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Peculiarities of the mental state of student youth of Ukraine during quarantine restrictions

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Abstract

The work was intended to generalize both world statistics and our own experimental study aimed at detecting changes in mental states during the introduction of quarantine restrictions caused by the prevalence of COVID-19. During quarantine restrictions we observed a high level of anxiety in almost 45% of young respondents, severe and extreme depression from 2% to 7% of respondents, and moderate from 40% to 50% of respondents. Impressive are also rates of explicit suicidal ideation – 10-13%. Thus, the situation with the mental state of the younger generation requires the intervention of specialists, the development of programs that allow them to provide timely assistance under quarantine restrictions and maintain a normal psychological state of young people. Identifying the peculiarities of mental states of young people provides an opportunity to develop programs of both prevention of suicidal ideation and support for people who are experiencing uncontrolled anxiety or are depressed. It should be noted that quarantine restrictions require special

Анотація

Робота була спрямована на узагальнення, як світової статистики так і власного експериментального дослідження спрямованого на виявлення зміни психічних станів під час введення карантинних обмежень спричинених розповсюдженням COVID-19. Під час карантинних обмежень ми спостерігали високий рівень тривожності майже у 45% молодих респондентів, важку та екстремальну депресію від 2% до 7% респондентів і помірний від 40% до 50% респондентів. Вражають також показники явних суїцидальних думок – 10-13%. Таким чином, ситуація з психічним станом підростаючого покоління вимагає втручання фахівців, розробки програм, які дозволяють вчасно надавати допомогу в умовах карантину та підтримувати нормальний психологічний стан молоді. Виявлення особливостей психічних станів молодих людей надає можливість розробити програми із профілактики, як суїцидальних намірів так і програм із підтримки осіб які відчувають неконтрольовану тривоги, чи знаходяться у пригніченому стані. Слід відзначити, що

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approaches to the provision and implementation of such programs, meaning their transference from real life to cyberspace. Given that programs quality should not suffer, assistance should be provided by expert professionals at a high level.

Key words: suicide, suicidal ideation, anxiety, depression, youth, mental states, COVID-19.

Introduction

The formation of Ukraine as an independent state in the early stages led to economic and political instability, which significantly affected the mental health of citizens, increased the number of acute mental illnesses and increased suicide rates, which are becoming epidemic every year. This determined the need for urgent precautionary measures, especially the creation of suicide prevention programs and the development of prophylactic courses for various types of mental illness. Nowadays a large number of modern scientists in various fields of science are studying this problem, namely: Aymedov K.V., Budonnyi P.V., Maruta N. A., Markova M. V., Kozhyna H.M., Aliieva T. A., Yuryeva L. M., Abdryakhimova T. B., Pshuk N. G., Skrypnikov A. M., Peretyatko L.G., Teslenko M.M., 2018; Romaniv O. P., Pohoriliak K. M., Jamerson J., Mitchell J. and others (Aymedov, 2015; Budonnyi, 2019; Maruta, Markova, Kozhyna, Aliieva, Yuryeva, Abdryakhimova, Pshuk & Skrypnikov, 2021; Peretyatko, Teslenko, 2018; Romaniv, Pohoriliak, 2014; Jamerson, & Mitchell, 2020)

Despite the fact that in modern domestic psychiatry and suicidology the problems of understanding the nature and meaning of suicidal behavior have taken one of the leading places, it is still could be said that there are a significant number of “white” spots in its study. These include the search for innovative technologies in the field of predicting suicidal behavior of student youth and the development of effective plan to help young people to avert possible self-aggressive actions. The issue of maintaining the mental health of young people remains unresolved.

Clearly marked social and psychological orders to solve the problem cannot yet satisfy the psychological care services organized in higher education institutions of Ukraine in recent years. As most educational institutions do not have such services, the positions of psychologists and social educators have not been included in the staff. In

картинні обмеження потребують особливих підходів надання та впровадження таких програм, із реального життя вони повинні перейти у кіберпростір, при цьому їх якість не повинна страждати, допомога повинна надаватись висококваліфікованими фахівцями на високому професійному рівні.

Ключові слова: суїцид, суїцидальні прояви, тривога, депресія, молодь, психічні стани, COVID-19.

the cycle of humanities subjects, the topic of “Suicide as self-destructive human behavior” is not presented at a sufficient level. It is also absent from the list of extra classes in most humanities curricula. Little attention is paid to the formation of guidelines for a healthy lifestyle, which has its result in almost no information on obtaining qualified psychological care for young people.

The analysis reveals the main contradiction – the one between the objective need for psychological, psychiatric and psychological and pedagogical assistance to students prone to anxiety, depression and suicidal behavior, and the lack of theoretical and practical development of the problem of preventing psychiatric illness and suicidal behavior within youth environment.

