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The study of relationships between psychological trauma and divorce

The article is devoted to the analysis of interrelation between individual traumatic experience of a person and divorce situation. Posttraumatic stress, which is a consequence of impact on the person of extreme psycho-traumatic factors of high intensity, affects not only the individual, but also all levels of his interaction with other people. Respectively, the need of the comprehensive analysis of consequences of traumatic experience is defined by involvement of a person in structure of interpersonal relations, including family relations, and how destructive can these consequences be for family functioning. Also this article is devoted to the analysis of strategy of the coping behavior used by people in a divorce situation. Now the mechanisms of psychological protection and coping mechanisms are considered the most important forms of adaptation processes and response of individuals to stressful situations. According to the authors, the choice of constructive strategy of coping behavior in a divorce situation by the person helps to adapt for this difficult life situation, as well as to prevent development of posttraumatic stress as a reaction to this traumatic event. Besides, the conclusion is made that studying of consequences of processes of coping with a trauma of divorce demand further discussion.

Key words: psychological trauma, divorce, posttraumatic stress disorder, traumatic experience, coping strategy.

Introduction

In modern psychology interest to a family problematic never faded, and its peak fell on the 1970–1980 years of last century. Domestic psychologists, sociologists, philosophers, culturologists right now try to comprehend those considerable changes in the family relations which have been undergone by the Kazakhstan family in the last decade. Among them are well-known phenomena and trends, such as decrease of number of recorded marriages and increase in number of divorces.

Throughout a life journey people can face difficult situations or the events demanding extraordinary emotional expenses. This special type of situations is designated by researchers as life crises [1–3]. These are the changes in life, consequences of which depend not only on what occurs, but also on perception and response to them [2, 3]. Subjective ideas of a pathogenic situation and its assessment are of great importance in formation of inability to resist to a psychological trauma [4]. The difficult situation and its experience are always bound to a certain event, and divorce of spouses can certainly be referred to such crucial, significant events [5, 6]. A situation of divorce is a difficult situation in person genesis, which appears to be non-normative, occurring «out of schedule», and is characterized by an emotional rupture of the relations with the spouse. Researchers consider that in a post-divorce situation the number of problems increases in accordance with the number of unsolved traumatic experiences which have arisen after specific traumatic events in life of a person.

It should be noted that the need of studying of experience by the person of consequences of a psychic trauma, which can lead to violation of social adaptation of the person, is caused, first of all, by requirements of practice of psychological assistance to the person who, owing to the various reasons (individual and personal features, the circumstances), was subject to influence of factors of a psycho-traumatic situation. The following arguments testify in favor of significance of solution of this task. Firstly, development of a civilization creates possibility of large and global disasters, accompanied by the feeling of powerlessness and helplessness of a large number of people. Secondly, the problem has a huge practical significance as post-traumatic stress disorders spread among the population. Thirdly, absence of distinct theoretical concepts explaining the reasons, mechanisms, features of dynamics of the remote consequences of traumatic experience, generates considerable difficulties in diagnostics, prophylaxis and rehabilitation of victims.

In our opinion, the relation between existence of traumatic experience of a person and the subsequent divorce is, on the one hand, that traumatic experience leads to weakening of interrelations with other people, which eventually leads to their violation and as a result — to decrease in adaptive opportunities of the person

in the sphere of interpersonal communication. And here quite pertinent is the assumption of how it can complicate the relations of spouses, which eventually can lead to a rupture of the relations.

On the other hand, experience by the person of a trauma of divorce in many respects is defined by existence of previous traumatic experience, in particular, incompleteness of former psychological traumas of different character, as well as earlier application of strategy of coping with traumatic experiences, often has a negative impact on success of overcoming and the subsequent adaptation in a divorce situation.

Impact of psychological post trauma on divorce

So, how does previous traumatic experience affect dysfunctionality of the matrimonial relations finally leading to their break. Let's talk about it in more detail.

First of all, it is necessary to analyze the available researches for the purpose of definition of existing concepts concerning a relation between traumatic experience and divorce situation. The analysis of scientific literature allows to make a conclusion about a large number of the empirical material, which has been saved up by researchers during studying of psychological consequences of traumatic experience. As one of consequences of a traumatic event mentioned in these researches the divorce situation is mentioned rather often. However, it should be noted that the problem of influence of last traumatic experience on relationship of spouses did not receive sufficient coverage. So, for example, in the research of E. Jennifer, devoted to study of short-term and long-term consequences of posttraumatic stress at the rescuers, who took part in rescue operations after events on September 11 [7], there is a question of impact of this traumatic event on interpersonal, professional and physical functioning in long-term prospect. As one of such long-term consequences of violation of interpersonal functioning in direct participants divorce is named. According to the author, it is connected to that participants felt deep influence of a traumatic event. However, in this research, as well as in the others, explanation of mechanisms of influence of a traumatic event on relationship of spouses in marriage did not receive due reflection.

