with consultants characterized by the predominance of conformal orientation; infantile-

capricious type was related to manipulative orientation; patronizing-instructive type – authoritarian orientation; anxiety-phobic – alterocentric orientation; professional-oriented type – dialogue orientation. It has been established that the consultants' ideas about "difficult" clients from among infertile women were largely due to the predominance of a certain type of orientation in communicative interaction. **Discussion.** It has been concluded that one of the factors of a psychologist's preparedness to consult women with psychological infertility was their ability to use different forms of behavior in communicative situations, and to transform them depending on the typological characteristics of client's personality.

Keywords

preparedness to consult women with psychological infertility, typological features of women with psychological infertility, communicative orientation, relations in the "Consultant-client" system, communicative flexibility, "difficult" client, characterological communicative tendencies.

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Introduction

The problem of providing psychological help to women with reproductive disorders is one of the most topical and yet complex and unsolved issues. Its relevance is primarily due, on the one hand, to the growing demand for targeted assistance related to difficulties in fulfilling the maternal role, and on the other hand, to the lack of scientifically sound information about the consultant psychologist's preparedness to work with such a request. The difficulty in training a consulting psychologist to work with women with psychological infertility is determined both by the peculiarities of a psychologist's professional education, the priorities of fundamental training with a significant amount of methodological knowledge (Arpentieva, 2016), and the undeveloped content of psychological counseling, the lack of a counseling algorithm due to the deficient psychological knowledge about female infertility (Voskanyan, Vasilyeva, 2024).

Female infertility is the origin of serious psychological problems (Golyshkina et al., 2021). Infertility may cause numerous negative psychological consequences, such as emotional stress, depression, anxiety, fear (Shakhvorostova, 2017), anger, shame, jealousy (Yermoshenko, Krutova, 2005), loneliness, despair, lack of self-esteem, emotional instability (Dementieva, 2010), insufficient sexual impression and sexual

dysfunction (Assaysh-Öberg, Borneskog & Ternström, 2023). Negative psychological phenomena associated with infertility are a factor behind the growing demand of infertile women for qualified psychological help.

Infertility is a global problem, and according to some estimates, about 186 million people worldwide are suffering from infertility (Assaysh-Öberg, Borneskog, Ternström, 2023). Despite of this, psychological studies of infertility and the related content of psychological counseling for women who suffer from infertility, are quite few in number and lack their consistency and fundamental scientific understanding (Kim, Moon & Kim, 2020).

Most of the studies on psychological counseling for infertile women somehow connect its content with the negative psycho-emotional consequences of female infertility (Fallahzadeh et. al., 2019), and the results of psychological counseling are associated with a reduction in stress, anxiety, and apathy (Meyers & Domar, 2021).

Psychological (psychogenic, functional) infertility, or infertility of unknown origin, is associated with the absence of any medical and objectively established problems in woman's reproductive system; pregnancy does not occur for psychological reasons, which may be due to intrapersonal conflicts or fears, or certain psychological problems that cause the internal resistance to pregnancy (Vasilenko, Blum, 2017). Many studies have proved the significant role of the family and family relations in the development and functioning of a woman's reproductive system (Mordas, Rudakova, 2021). Thus, Gavrilova V.E. considers a special disposition, formed during the childhood due to the peculiarities of family upbringing and child-parent relations, as factors of non-occurrence of pregnancy in some women despite of their objective somatic health (Gavrilova, 2018). Among these unfavorable family factors that might lead to the formation of that special disposition in the childhood, or a "family scenario" that would block the occurrence of pregnancy at the level of the central nervous system, the author highlights a distant relation with mother, the assignment of responsibilities to the baby girl to take care of a younger sibling, and excessive "adult" requirements for the child (Gavrilova, 2018). The main cause for infertility may be some traumatic experience related to the family and its social status: poverty, a father running out on the family, forced rejection of the "joys" of childhood (Manohar et al., 2016), which eventually develops into fear of an unfavorable financial situation and intrapersonal conflict, when two main factors would be fighting inside: the mother's motive and the career motive (Kipper & Zadik, 1996). The research on family situation of women with psychological infertility, both in the parental family and in their own, allows increasing the effectiveness of the assistance provided (Shakhvorostova, 2017; Stepanova, Bonkalo, 2022).

Psychological help to women with reproductive disorders in one way or another involves working with their past, analyzing the factors that would cause a conflict between a woman's desire to have a child and their inner unwillingness to fulfill the role of a mother (Filippova, 2014). The complexity of counseling for the problem of female infertility of unclear etiology, lies in its multidimensional and multifaceted nature,

related to the need of integrating those areas of psychology that deal with different manifestations of reproductive disorders, at different stages of its formation (Anderson, Dabelko-Schoeny & Fields, 2018).