The aim of the study is to establish the peculiarities of the mental states of young people during the implementation of quarantine restrictions associated with COVID-19.

The object of research is the mental state of student youth.

Methodology

contain theoretical analysis and generalization of literature on research issue, psychodiagnostics, and mathematical and statistical methods.

Theoretical method includes theoretical and methodological analysis, generalization of medical and psychological achievements on the topic of research, which was aimed at reflecting the current state of the study of mental states among student youth.

The psychodiagnostic complex included: Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HARS/HADS) (Rajgorodskij, 2001); Beck's Depression Inventory (adolescent version) (Beck, 1961); Test: suicidal tendencies (Rajgorodskij, 2001).

Firstly, “Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale” (HARS/HADS) questionnaire was used to identify and assess the severity of depression and anxiety among respondents.

The second questionnaire, “Beck Depression Inventory” (adolescent version), was used because it allows to identify a limited set of the most relevant and fundamentally significant symptoms of depression, suicidal ideation and complaints, which are especially common in adolescent respondents.

The third method, “Test: suicidal tendencies”, allowed us to determine how resistant the respondent is to internal triggers to commit suicide for one reason or another.

The sample consisted of people aged 17 to 21, in the number of 360 people, which in the study is considered as 100% of the sample.

Analysis of recent research and publications

According to the report of the World Health Organization (WHO) published on September 9, 2019, the suicide rate is the highest in wealthy countries and is 11.5 per 100 thousand population, in contrast to 2016 10.5 per 100 thousand population. Besides, WHO analysts note that suicide is the second most common cause of death among young people aged 15 to 29. Only car accidents take more young lives (Saakov, 2019). Let's look at one of the most accurate statistics in the world – suicide statistics in Japan, where reports are compiled monthly. Even here during the COVID-19 pandemic these statistics were more alarming than before. In 2020, for the first time in 11 years, the number of suicides in Japan increased. At the same time, although the number of suicides among men decreased slightly, the growth among women was almost 15%. In October alone, the suicide rate among women in Japan jumped by more than 70% compared to the same month last year (Rupert Wingfield-Hayes, 2021). As stated in a study by Harvard Medical School, currently 4.4% of Americans aged 18 to 34 suffer from mental disorders with the main symptoms of “persistent depression, deep sadness or despair” (Zhitkova, 2020).

In Ukraine probably the only statistical study on the impact of the pandemic of coronavirus infection on the psychological state of people is a poll of the social group “Rating”. Thus, in the first two months of quarantine, the rates of depression in Ukraine increased by 3%, anxiety – by 4%, fatigue – by 3%, insomnia – also by 3%.

It is noted that 1627 respondents aged 18 and older took part in the survey (Ukraine Rating Group, 2020; Frankova, 2020).

Analyzing recent studies, it should be noted that experts are increasingly assuming that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic intensify the risk of suicide: isolation, fears, growing anxiety, economic risks, depression, along with alcohol and drug use rising (Kurok, Lucenko, Povstyn, & Lutsenko, 2020; Martsenkovskiy, & Martsenkovsky, 2020). Moreover, the pandemic has affected family relationships, with couples more likely to be divorced and families more likely to be aggressive including as partners as parents and children. Restrictions in direct communication during adolescence cause a deterioration in mood, resulting in depression and unexpressed aggression about the inability to satisfy the need leading to irritability, sadness, grief. All this requires close attention and the construction of appropriate support and prevention programs.

Researchers of various branches of science have been studying the psycho-emotional states of adolescents and young people in recent years. Among physicians it is possible to mention: Aymedov K.V., Budonnyi P.V., Kozhyna H. M., Maruta N.O. and others; among psychologists: Yurieva L.M., Bardenstein L.M., Aleshkina H.A., Slavhorodsky Ia.M., Krupkin A.H.; Pilyagin G. Ya., Hlebova N., Afanasieva L., Bukrieva I., Semykin M., Orlov A., Khoroshukha M., Ivashchenko S., Prysiazhniuk S., Oleniev. D., Biletska V., Tymchyk O., Garashchenko L. and others.

