

Psychology of Development

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Forming of a children's controlling behaviour

Forming of a child's adaptable behaviour appears under the process of family interaction and is determined by family structure, parents' copying style, sex-role educational stereotypes, as well as by nature of child-parent relationships. A child does not copy the pattern of his/her parent's copying-behaviour but has to adapt to it according to how his relations with the adults are in reality and how he/she "realizes" them.

Key words: *Copying, copying behaviour, copying style, child-parent's relations, family structure, sex-role stereotype.*

Copying style like individual life style of a person determines the steady way of psychological adaptation that influences social environment as well as nature of inter-personal relations. Copying behaviour allows reducing the stressor's pressure which means to perform the protective function. A child "learns" different ways of psychological overcoming (copying strategies) while contacting adults and other children first in his/her own family, and then in social groups. The way how a child apprehends different controlling methods and what factors influence his/her choice is the subject of recent scientific research works. In some of them it has been proved that a copying style is determined by age, sex-role and family factors [1-3,5,6]. Also links between parents' and children's copying styles have been found [4].

The main tasks of this research were to elicit factors influencing the formation of a pattern of copying behaviour with children who are brought up in different family environments as

well as to approve and to standardize the translated test «Self-Report Coping Scale» by Skinner.¹

In this research took part 575 children at the age from 7 to 11 from 12 compulsory schools and their parents (570 people) from 314 full, 136 short, 56 mixed, 28 large and 27 enlarged families. The great number of children can be referred to the conventional norm, only 49 children have had behavioural disorder (violated relations with adults and children of their age at school and at home – flights, rubbery, vagrancy, begging, being rude, aggression, confrontation, oppositional behaviour etc, classified according to MKB-10 as F.91.3). It was the reason to put them in a separate group.

As research methods we used: with children – Skinner’s «Self-Report Coping Sale» questionnaire, Ryan’s «Schoolager’s Coping Strategies Inventory», anxiety scale CMAS, PCI questionnaire – «Parent-child interaction» (our modification for junior schoolagers), with adults – adults’ variant of PCI questionnaire and Lasarus’s WOCQ.

During our research we have found out that children’s copying behaviour in spite it can be induced by them doesn’t not represent the exact copy of parents’ pattern. Copying style depended on child subjective perception of child-parents relations that present an important condition for accepting or refusing any controlling model or “tuning” for it. To what extend does parents copying style determine child-parents relations? What do sex-role stereotypes mean in bringing up process and, accordingly in forming of children copying behaviour?

The above-mentioned problems are very up-to date in the frame of studying different factors and conditions that influence copying style of children and teenagers in connection with psychocorrection and psychotherapy.

We have founded trustworthy distinctions in copying styles and child’s attitude towards his/her mother and father. Mothers

¹ To collect the experimental data under the guidance of the author, O.Y. Mashtal took part.

more often than Fathers used the strategies of *searching for social support* (when $p=0,000$), *taking responsibilities* (when $p=0,016$) and *escaping* (when $p=0,002$). Fathers were more demanding to a child (when $p=0,003$) and ticked family confrontation in bringing-up matters more often than Mothers. From their side Mothers were more severe (when $p=0,002$), ticked better emotional closeness (when $p=0,000$), acceptance (when $p=0,005$) and cooperation with a child (when $p=0,000$) as well as worried more about him/her ($p=0,000$).

Those distinctions have been determined mainly by role structure of a family and separation of functional positions by Father and Mother in a full family.

Mothers' and Fathers' copying behaviour and style of relationship with a child in families with different structure also differed from each other:

- Mothers in full families as compared with short families used copying strategies of *self-control more often* (when $p=0,011$) and *positive reappraisal less often* (when $p=0,023$), they also worried about the child *more* (when $p=0,026$) and showed educational confrontation in the family *less* ($p=0,000$);

- Mothers in full families demonstrated *better* acceptance of the child ($p=0,01$), consistency in growing-up ($p=0,009$) and much *less* control over the child ($p=0,009$) and educational confrontation ($p=0,019$) than mothers in short families;

- Fathers in full families as compared with stepfathers showed *much more* acceptance of the child ($p=0,003$) and anxiety for him/her ($p=0,04$);

- Mothers in short families noted *better* emotional closeness with the child ($p=0,007$), his acceptance ($p=0,019$), consistency in growing-up ($p=0,008$) than in mixed families.