Psychological counseling for problems related to female infertility of unknown etiology is a special type of professional activity of a consulting psychologist, who, firstly, is forced to act within the framework of the activities of related specialists, including the subject areas of obstetricians, internists, psychiatrists, lawyers, social workers, educators (Kheirkhah, Faramarzi & Shafierizi, 2023); secondly, performs helping activities in different conditions of clients and in different social situations of their development (Andrei et al., 2021); and thirdly, integrates the tasks of psychological counseling with the those of psychotherapy and psychocorrection, which is due to the interpenetration of deep personal problems of clients with problems of their interpersonal interaction (Kheirkhah, Faramarzi & Shafierizi, 2023).

Psychological help in a situation of female infertility of unclear etiology is based on a consultative conversation. During the psychological counseling, however, there may arise various difficulties related to both the client's behavior (Mironova, 2024) and the condition of the counseling psychologist himself (Korablina, Korgozha, 2014). The characteristics of the relationship in the psychologist-client system would play an important and actually decisive role here (Prusova, 2022), which is recognized by representatives of all areas of psychological counseling. A considerable attention is paid here to the communicative component of the personality of consulting psychologists themselves, the formation of their communicative competence (Stepanova, 2024), the content of which, according to researchers, would include developed emotional and social intelligence, empathy (Dolgova, Melnik, Karakhan, 2015), sociability (Lavrentieva, 2006), the internal locus of control (Petrovskaya, 1996), and the ability to speak, listen, and convince (Nalivayko and Shinkoruk, 2010).

The profession of a consulting psychologist, as it is known, belongs to a group of helping professions, which main characteristic is a special relationship that develops between a professional who provides assistance and a person who receives it, during the process of dialogue (Nalivayko, Shinkoruk, 2010). And it is precisely the counseling psychologist who should build up such "helping" relationships, and the effectiveness of the entire counseling process would depend on their ability to establish a communicative contact and manage a dialogue conversation (Arpentieva, 2016). The peculiarity of the professional training of a consulting psychologist as a specialist in helping activities lies in the need to integrate the processes of formation of professional competence as a combination of certain knowledge, skills and abilities that form the capacity to solve their professional problems (Shorokhov, 2023), and psychological preparedness – that is, the motivational, moral and existential components of the general professional readiness of a consulting psychologist (Korablina, Korgozha, 2014).

However, the question of the relationship between the communicative orientation of the consultant's personality, and their individual communicative style, with the forms

of their communicative interaction with the client, remains open and far from being investigated.

The purpose of this investigation was an identification of the relationship between the communicative orientation of the consulting psychologist and the satisfaction of their clients, women of various types with psychological infertility, with their developing relationships with the consulting psychologist. Such satisfaction with the relationship has been considered by us as one of the indicators of the effectiveness of the first phase of the consultation process.

Methods

A study focused on identifying the typological features of women with infertility of unknown origin was conducted by us earlier, with its published results (Stepanova, 2023). The present study constitutes the continuation of the previous study, and includes the same sample of 312 women with psychological infertility. This time the investigation has focused on the level of satisfaction of women with infertility of unclear etiology, with their relationship with a counseling psychologist.

The peculiarities of the communicative orientation of counseling psychologists were studied in a sample consisting of 72 counseling psychologists with work experience from 3 to 10 years, who provided individual psychological assistance to the interviewed women (at least two sessions). All respondents were women; the age range varied from 29 to 58 years old (the average age was 44.6 y.o.).

For the purpose of investigation of the communicative orientation of a consulting psychologist, there was chosen a methodology developed and tested back in 1987 by S.L. Bratchenko (the methodology based on the provisions of the theory of dialogue (M.M. Bakhtin et al.), designed to identify stable types of personality orientation in communication, with its manifestation in a communicative style, and individual communication strategy; the data of the psychometric verification of the methodology, that indicates its sufficient retest reliability and constructive validity, is presented in the author's dissertation; relationship satisfaction is a ten-point satisfaction scale (a variable answer to the question: "Please evaluate how satisfied you are with your relationship with a counseling psychologist: from 0 to 10 points, where 0 points - not satisfied at all, and 10 points - fully satisfied").

There was also examined the ratio of ratings of female clients of their consultants, as well as those of the consultants, of their clients, and their ideas about the ideal consultant and a difficult client. For this purpose, T. Leary's interpersonal relationship test was used.