Numerous researches conducted showed that victims of natural disasters are also in danger of development of heavy posttraumatic stress disorder, which in long-term prospect can threaten their personal, professional and family lives. Thus, in the research by De Clercq [8] the question is that influence of traumatic events on families and couples can take the form of misunderstanding and rejection of a problem, difficulties in the sexual and emotional spheres, leading to a rupture of the relations.

This assumption also found reflection in the research by P. Roszell, the purpose of which was representation and empirical assessment of prospect of influence of stress on a course of life of a person [9]. The author refers to the empirical data obtained during the period from 1990 to 1992 in Toronto. Results of this research indicate that each initial and later specific and type of stress experience has discernible psychiatric risk consequences. In terms of sequential risk effects, initial personal physical victimization (e.g. parental physical abuse) of increases risk for both later personal physical victimization (e.g. spouse or partner physical abuse) of and later loss (e.g. personal divorce). While severe adaptational difficulties can increase the relevance of initial stress for risk of subsequent stress, this effect is not consistent across all stress experiences. In terms of interdependence of stress experiences, initial loss (e.g. parental divorce) reduces onset of adverse psychological and substance implications of later loss (e.g. later divorce). Prior personal physical victimization (e.g. parental physical abuse) of reduces risk for onset of substance problems following later victimization

Not smaller interest is caused by the research by M. Cerda, P.M. Bordelois, F. Norris, K.C. Koenen, carried out for the purpose of definition of symptoms of posttraumatic stress and functional disorder after natural disaster [10]. The purpose of this study was to compare the influence of acute hurricane-related exposures and ongoing post-hurricane exposures on the short-and long-term course of posttraumatic stress symptoms (PTSS) and functional impairment (FI). Post-hurricane exposures included traumatic events such as sexual assault and stressors such as divorce or serious financial problems.

Thus, in the analyzed researches representing only a small part from the whole arsenal of researches, conducted for the purpose of assessment of short-term and, especially, long-term consequences of a traumatic event, the problem of influence of this sort of events in human life on family functioning is mentioned only casually, without detailed analysis of the mechanism of such influence.

So, to begin with, we will try to consider the specifics of impact of traumatic experiences on normal psychic functioning of a person.

It should be noted that in impression of different authors concerning the reasons of emergence of the remote consequences of a psychological trauma there is no consensus. «Success» of overcoming of a psychic

trauma is caused by influence on the person of a number of factors, both external, objective, that is relevant mainly to characteristics of a traumatic situation, social environment, and internal, concerning psychophysiological, characterologic features of an individual and his personal qualities.

Sometimes during developing problems of experience by the person of consequences of influence of an extraordinary event the emphasis is placed on selection of some parameters of the traumatic situation having immediate impact on severity of psychological consequences of a trauma. R. Price, without denying a significant role of psychological characteristics of a person in formation of various kinds of mental deviations, emphasizes special importance of focalizing of attention on peculiarities of a situation [11]. Such transferring of accents, in his opinion, provides the researcher with information on the stress factors of a situation promoting emergence of psychological problems. It raises possibility of diagnosis of situations of the increased risk and change of the conditions, stimulating emergence of long-term psychological problems. Y.A. Aleksandrovskiy [12], Y.V. Nazarenko et al. [13] allocate such factors, significant for emergence of psychogenic disturbance, as the characteristic of an extreme situation (intensity, suddenness, action duration), support of people around.

However, when determining stressogenicity of a situation we come across a number of difficulties. Long-term psychological problems of the same kind can arise both in the people who have endured extreme, unique experience, and in those (with smaller probability, but there is still such risk), who met difficulties met by many people, for example, serious illness, divorce, death of the loved one. At the same time such extreme by impact on mentality of the person case as a situation of capture of hostages, tortures, cause emergence of posttraumatic stress disorder in the majority of people, however, a slight part of the released copes with psychological consequences more or less successfully. The perception of the same situation by each person is individual, and in this connection deduction of average indexes can give a particular prognostic value concerning a big group, but during the work with the specific person it makes little sense. Then the objective criterion of extremeness is lost, which has compelled scientists to look for it in the internal, psychological plan of a person.