(Aymedov, 2015; Bardenstein, Aleshkina, Slavgorodsky, & Krupkin, 2011; Budonnyi, 2019; Hlebova, Afanasieva, Bukrieva, Semikin, & Orlov, 2021; Khoroshukha, Ivashchenko, Prysiazhniuk, Oleniev, Biletska, Tymchyk, & Harashchenko, 2021; Maruta, Markova, Kozhyna, Aliieva, Yuryeva, Abdryakhimova, Pshuk, & Skrypnikov, 2021; Yurieva, 2015; Sementsul, & Pilyagin, 2014)

In studying the scientific literature on suicidal behavior, attention is drawn to the diversity, fragmentation and contradiction of the data, due to the complexity and multifaceted nature of this phenomenon. Suicidal behavior, unlike other medical phenomena, has philosophical, social, historical, religious, cultural, psychological, moral and legal aspects. Unfortunately, the problem of suicides has always existed, but to date, neither in the world nor in Ukraine, there are no effective and high-quality means of

preventing it. Therefore, this problem requires urgent comprehensive and prophylactic measures, a combination of sociologists, teachers, social workers, doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists, lawyers' efforts. This problem intersects with many other medical, social and legal issues, such as euthanasia, terrorism with suicide terrorists, crimes against person, risky behavior and more.

Results and Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the fact that almost all states have introduced quarantine measures to block the spread of the infection, differentiating states at the level depending on the number of diseased and the rate of spread speed. In the first wave that swept the world and took many lives, the inability to predict, the instability of the situation led to the dissemination of increased anxiety, worry, fear among people. Prolonged restrictions

unbalanced mental states, as evidenced by the number of outbreaks of mental illness and the number of applications for psychological help. During the remote learning, there was a deterioration in the emotional state of students, anxiety, reduced efficiency, gloomy mood. Consequently, to determine the characteristics of the mental state of young people during the implementation of quarantine restrictions associated with COVID-19, we decided to investigate the problem in more detail and conducted several psychodiagnostic analysis: March-April 2020 and October-November 2021. The online research involved 360 people who studied in higher education institutions in Odessa, aged 17 to 21, including 223 females and 137 males.

Based on the results of the survey of respondents on the selected methods, an analysis of the data has been made and is provided in the tables (1 - 3)

Table 1.

Anxiety level according to the method "Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale"

| Survey period | gender | normal | borderline abnormal | abnormal |
|---------------|--------|--------|---------------------|----------|
| Spring, 2020 | female | 18.83 | 34.53 | 46.64 |
| | male | 19.71 | 37.96 | 42.34 |
| Autumn, 2021 | female | 19.28 | 36.32 | 44.39 |
| | male | 18.98 | 40.15 | 40.88 |

As stated in the results of the study of anxiety, it was found that among the respondents, both in the first and in the second survey, the indicators of borderline abnormal and abnormal anxiety prevail and are observed in almost 70% of respondents. It is alarming that more than 40% of young people have a high degree of anxiety during quarantine restrictions, and more than 30% of respondents have an edge level of anxiety. It should also be noted that there is a higher rate of abnormal anxiety among women than among men, so in the first wave the difference is 4.50%, and in the second 3.52%. When considering the obtained data on the borderline abnormal degree of anxiety, there are

also higher rates among women than among men, the difference is in the first wave of 3.43%, and in the second 3.82%. All this indicates that young women are more prone to anxiety in quarantine restrictions than men. That is, with limited real communication, with daily negative information about the level of morbidity, unstable and unclear situation, women tend to be more anxious than men.

Thereafter, we analyzed the predisposition to depressive states in conformity with the methods of "Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale" and "Beck Depression Inventory" (Tables 2, 3).

Table 2.

Depression level according to the method "Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale"

| Survey period | gender | normal | borderline abnormal | abnormal |
|---------------|--------|--------|---------------------|----------|
| Spring, 2020 | female | 50.22 | 43.50 | 6.28 |
| | male | 33.58 | 54.01 | 12.41 |
| Autumn, 2021 | female | 50.67 | 42.15 | 7.17 |
| | male | 31.39 | 56.93 | 11.68 |

Considering the results of the “Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale” it is possible to claim that among young people during quarantine restrictions there is an abnormal degree of depression at almost 10% and borderline abnormal of more than 40%, indicating a negative mental state of young people. Furthermore, among young men the abnormal level of depression in the first wave by 6.13% and in the second by 4.50% higher than among girls.

The same trend is observed when comparing the borderline abnormal level of depression, but the difference is in the first wave of 10.52%, and in the second – 14.78%. All this indicates the need to develop programs that will be aimed at stabilizing the mental states of young people, learning to control their emotional states, self-stabilization of their mental state in conditions of limited communication and movement.