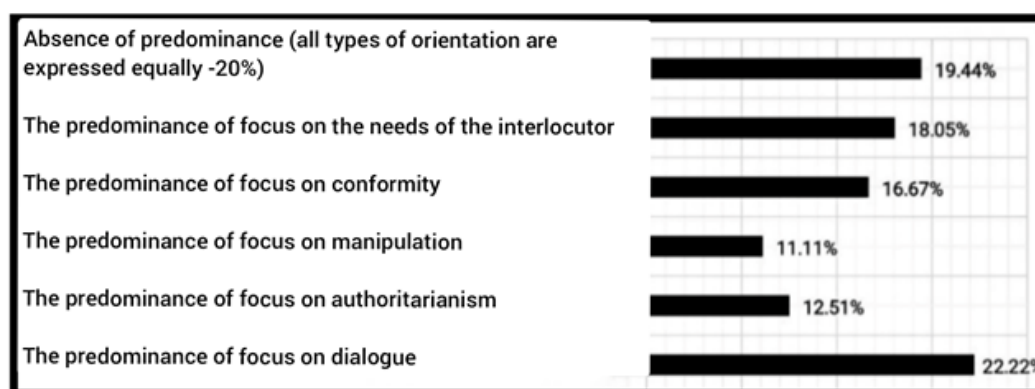
Statistical methods included a package of descriptive statistics, as well as comparative (Mann Whitney U-test), correlation (Spearman), cluster (Ward) and factor (principal component method) analyses.

Results

The five main types of women with psychological infertility were identified by us in a previous study (Stepanova, 2023), which include aggressive-masculine (AM), infantile-capricious (IC), patronizing-instructive (PI), anxiety-phobic (AP) and professional-oriented (PO) types. A study of the communicative orientation of consulting psychologists providing psychological help to women with infertility of unknown origin, performed using the methodology of S.L. Bratchenko, showed that all practicing psychologists have an individual communication style and differ from each other in their individual formula of communicative behavior (Figure 1). The absence of a predominance of any type of communicative orientation (all indicators fall within the range of average values) was registered only in less than 20% of practicing consulting psychologists.

Figure 1

Percentage distribution of consultants according to the prevailing type of communicative orientation



During the study of the degree of satisfaction of women with psychological infertility with their relationships developing in the "Psychologist-client" system (answering a direct question with answer options from 0 to 10 points, depending on the subjective assessment of the degree of satisfaction), there have been revealed certain correlations with indicators of the prevailing communicative orientation of the personality of the consulting psychologist (Table 1).

Table 1

Ratio between the degree of satisfaction of different types of women with psychological infertility with their relationships with counseling psychologists, and the prevailing type of their communication orientation

Type of personality of female clients	Concordance coefficient W	Types of communication orientation of the consultants				
		DG	AUTH	MN	CN	IN
AM	0,75***	0,132	-0,221	-0,169	0,617***	0,207

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Type of personality of female clients	Concordance coefficient W	Types of communication orientation of the consultants				
		DG	AUTH	MN	CN	IN
IC	0,81***	-0,196	-0,187	0,563***	0,198	0,177
PI	0,77***	0,233	0,449**	0,156	-0,033	-0,004
AP	0,73***	-0,204	-0,043	0,174	0,114	0,661***
PO	0,86***	0,753***	-0,012	-0,584***	0,112	0,349**

Note: ** $p < 0,01$; *** $p < 0,001$; DG – focus on dialogue; AUTH – focus on authoritarianism; MN – focus on manipulation; CN – focus on agreement, conformity; IN – focus on the needs of the interlocutor.

It has been established that most women with psychological infertility of aggressive-masculine (AM) type were satisfied with their communication interaction with consultants that had been aimed at adopting an objective position in communication; they were characterized by a renunciation to be understood by their communication partner (in this case, a counseling psychologist) and a willingness to help them in everything ($r = 0,617$; $p < 0,001$); while women of infantile-capricious (IC) type were feeling themselves more comfortable when communicating with those consultants focused on restraint and insincerity, and capable of hidden manipulation of a partner ($r = 0,563$; $p < 0,001$); patronizing-instructive (PI) individuals, on the contrary, would appreciate the consultant's ability to categorically assess the situation, give their prescriptive advice, and insist on their point of view ($r = 0,449$; $p < 0,01$); anxiety-phobic (AP) type would be oriented on interaction with such a consultant who would give all their attention to the client, seek to understand more deeply all their requests, listen, sympathize, and try to relieve their condition ($r = 0,661$; $p < 0,001$); and those women with prevalence of the professional-oriented (PO) type would be satisfied with the relationship with those consultants who prefer to establish an equal dialogue and achieve a communicative cooperation ($r = 0,753$; $p < 0,001$).