Perception of father's attitude also differed among children in different family structure. In full families children noted father's accord with them *more often* than in mixed families ($p=0,019$). Children from mixed families announced fathers' strictness *more often* than in short families ($p=0,029$) which is natural as fathers after divorce do not take an active part in his

child's growing-up. Nevertheless children from full and short families noted their acceptance by their fathers *much more* than in large families (when $p=0,007$ and $p=0,048$ accordingly).

It is obvious that family structure plays an important role in the child's life influencing the development of its personality including adaptation behaviour.

Children from full families owned wider range of coping strategies than children from short families:

- Children from full families *more often* used the strategy of *problem solving* ($p=0,003$), *looking for social support* ($p=0,000$), *distancing* ($p=0,006$) and *internalization* ($p=0,004$) than children from short families;

- Children from full families used *more often* the strategy of *problem solving* - «change something to get it» ($p=0,037$) or «say I am sorry or tell the truth» ($p=0,031$), the strategy of *looking for social support* - «ask someone from my family for advice» ($p=0,011$) or «talk to someone» ($p=0,003$), as well as the strategies of *distancing and distraction* - «try to relax and stay calm» ($p=0,016$), «draw, write or read something» ($p=0,000$), «play games» ($p=0,015$), «eat or drink» ($p=0,031$);

- Children from short families used *more often* the strategy of *distancing* - «forget about everything» ($p=0,024$) and *less often* the strategies of *externalization* - «tease somebody» ($p=0,036$) and *internalization* - «think about it» ($p=0,011$) than children of their age in full families.

The above mentioned conformities have been proved while comparing short and mixed families. Children from mixed family have wider range of coping behaviour than those from short families:

- Children from mixed families use *more often* the strategies of *problem solving* ($p=0,001$), *looking for social support* ($p=0,018$), *distancing* ($p=0,022$) and *internalization* ($p=0,010$) as compared with children from short families;

- Children from mixed families apply *more often* the strategies of *distraction and distancing* - «try to forget» ($p=0,002$), «draw, write, read something» ($p=0,000$), «play

games» (p=0,003), «talk to somebody»(p=0,04), «stay alone» (p=0,004);

- children from mixed families as compared with short families used *more often* extra pointed copying - *replacing* - «do something similar» (p=0,003) and *less often* intro pointed one- «feel sorry for myself» (p=0,048).

A child from full family has been oriented more than the one from mixed family towards *looking for social support* – *more often* «got some help from a friend» (p=0,035) and «asked somebody from his/her family for advice» (p=0,047). Children from mixed families as compared to those from full families chose *more often* the strategies of *distracting and distancing*– «draw, write, read» (p=0,014), «try to forget» (p=0,013) and used *replacing* methods– «do something similar to someone» (p=0,013).

It is possible to say that children from full families as compared with those living with stepfathers in mixed families were more dependent on support of the other people and used less the inadequate strategies of *distraction? Distancing and replacing* (i.e. emotionally focused copying).

Children from large families also differed from children of their age. They were mostly focused on *problem solving* – «thought about what to do or to say» than children of their age from full and short families (when p=0,022 and p=0,015 accordingly).

Children from large families as compared with children of their age from full and fixed families used *less often* copying focused on *looking for social support* (when p=0,006 and p=0,032 accordingly). In comparison with children from full families they *less often* «told a friend or member of the family about what had happened» (p=0,021), «got some help from a friend» (p=0,041) and *more often* «did something similar» (p=0,029) (i.e. tried to «win back»).

Children from large families differed from all the others because they chose *less often* the strategy of *emotional support* like «hug and clasp somebody nearest or my favourite toy, or

flatter an animal» (when $p=0,001$, $p=0,002$, $p=0,008$). As compared with children from full and mixed families they used *less often* the strategy of *distraction* – «jog or walk» ($p=0,008$ и $p=0,012$ accordingly), «play games » ($p=0,012$), «draw, write and read something» ($p=0,048$). It can be explained by the fact that in all large families there exist problems with personal space and besides that they have to grow up faster – the process of socialization goes faster. Probably that is why they use *less often* than children from mixed and full families the strategies of *internalization and distancing* – «think about it» ($p=0,001$), «try to forget» ($p=0,001$ and $p=0,05$ accordingly).

Thus we can make a conclusion that the reason why a child chooses copying strategies also depends on life conditions and system of relationships in the family which are determined by its structure. Children from two-parents families have turned to be more copying competent than children from short families. Together with this the copying strategies of mixed family children have been less infantile and more socially mature as compared with other children who have turned to be more focused on looking for social support or emotional copying.