M.S. Magomed-Eminov [14] points to possibility of application of one more approach to the analysis of factors of emergence of the remote consequences of a psychological trauma. He offers the option of such connection of external and internal factors which generates emergence of so-called «interaction variables», being neither personal, nor situational, but acting as theoretical constructs like transaction, as which, for example, the «ego structure dissociation» can act.

To similar position adheres in his researches F.E. Vasilyuk [15]. In his opinion, in the psychological world special phenomena, transcendental to it, for example, difficulty and pain are found from time to time. Being completely psychological, they at the same time point to existence of the self-contained life living on laws, other than the living world of this person: «In other words, the phenomena of difficulty and pain bring into initially homogeneous psychological world differentiation of internal and external, more precisely, in the psychological world in phenomena of difficulty and pain appears the external» [16].

Thus, the main problem of research of long-term psychological problems of a person having endured traumatic experience consists in presence in the modern psychological science of the inconsistent situation presented in the form of opposite positions in interpretation of the nature of stress disorders. The main reason of research difficulties can be defined as current absence of the distinct theoretical concepts defining approaches to studying of psychological mechanisms of development of posttraumatic disorder. Despite growing interest to this problem, a number of the questions concerning ideas of mechanisms of functioning of mentality of the person, enduring consequences of a psychic trauma, the nature and the reasons of posttraumatic stress disorder did not receive the unique interpretation. Among the most significant questions demanding the answer in connection with requirements of practice of family consultation, there is a problem of reflection of parameters of a psycho-traumatic situation in the inner, subjective world of a person.

Divorce as trauma

Negative impact of divorce on the former spouses is noted in researches by Z.I. Fainburg. V. Gaydis, R. Muksinov and other scientists also note ambiguous action of divorce which is that some divorced couples endure deep life crisis, while the other, on the contrary, feel release and relief [17].

Quite recently in science there appeared the term «divorce trauma», defining a condition of the divorced enduring a situation of divorce for which are characteristic emotional instability, low self-esteem, sleep disorder, mental disorder, emotional disturbance.

In our opinion, normal, natural course of post-divorce stress reaction takes place not in all cases. This circumstance is connected to that people still have the unsolved traumatic experiences taking place after a particular kind of traumatic event. Sometimes they turn into the lock not allowing the person to move ahead. In certain cases this lock can be so strong that the psycho-emotional condition of the person is «preserved» on the phase where the «jam-up» happened.

What interferes with normal enduring of a trauma? What most often leads to emergence of «defects»? Something that is not directly connected to this trauma.

Presence in the life of a person of earlier unsolved traumatic experience strengthens traumatic stress [18]. It occurs because any our psychological problem (a trauma, in particular) strives for solving. We get used to live in a routine life with a set of the unsolved conflicts (external and internal), not healed soul wounds. Often we simply do not notice them because there are problems of more serious character.

In a trauma situation all organism is reconstructed. Its main task now is «treatment», restitution, instead of the solution of the current life questions. It is natural that in this case «old» traumas have an extra opportunity to get to the attention focus. We suddenly address inside, inward. As a result the access to emotions opens. Thus, the old, early traumas fill a new trauma with meanings unclear for others.

It turns out that incomplete and unsolved psychological difficulties (not necessarily only traumas), as though taking an opportunity, break through a protective armor. But, as well as in life, «dogs that put up many hares kill none». It is impossible to endure successfully a fresh trauma and to resolve old problems at the same time.

As a result natural process of coping becomes more difficult. At best it simply goes more slowly and with constant «defects». At worst this process just stops, which leads to emergence of fixation on an incomplete phase. It is possible to draw a paradoxical conclusion: receiving traumatic experience is the reason (often the only one) to address to the solution of the problems.

The old, pre-traumatic problems interfering with the natural current of events may be called «drives from the past». They are some kind of «brakes» interfering with spontaneous coping with a trauma.

It is some kind of additional system of a self-protection providing emergency braking. It turns out that «drives from the past» have two sides to look at. The first (most apparent) is braking of processing of a trauma through pain strengthening. The second is a counteraction to mental destruction because of a combination of an actual trauma and earlier experiences.

In the shock phase the leading «drive from the past» is experience of not complete earlier traumatic experiences. Until the cycle of earlier traumatic stress is not passed completely, the person will have no opportunity to promote on experience of a new trauma further than a shock phase.