It is important to note that the dialogic communicative orientation of a consultant may not always demonstrate effectiveness in building relationships with female clients, and that the correlation between the degree of satisfaction with relationships with consultants focused on building an equal dialogue in groups of infantile-capricious and anxiety-phobic women types, would be negative. At the same time, the manipulative orientation in the consultant's communication would not always lead to a negative communicative effect: the correlation between these indicators in groups of women with a predominance of infantile-capricious, patronizing-instructive and anxiety-phobic types is positive.

Moreover, the results of the study on ratio between the ideas of female clients and consulting psychologists about an ideal consultant and a difficult client, evidence the necessity to take into account the needs of each individual client, and their typological features, manifested in interpersonal interaction, when counseling women with psychological infertility in order to achieve contact in the "Consulting Psychologist" system.

The characterological profiles of difficult clients, according to the views of psychologists providing psychological help to women with infertility of unclear etiology, would significantly differ from each other, depending on the prevailing type of their communicative orientation (Table 2).

Table 2

Perceptions of psychological consultants about a "difficult" client from among women with psychological infertility (average group score)

Prevailing orientation on:	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
Dialogue	7,8	14,2	4,9	5,8	13,2	13,3	6,6	8,9
Authoritarianism	12,6	6,9	14,8	6,2	9,2	1,6	4,2	7,4
Manipulation	13,4	12,9	15,2	10,7	4,3	1,8	2,0	2,6
Conformity	8,4	5,9	5,4	9,4	4,6	5,8	4,4	3,2
Alterocentrism	5,6	13,8	6,2	8,6	8,0	0,8	3,2	2,4
Similar prevalence	4,9	5,7	5,4	3,2	2,8	0,6	1,4	0,8

Note: I-VIII –characterological tendencies according to T. Leary: I – Authoritarian; II – Egoistic; III – Aggressive; IV – Suspicious; V – Subordinate; VI – Dependent; VII – Benevolent; VIII – Altruistic

According to counseling psychologists with a predominant focus on dialogue, a difficult client from among women suffering from infertility of unknown origin and seeking psychological help, would be a person characterized by narcissism (14.2), combined with self-deprecation and excessive feeling of guilt (13.2), as well as extreme lack of independence and subjection (13.3); while from the point of view of consultants focused on a directive style of communication, a difficult client would have such characterological personality traits as irritability, negativism, disobedience (14.8), a tendency for dominance, and resistance (12.6); and consultants who are used to build their communicative behavior based on the interests of their interlocutor, find it difficult to advise women who would resort to mockery, sarcasm, and skepticism when communicating (13.8).

A pairwise comparison of the average group indicators of the characterological tendencies of difficult clients, from the point of view of consultants of different communicative orientation, has evidenced the statistically significant differences between the groups of psychologists, at a rather high level of significance (Table 3).

Table 3

The results of a comparative analysis of the ideas of consulting psychologists with a predominance of different communicative orientations, about a "difficult" client (level of significance)

Differences between:	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
1 – 2 gr.	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,124	0,046	0,000	0,049	0,093
1 – 3 gr.	0,000	0,089	0,000	0,007	0,000	0,000	0,001	0,001
1 – 4 gr.	0,102	0,000	0,000	0,004	0,000	0,000	0,023	0,009
1 – 5 gr.	0,095	0,087	0,069	0,088	0,005	0,000	0,006	0,001
1 – 6 gr.	0,047	0,000	0,106	0,039	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000
2 – 3 gr.	0,110	0,015	0,092	0,004	0,074	0,069	0,071	0,000
2 – 4 gr.	0,000	0,103	0,001	0,042	0,039	0,008	0,101	0,005

Differences between:	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
2 – 5 gr.	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,049	0,061	0,098	0,077	0,021
2 – 6 gr.	0,000	0,110	0,000	0,012	0,033	0,087	0,023	0,001
3 – 4 gr.	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,124	0,117	0,003	0,042	0,099
3 – 5 gr.	0,000	0,105	0,000	0,063	0,036	0,094	0,100	0,118
3 – 6 gr.	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,056	0,067	0,077	0,082
4 – 5 gr.	0,091	0,023	0,079	0,093	0,001	0,000	0,061	0,097
4 – 6 gr.	0,093	0,096	0,312	0,004	0,055	0,000	0,000	0,000
5 – 6 gr.	0,069	0,000	0,078	0,000	0,000	0,172	0,181	0,024

Note: I-VIII – characterological tendencies according to T. Leary (Table 2). 1 gr. – Predominance of the focus on dialogue; 2 gr. – predominance of the focus on authoritarianism; 3 gr. – predominance of the focus on manipulation; 4 gr. – predominance of the focus on conformity; 5 gr. – predominance of the focus on alterocentrism; 6 gr. – no type of communicative orientation prevails.