Children from short families have turned to be in worse position. That particular family structure when the whole power is concentrated in one hand, does not contribute to the variety of controlling methods that a child can “afford” in these conditions. That is why they have to use mostly the strategies focused not on problem solving but on rebuilding emotional and soul balance.

Parents’ copying style and nature of relationships with a child have been caused by sex-role stereotypes in behaviour and parents’ aims, and have had a considerable difference among adults and children perception. For instance, girls noted *better* closeness to their mother ($p=0,029$) and satisfaction with their relationships ($p=0,05$) than boys. Boys were not satisfied with their relationships with fathers *much more* than girls ($p=0,05$) and noted *more often* that their fathers had been severe to them ($p=0,08$).

Sex-role stereotypes have been founded either in educational styles or in copying behaviour among adults. Boys' mothers showed themselves *much more* severe to their children than girls' mothers ($p=0,013$). Girls' fathers controlled *much more* their child's behaviour ($p=0,049$) but showed *less* strictness in growing-up process ($p=0,034$) than boys' fathers. In total girls fathers used the strategies of *self-control* ($p=0,06$) and *looking for social support much more* ($p=0,018$) than boys' fathers. It testifies that there are different ways of control and educational styles among mothers and fathers which form behavioural models with a child according to his/her gender.

Gender differences in copying behavior also prove it:

- Girls as compared with boys used *more often* the strategies of *looking for social support* - «tell each other or someone from my family about what has happened» ($p=0,048$), «tell somebody about my feelings» ($p=0,000$), «hug and clasp somebody nearest or my favourite toy, or flatter an animal» ($p=0,000$), «say I am sorry or tell the truth» ($p=0,001$);

- For girls it more typical than for boys to *use more* often the strategies of *internalization* (when $p=0,027$): for example, «feel sorry for myself» ($p=0,023$); «worry about others' negative opinion about me» ($p=0,002$); «cry and feel sad» ($p=0,001$); «think about it» ($p=0,035$); «pray» ($p=0,054$);

- Boys as compared with girls used *more often* the strategies of *problem solving* - «change something to get it» ($p=0,013$) as well as of *externalization* - «curse loudly» ($p=0,045$), «do something similar» ($p=0,015$), «fight with someone» ($p=0,000$), «tease somebody» ($p=0,001$), «get crazy» ($p=0,034$), «hit, break or throw out things» ($p=0,059$);

- Boys more often than girls use the strategies of *distraction* and *facilitation* - «sleep» ($p=0,039$), «walk around or outside» ($p=0,003$), «jog or walk» ($p=0,022$), «walk, run, ride the bicycle» ($p=0,009$) as well as «talk to somebody» ($p=0,037$).

It means that at that age it is more typical for girls to use the intro pointed copying as for boys to use extra pointed copying which can be explained by parents' expectations because

aggression among girls is not realized as socially accepted form of protective behaviour.

Children with deviant behaviour also differed in controlling methods from children of their age who didn't have any deviation of adaptation. Controlling behaviour of children with deviant behaviour was determined by violated relation between them and the society.

Children with some breaches of behaviour used *more often* the strategies of *externalization* (p=0,045). Under stress they chose *rather often* the following ways of controlling: «get angry, throw away or break something» (p=0,016), «fight with someone» (p=0,000), «get crazy» (p=0,044), «shout and cry» (p=0,004), «tease someone» (p=0,000), «do something similar» (p=0,037), «hit, break or throw out things» (p=0,013).

Together with extra pointed copying the used *rather often* the strategies of *distancing* – «try to forget» (p=0,007), «stay alone» (p=0,022), of *escaping-distraction* – «dream about something» (p=0,043), «walk around or outside» (p=0,031), «play games» (p=0,007), and less often the strategies of *internalization* – «worry about that» (p=0,042).

Parents' attitude to their children was taken differently by children with breaches in behaviour as compared to children with standard adaptation:

- Children with deviant behaviour noted *lower* emotional closeness with mother (p=0,019) and father (p=0,003) as well as mother (p=0,02) and father (p=0,000) as compared to children with standard adaptation;

- Children with some breaches of behaviour noted heir fathers being *more* severe (p=0,037) and demanding (p=0,022) as well as showed lower adoption towards them (p=0,008).