Of particular interest is an assessment by the person of a stressful event in the conditions of indeterminacy. Indeterminacy of a situation is directly connected with such parameters of assessment of the situation as predictability. Predictability of an event means to what extent the person is capable of predicting dynamics, situation development. With increase of indeterminacy of a situation the degree of predictability of an event decreases, and, as a result, the application of coping strategy, connected with scheduling of the actions on overcoming a stressful event becomes impossible. V.A. Bodrov notes that lack of opportunity and ability to predict succession of events leads to impossibility of exercise of efficient coping with a situation [8; 64].

In this case, most likely, the situation of loss of the loved one as a result of divorce is perceived by the majority of divorced as an inalterable situation. The person, having the hardest stress, connected with the loss of the close relations, trying to somehow restore emotional balance, uses passive coping. People overcome family loss by various ways of distraction, trying not to think of a problem.

It should be noted that now studying of coping behavior in all areas of life is carried out. In our opinion, the most important area is studying of coping behavior in a family. Family life, with its complexity and ambiguity, is a source and simultaneously the arena of both social and psychological tempering of the person and possible deformations, traumas, lack of coping, especially at early age. It is undoubted that the coping behavior can be real protection, buffer against stress. Physical, mental health and the common subjective feeling of life wellbeing are also a result of coping efforts of subject and family as a group subject. The psychological assistance, correction and psychotherapy for those unable to cope are directed in the modern concepts of stress coping on searching and opening of characteristic resources of person and family, mastering self-regulation, self-organization and aspiration of motivation to self-improvement and self-belief.

Now concepts of mechanisms of psychological protection and coping mechanisms (coping behavior) are considered the most important forms of adaptation processes and response of individuals to stressful situations.

Coping behavior represents the form of behavior reflecting readiness of the individual to solve life problems. This is a kind of behavior, which is directed on the adaptation to circumstances and assuming formed ability to use particular tools for coping with stress [8; 74].

The coping behavior is considered successful if it eliminates physiological and reduces psychological manifestations of tension; gives the chance to the person to restore pre-stress activity; preserves the person from mental exhaustion (distress).

In the anger phase the basic problem which is acting as the «drive from the past», is a ban on aggression. As a result, exaltation release as a result of anger gives rise to secondary stress because of ban violation. It is clear that in this situation natural process can be blocked completely. Other option — excitation energy, bound to anger, breaks in affective flashes, sudden and not controlled by consciousness.

If a person had unresolved problems, bound to the strong anxiety, even though suppressed earlier, the anxiety and fear will be leading feelings on a phase of anger. In this case fixation is possible because of concentration on anxiety and, respectively, difficulty of stress release through aggression.

In the depression phase the main problems interfering with a natural stream of events on this phase are connected to traumatic experience of the first year of life. It is what in psychoanalytic approach is called «an early trauma» and is connected with the relations with a mother figure. And the main character of such traumas lies in rejection.

And in conclusion we would like to note that, at the same time, the personal history can be also a resource for more successful enduring of a trauma. In that case the scheme of interaction of traumatic experience and a post-divorce situation will be directly opposite. The more successfully the early traumas and other psychological problems are solved, the more strength for passing of delayed traumatic reaction they will give.

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Г.К. Сланбекова, М.С. Чунг

Психологиялық жарақат пен ажырасу арасындағы байланысты зерттеу

Мақала тұлғаның дара жарақаттық тәжірибесі мен неке бұзу жағдай арасындағы өзара байланысты зерттеуге арналған. Адамның психикасын жоғары дәрежеде жарақатайтын экстремалды факторлардың нәтижесінде пайда болатын жарақаттан кейінгі стресс дара тұлғаны ғана емес, сонымен қатар оның басқа адамдармен өзара әрекеттесудің барлық деңгейлерін қамтиды. Осыған байланысты жарақаттық тәжірибенің нәтижелерін жан-жақты талдаудың қажеттілігі тұлғаның тұлғааралық, соның ішінде жанұялық қатынастар құрылымына кіруімен және осы нәтижелердің жанұялық қызметтенуге қаншалықты ауыр тиетіндігімен анықталды.

Г.К. Сланбекова, М.С. Чунг

Изучение взаимосвязи между психологической травмой и разводом

Статья посвящена анализу взаимосвязи между индивидуальным травматическим опытом личности и ситуацией развода. Посттравматический стресс, являющийся следствием воздействия на человека экстремальных психотравмирующих факторов высокой интенсивности, затрагивает не только отдельную личность, но и все уровни его взаимодействия с другими людьми. Соответственно, необходимость всеобъемлющего анализа последствий травматического опыта определяется включенностью личности в структуру межличностных, в том числе семейных, отношений и тем, насколько разрушительный характер могут иметь эти последствия для функционирования семьи.

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