Table 3.
Depression level according to the method of “Beck Depression Inventory”

| Survey per | gender | Absence of depressive symptoms | Mild depression (sub-depression) | Moderate depression | Severe depression | Extreme depression |
|--------------|--------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Spring, 2020 | female | 24.22 | 27.80 | 41.70 | 3.59 | 2.69 |
| | male | 16.06 | 20.44 | 51.09 | 7.30 | 5.11 |
| Autumn, 2021 | female | 24.66 | 28.25 | 39.91 | 4.93 | 2.24 |
| | male | 14.60 | 21.90 | 51.82 | 7.30 | 4.38 |

Analyzing the results, it is possible to assume that almost 5% of young people have extreme depression, that is they need help of psychiatrists, and about 10% of young people had severe depression during quarantine. The level of moderate depression during quarantine is impressive, as almost 40% of girls and 51% of boys show a level of moderate depression, which indicates the need to involve specialists to provide them with the necessary psychological assistance. Finally, during the quarantine period, sub-depression was observed in almost 30% of

boys and 20% of girls. In consequence, only 15% of boys and 25% of girls have no manifestations of depression during the quarantine period.

The analysis of the obtained data proved that boys are more inclined to depression than girls, and girls are more prone to anxiety than boys. Since only 15-20% of young people were found not showing manifestations of depression and anxiety, it was decided to study the tendency to suicidal ideation (Table 4).

Table 4.
The results of the study of respondents’ suicidal ideation.

| Survey period | gender | No suicidal ideation | Possible in critical situations | Presence of suicidal ideation | Explicit suicidal ideation |
|---------------|--------|----------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Spring, 2020 | female | 8.97 | 33.63 | 44.39 | 13.90 |
| | male | 13.14 | 26.28 | 48.91 | 11.68 |
| Autumn, 2021 | female | 10.31 | 34.08 | 43.50 | 12.11 |
| | male | 14.60 | 27.74 | 47.45 | 10.22 |

When analyzing the results of the psychodiagnostic study of suicidal tendencies, it can be noted that almost 50% of male are prone to suicide, and among female almost 45% of respondents show suicidal tendencies. Almost 30% of respondents can probably commit suicide, where girls are more prone to such attempts than boys: in the first wave the difference is 7.35%, and in the second wave – 6.34%. About 10% of respondents have an explicit tendency to commit suicide. It should noteworthy that in the first wave the rates of

presence and severity of suicidal tendencies were higher than in the second.

On the whole, adolescence is characterized by unstable psychological states, including the inclination to commit suicide. It should be pointed out that introducing quarantine restrictions, the information field was oversaturated with information about the negative effects of COVID-19, the daily number of diseases and deaths. Not everyone is able to avoid such pressure and negative information. Isolation, in addition, further immerses the

individual in a negative perception of the environment. Sociological research has repeatedly emphasized that human is a social being and it is no longer a new statement that a person endures any difficult situation easier in a group than alone. What is more, the insertion of quarantine conditions without a clear deadline with constant reports of destructive consequences of COVID-19 creates setting for constant stress, the state is mostly depressed, the number of fears and anxieties increases. As a result, it is clear now that being alone a person loses their mental health. Therefore, it is not surprising that during quarantine restrictions we observe a high level of anxiety in almost 45% of young respondents, severe and extreme depression from 2% to 7% of respondents, and moderate from 40% to 50% of respondents. Impressive are also rates of explicit suicidal ideation – 10-13%. Thus, the situation with the mental state of the younger generation requires the intervention of specialists, the development of programs that would allow to provide timely assistance within quarantine restrictions and maintain a normal psychological state of youth.

Conclusions

Adolescence is an important stage in the formation of personality and is very difficult in psychological terms. The instability of the psychological processes of young people considered as being normal is exacerbated in the current period by a very difficult economic, social, political and epidemiological situation. During the insertion of quarantine restrictions, we conducted a psychodiagnostic survey of student youth: the first survey was conducted in the spring of 2020, and the second one in the autumn of 2021. According to the results of the study, the negative manifestations of anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation were higher than with the second wave of quarantine restrictions in 2021, which may indicate adaptation to negative social and epidemiological living conditions. High rates were established for scales such as abnormal anxiety (average 45% of respondents), sub-depression (20% to 28% of respondents), and moderate depression (38% to 51% of respondents). Others with high rates were possibility and presence of suicidal ideation having over 30% (female in the first wave – 33.63% and 44.39% of respondents, respectively; male – 26.28% and 48.91% of respondents, respectively, while during the second period of quarantine restriction, female – 34.08% and 43.50% of respondents, respectively, and male – 27.74% and 47.45% of respondents, respectively). Observing such data, it is

necessary to pay attention to the fact that the mental and psychological state of student youth is in dire need of qualified intervention, both for psychocorrection and for the prevention of unstable mental states. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the immediate development of state social programs to support and stabilize the mental state of young people, taking into account trends and limitations in direct interpersonal communication in real life. Additionally, programs could be developed in cyberspace for easy access to psychological support at any time, that is social programs should be organized in the framework of.

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