Mother's attitude towards her child in those families differed greatly from the families where there were no such behavioural problems. Mothers of children with deviant behaviour had *more* conflicts with members of the family on growing-up methods (p=0,005) and noted *higher* dissatisfaction with relationships to their child (p=0,000).

We have founded the influence of parents' copying behaviour pattern on controlling behaviour of children with deviations in behaviour as well as on nature of child-parent's relationships (Tables 1,2,3):

- Mothers who used *more often* the strategies of *planning the problem solving* were more severe to their child;

- Internal mothers choosing the strategy of *taking responsibilities*, controlled their child *more*, i.e. they tried to behave themselves the same way in educational matters. т.е. они пытались вести себя также и в сфере воспитания;

- Mothers disposed mainly to *positive reassessment* of stressful situation better cooperated with their child and were more satisfied with their relationships. Thus it proves their more flexible position;

- Fathers who used *more often confrontation copying*, were more severe towards their child, less successive in growing up and demonstrated less adaptation of their child;

- Fathers who were ready to choose the strategies of *distancing, escaping, positive reassessment, planning the problem solving* cooperated with a child much less which confirms their low participation in growing up process;

- The *more* fathers used the strategies of *accepting responsibilities*, the *worse* they assessed emotional closeness with their child which testifies his/her emotional non acceptance from parents' side.

Thus fathers of the children with violations in their behaviour have been less involved in the growing up process or projected in this field their deconstructive copying style.

Subjective child's assessment of his/her parents attitude towards him/her supports these conclusions:

- In the families where Father used more often *confrontation copying*, children noted less often his confrontation with members of the family on educational matters, i.e. Father's authority in these issues was indisputable;

- Fathers who use constructive copying of *planning the problem solving* more often according to child's opinion have been more demanding;

- Fathers inclined for *looking for social support* according to child's opinion controlled him/her less;

- Mothers who use more often the strategies of *taking responsibilities and planning the problem solving*, according to child's opinion controlled him/her more and appeared to be more emotionally close to him/her;

- In the families where mothers were inclined to *confrontation copying and escaping* children noted better accord with her (i.e. such inconsequence in mother's behaviour gives the possibility for manipulating);

Thus it is obvious that parents' personal reactions under stress stipulate a lot the styles of family education and child's perception of his/her parents. The child has to "adapt" to their copying behaviour and system of demands. As for parents, they build their cooperation with a child according to their controlling mechanisms.

Mother's and Father's copying style is interconnected with controlling behaviour of maladapted child:

- Father's *Confrontation copying* promoted the use of the *externalization* strategy by a child – «cry to let the stress out»;

- An expressed tendency of a father *to look for social support* didn't lead to the choice of the strategies of *problem solving* – a child thought *much less* about «what he will do or say»;

- Fathers' use of the strategies of *taking responsibilities and planning the problem solving* led to the fact that children were much more «angry with themselves with things they should not have done», i.e. fathers' internal position was forming internalization with children;

- Focus on *positive reassessment* among fathers led to the formation of internalization among their children;

- When mothers demonstrated better *taking responsibilities*, their children showed *less distancing* – they seldom «say to themselves that it does not matter» or «that they do not care»;

- The expressed tendency of mothers to *positive reassessment* caused in a child the display of the strategies of *externalization* – «cry to let the stress out»;

- When mothers use *planning the problem solving*, their children *seldom* use *distancing* – «say to myself that it does not matter» and seldom think that «they can change the situation».

The results of this research let us make a conclusion that the pattern of child's copying behaviour is being formed under several factors among which the family processes take a leading role. In cognitive-behavioural approach every individual is taken as self-dependent as well as mutual family communications is seen as incentive and addition to the development of the other. «Social teaching» in this case is done according to parents' support of child's behaviour.

If we analyze a family based on systematic approach, we can realize the “symptomatic behaviour” of a family member as a result of deviations in the whole system of relationships. If this “symptom” is taken in family context, and then it turns out that “bad moments do not come to a person, but to families”. And “identified patient” is only a family's “scapegoat” who suffers for all of them which is pointed out by “behavioural patterns” of family members under stress. Studying copying behaviour of children with deviant behaviour proves in practice these points of view either on intramental or interpersonal levels: violated relationships with parents have formed child's inadequate reactions on stress where a parent's personality – in this case his copying style – turns to be a factor of internal, psychologically motivated conditions of child's development and adaptation (i.e. “as the child's life is, the same is its copying”).

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