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Trust in and Perception of Parents in Children with Different Coping Strategies

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Abstract

The article reviews the problem of children's trust in relation to children's perception of parents. Children of different age (N= 119). The following methods: the projective techniques «Kinetic family drawing»; «The Sacks sentence completion test»; «Children's coping questionnaire». Data processing: content analysis, correlation analysis (Spearman's rho), IBM SPSS Statistics 20.0. The study has revealed that as children grow older their perception and understanding of trust shifts from family relationships to friendships. Relationships with peers start to "oust" close family relationships spurred by the emerging need to share information and to find an object of trust which would demonstrate specific qualities.

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1. Introduction

Trust is a basic property of a person that builds up in early childhood [1]. Trust is often considered a socio-psychological phenomenon [2], [3] and an important concept of morally integral behavior as well as an ethical moral category [4]. Without trust it is impossible to reveal oneself [5]. Incapable of trusting behavior, a person may find it difficult to establish close relationships. According to S.N. Plesovskikh [6], trust is an ancient social concept. Its social and historical roots date back to interaction practices of the earliest human communities. Amid a constantly threatening external environment members of the earliest human communities consolidated and integrated on the basis of trust. Trust helps one to live in integrity and harmony both with oneself and, on the

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whole, with the world and people around [7]. Mistrust hinders interaction and exploration of the world [8]. Excessive trust increases a person's vulnerability.

Unfortunately, contemporary Russia is a "low-trust country" [9]. In 2006-2008 sociological research revealed a dramatically low level of trust to one another. 72.68% of Russians believe that "one should be cautious of others" [10]. These data reflect many years of social transformations in Russia that have undermined trust both in government institutions and other people. Trust can neither be taught nor won by effort; trust builds up solely with time [11]. The specific features of trust and relationships in teenage jailed criminals [12]. Trust explores the ability to instill safety and value into the surrounding environment (i.e. situational relevance) [13]. Trust emerges, builds up and grows stronger together with a person's experience of interaction with the environment. As V.P. Zinchenko [13] puts it, trust pertains to the emotional dimension of the human psyche, which makes it difficult to rationalize. Trust is a fundamental feeling that reveals a person's attitude to oneself and others in terms of a broad variety of aspects of human behavior (actions, intentions, ideas etc.). According to I.V. Antonenko [14], social and psychological trust-building mechanisms include 1) a situation to demonstrate trust; 2) the subjective givenness of a situation (a person's perception of the situation); 3) a person's experience (individual, family, ethnic and cultural etc.); 4) relevant demonstration of trust. Trusting behavior is dynamic and can vary in terms of intensity depending on a person's experience, the current situation, and an object of trust [15].

Childhood is a unique age span to establish trust. Trust emerges in response to care and creates the foundation for a child's identity that will later encompass three feelings – firstly, a feeling that "everything is fine"; secondly, a feeling that the child is becoming his/her own true self; and thirdly, a feeling that he/she is becoming a person that others would like him/her to become [1]. The aim of this research is to study the perception of trust in children of different ages and its relation to their perception of fathers and mothers, as well preferred strategies of coping behavior. Our hypothesis is that differences in behavioral strategies and, therefore, children's trust / mistrust to others is related to children's perception of parents' emotional, personal and behavioral properties.

2. Method

A total of 119 children participated in the study including 20 preschool children (their average age being 3.5 years), 20 secondary school pupils (their average age being 14.8 years), 79 primary school pupils (their average age being 8.3 years). All the participants live and study in Saint-Petersburg and the Leningrad region and come from two-parent families with one to three children. Three class masters took part in the study as experts. We used the following techniques: 1) a private talk when children were asked to answer the question "What does it mean to trust" (for junior pupils) or "What helps to build trusting relationships" (for teenagers); 2) projective techniques «Kinetic family drawing» (KFD) by Burns-Kaufman [16], 3) «The Sacks sentence completion test» (SSCT) by Sacks-Levy [17]; 4) revised "Ways of Coping Questionnaire" (WCQ) by R.S. Lazarus and S. Folkman [18], adaptation by T.L. Kryukova and others for assessing parents' coping strategies in children's views; 5) «Children's coping questionnaire» by I.M. Nikolskaya and R.M. Granovskaya [19]. Data processing included content analysis, analysis of the significance of differences (Chi-square, Mann-Whitney U, Kruskal-Wallis), correlation analysis (Spearman's rho), IBM SPSS Statistics 20.0.

The study was carried out in two stages. The first stage included private talks to study the perception of trust in children of all the three age groups. At the second main stage 79 primary school pupils participated in a psychological diagnostic examination[†]. A child was first asked to draw his/her family (KFD technique) and then to finish a set of sentences (SSCT technique); a follow-up task was to choose preferable behavioral strategies from the list (the questionnaire by I.M. Nikolskaya and R.M. Granovskaya) and to answer a couple of questions

[†]The research was performed by Yu.A. Kiselyova as part of her graduation assignment "The Perception of Parents in Primary School Pupils with Different Coping Strategies" (Saint-Petersburg State University, 2014).

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