In the group of consultants who showed no predominance of one communicative orientation over another, and where all attitudes in communicative interaction were expressed in the same way (20% each), there were identified a significantly smaller number of those characterological traits of the client that may cause difficulty in establishing a psychological contact.

It should be also noted that in this group, there were obtained the highest indicators of women's satisfaction with relationships in the "Psychologist-consultant" system (9.6), regardless of their typological characteristics (46 out of 48 women gave the highest rating of relationship satisfaction, which amounts to 95.83%).

Discussion

In modern psychology, the scientific understanding of the problem of communicative behavior of counseling psychologists and their professional communication is represented by a very limited amount of theoretical and empirical material (Mironova, 2024). Over the years, the main attention has been paid to the communicative competence of a psychologist, traditionally considered as an integrative education of their personality, including a certain set of communicative qualities and skills that are universal for successful professional interaction with different types of clients (Petrovskaya, 1996; Lavrentieva, 2006; Nalivaiko, Shinkoruk, 2010; Dolgova, Melnik, Karakhan, 2015).

However, in recent years, the researches have increasingly suggested that the nature of interpersonal communication is largely determined by typological characteristics of the communicative sphere of the personalities of communication partners (Nazarova, 2023), and those characteristics, which are quite persistent and would manifest themselves in individual communication styles, attitudes, positions in communication, and communicative orientation (Odintsova, Razgotchikova, Kuzmina, 2024).

When considering the difficulties faced by practicing psychologists, the researchers note certain communication barriers associated with the undeveloped ability of consulting psychologists to establish psychological contact with different categories of clients (Mironova, 2024), as well as with the individual characteristics of their own stable communicative behavior (Shorokhov, 2023; Stepanova, 2024).

In the situation of counseling women with psychological infertility, which complexity is due to both different typological features of their personality (Stepanova, 2023), life-meaning orientations (Stepanova, Bonkalo, 2022), and the presence of some intrapersonal conflict (Kipper & Zadik, 1996), as well as their mental states – anxiety (Golyshkina et al., 2021), depression (Fallahzadeh et. al., 2019), fear (Ermoshenko, Krutova, 2005), irritation (Dementieva, 2010), obsessions (Filippova, 2014), it is particularly important to find the ways to establish a psychological contact in the "Psychologist-client" system as the first phase of the consultation process.

The results of this study confirm the connection between the communicative orientation of consulting psychologists specializing in female infertility, and client satisfaction with relationships developing in the "Psychologist – client" system.

At the same time, the traditional idea that the orientation of a consulting psychologist towards dialogue with a client was one of the important conditions for the successful contact process (Prusova, 2022) has not been confirmed. Neither was confirmed the negative role of the consultant psychologist's orientation towards manipulating the client in professional interaction.

The results of the study have revealed that the satisfaction of women with psychological infertility with their relationship with a counseling psychologist, would

depend both on the typological characteristics of women themselves, and on the communicative orientation of the consultant, and that in order to establish a contact in the "Psychologist-client" system, it is necessary that the psychologist would develop communicative flexibility, and the ability to overcome their own habitual and stable forms of communicative behavior, to occupy different positions during the professional interaction, depending on the typological characteristics of their clients.

Conclusion

In the course of the research, it was discovered that the communicative orientation of the consultant psychologist's personality as a fairly stable and peculiar characteristic of their position in interpersonal communication, is interrelated with the typological characteristics of women with psychological infertility. Based on the conducted research, it can be suggested that the communicative orientation of a consulting psychologist is one of the factors of their preparedness to consult women with psychological infertility. Providing there was no clear manifestation of one or another communicative orientation, neither were there difficulties in psychological counseling of different types of women, but at the same time there was registered a high degree of women's satisfaction, regardless of their typological characteristics, with their relationships in the "Psychologist-client" system.

These findings indicate the need for the psychologists, in the process of their professional training for counseling women with psychological infertility, to focus on the development of the ability to use different ways and attitudes in communicative interaction, depending on the typological characteristics of their clients. The development of this ability presupposes the formation of a psychologist's communicative adaptability, flexibility and creativity.

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Conflict of Interest Information

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.