

CPSYC 2014

Description of problematic situations for students referring to the psychological support center of the St. Petersburg State University

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Abstract

The Article based on 390 cases of the psychological consulting practice describes the content of different types of problematic situations typical for students depending on the year of study (age) and chosen profession. The features of the most important (actual) problematic situations with which students in sciences and humanities refer are shown. The relation between the readiness for work with a professional psychologist and the age, sex and the faculty of the student is discovered.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of CPSYC 2014.

Keywords: Problematic situation; psychological aid to students; readiness to receive psychological aid.

1. Introduction

During their study at the University students face a lot of issues of various types: adaptation to a new place, a higher level of responsibility due to higher learning requirements, establishment of relationships with fellow students, search for and building of close partnerships, disappointment in the chosen profession etc. To solve these kinds of issues, special psychological support services are often established in higher education institutions to render professional psychological aid.

In the West the idea of student services, psychological consulting and development programs for students underwent fast growth since 1940s (Canon, 1988; Winston & Creamer, 1997). The first psychological support services for students in Russia emerged 20 years ago. Currently such services work at more than 60 higher education institutions of Russia (Slavogorodskaya, 2012), one of which is based at the Saint Petersburg State University.

We should notice that there is no single concept for rendering psychological aid to students. However a review of the available literature (Kholmogorova, 2010; Nabatnikov, 2011) allows revealing a number of common fields of psychological work with student and identifying a number of features typical for a certain educational institution. The

growth in the number of references (in the first academic year of the Service's operation (2003/2004) the number of individual psychological consultations was 112 totally while 24 to 50 consultations per week i.e. 1000 consultations annually on the average are rendered currently) and expansion of the range of problematic situations evidences demand for accumulation and realization of the collected information about types and features of problematic situations to develop effective strategies for rendering psychological aid to students.

2. Problem Statement

A peculiarity of operation of psychological consulting services in Russia is commitment of their specialists mainly to solution of issues related to the learning process (e.g. readiness for study, adaptation in first years of study, including for students from other cities, fear of failure etc.) (Ivanova, 2010). On the other side, psychological support services are often established based on the nature of problems or the category of students. For example, we can see services aimed at prevention of different types of deviant behavior (alcohol addiction, smoking, feeding behavior disorders), career guidance services or social psychological services intended for adaptation of first-year students or national minority students. The specialization of the educational institution also contributes to differentiation of services. In each of the versions described above work of the Service is aimed at solution of narrow tasks. But in the situation of increasing demands and expansion of the range of problematic situations this approach shows low efficiency. Moreover only one or two specialists work at such services.

As Bishop says (1992) for work with students we must take into consideration the key tendency of this age group. These are persistent changes in the student subculture. The behavior of students varies with each next generation. Employees of consulting centers at universities notice the increasing number of students with serious psychological problems and the general increase in severity of such problems (Sharkin, 1997; Gorchakova & al's, 2013). In this regard we must focus not only on learning problems of students but on regular monitoring of problems students refer with.

Therefore a psychological support service must be organized in such a manner to provide effective aid to students in a broad and actual range of problems.

In connection with the problems described above we have a number of questions relating to the psychological support service: how must it be organized, which problems will their workers face in addition to learning issues? What type of specialists must we engage: narrowly specialized or more universally trained? What kind of aid must be rendered: long-term or issue-oriented? We must take into consideration that such services usually engage voluntary servants, and on the other side we can't know the level of readiness of the very students to accept advice under the "student as client" pattern.

3. Research Questions: Can we identify main features of problematic situations for students in sciences and humanities? Are there any relations between the profession chosen, year of study and readiness for psychological work?

4. Purpose of the Study: To review and identify features of problematic situations for students referring to the student psychological support service for psychological consultation. Also:

- to identify, which problematic situations are most actual for students and which are least.
- to describe typical features of problematic situations depending on the specialization chosen (sciences or humanities), age and year of study
- to identify the level of readiness for psychological work depending on the specialization chosen (sciences or humanities), age and year of study.

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