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The Content of Childhood Fears of Primary School Children Living in Urban and Rural Areas

N.N. Kalatzkaya[a]*

[a]Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, Institute of Psychology and Education, M.Mezhlauka str, no.1, 420021, Kazan, Russia

Abstract

The goal of the present research was to study the content and types of childhood fears of primary schoolchildren living in urban and rural areas. 72 children aged between 7 and 8 (42 children live in Kazan, 30 children live in the country) took part in the experimental research carried out for this purpose. The battery of tests was used for the data collection. The obtained results were exposed to statistic processing. It was found out that urban children have bigger quantity of fears than rural schoolchildren. They experience the fear of assault, they are afraid of strangers, transport, open space and sleep. Rural children are afraid of pain, sharp sounds, fairy-tale characters. Primary schoolchildren with a high level of anxiousness have more than 20 types of fears. The article presents some recommendations for children's fears correction.

Keywords: childhood fears, anxiety, anxiousness, primary schoolchildren, city, country, urban and rural areas.

1. Introduction

In the modern world adults and children experience a lot of unfavorable factors: transformations in the society, the increase of the requirements that the society imposes on the individual's intellectual, psycho-emotional, physical possibilities, etc. Children have become the least protected category in these conditions as both their organism and psyche are still unstable, vulnerable and very susceptible to the environment impact. All this causes anxiety and various fears of a child. Much attention is paid to the issue of fears at school as the increase of stress situations in the educational process is observed. The number of children with various fears, hyper-excitability and anxiousness is

* N.N. Kalatzkaya. Tel.: +7 9053160602; fax: +7 8432929123.
  E-mail address: kalazkay@mail.ru

increasing. The modern child has to "struggle" with the fears that were not experienced by the children of the previous century (Kalatzkaya, 2010). Fear is a habitual feeling which we experience rather often. Once having experienced fear in any situation, we will experience the similar feelings every time in the same cases. Fear appears with the experience. We are frightened by something that once disturbed our soul and consciousness. One is seldom afraid of those objects and situations in which they have never found themselves, or at least have not seen or read about. Fears appear in the process of cognitive activity; the child is growing up and starts to cognize the external world. The child is developing in the society, and adults play the leading role in their upbringing. Therefore, the child's mental health depends on the correct words and behavior of grown-ups. The consequences of children's fears can be different: anxiousness, aggression, problems in communication with other children, complexes and some other serious problems. Fear is the most dangerous of all emotions. It is the reaction to the real or imaginary (but experienced as the real) danger. The human body is arranged in such a way that the fight against fear cannot continue for a long time. At the biological level, the fear is the release of a large quantity of adrenaline in blood that causes a hormonal explosion in a person's body. At the psychological level - it is the fear of situations (objects, people, events) that provokes the excretion of this hormone. The term "anxiety" is met as often as the term "fear". Both fear and anxiety have one common emotional component: the feeling of excitement and solicitude, i.e. the perception of threat or the absence of the feeling of safety is displayed in both concepts. The apotheosis of fear and anxiety is horror. The anxiety is the presentiment of danger, the condition of discomposure. Most often the anxiety is manifested on the eve of some event which is difficult to predict and which can threaten with unpleasant consequences. Izard (2011) explains the difference of the terms "fear" and "anxiety" as follows: anxiety is a combination of some emotions, and fear - only one of them. The Russian psychologist Zakharov considers that the fear is one of a person's fundamental emotions, resulting in reply to the action of a threatening stimulus (Zakharov, 2005). Each child has certain fears. However, if there are a lot of them, it is possible to speak about the manifestations of anxiousness in the child's character. Therefore, if fear is the affective (emotionally pointed) reflection of the specific threat for life and wellbeing in the person's consciousness, anxiety is the emotionally pointed sense of forthcoming threat (Arefyev ; Galkin, 2006). Anxiety unlike fear, is not always a negatively perceived feeling, it can be displayed in the form of joyful excitement, exciting expectation as well. Anxiousness is a specific psychological feature which is manifested in the person's inclination to experience intense anxiety concerning rather insignificant occasions. It is considered either as the personal formation or as the feature of temperament which is connected with the weakness of nervous processes, or both the first and the second at the same time. Despite its negative coloring, fear carries out various functions in human life: it mobilizes people's scientific and creative potential to fight against elements, it plays a protective role, it allows to avoid the meeting with danger, it acts as a peculiar means of the surrounding world cognition, it leads to a more critical and selective attitude to the phenomena of life (Vologodina, 2006). Therefore, according to Zakharov (2005) the fear can be considered as the natural forwarding of human development. Scientists distinguish real and imaginary, acute and chronic fear. It is also the practice to single out age fears, the emergence of which most often coincides with certain changes in the child's life, in other words, age fears are the reflection of the child's personal development. So, according to Zakharov (2005), fears can be divided into groups: medical fears (fears of pain, blood, pricks, diseases, doctors); fears connected with physical injuries (unexpected sounds, attacks, transport, fire, conflagration, war, elements); fears of oneself and parents' death; fears of animals (wolf, bear, dogs, snakes, spiders); fears of fairy-tale characters; fears connected with sleep (before falling asleep, nightmares, darkness); social-mediated fears (some people, parents, punishment, being late for school, loneliness); spatial fears (fears of height, depths, water, closed space, open space). Each age is characterized by standard fears that come into being as a result of the intellectual sphere development, imagination growth etc. In case of favourable life circumstances, such fears pass away. But there are fears which are accumulating, enhancing and interfering with a personal development, creating adaptive, neurotic problems etc. The analysis of scientific literature showed that psychologists of many countries have been engaged in the study of fears. The content of fears experienced by children, the reasons of their emergence and possible ways of their overcoming have been analyzed in the works of Popper and Ranshburg (1983) and S. Freud (1989) and Horney (1993), etc. The significant contribution in the study of this problem at the philosophical-psychological level has been done by such scientists as Kempinski (1998) and Spielberger (1983) and Jaspers (1997), etc. who considered the fear in the context of existentialism. At the psychophysiological level, the mechanisms of the fear emotion emergence, interrelation of physiological and psychological activity of a person in the process of fear experience are analyzed in the works of (Bekhterev, 2010; James, 1991; Pavlov, 1954; Sechenov, 2012, etc.). At the psychology-pedagogical level, fears are studied to understand the way children's negative

emotional states affect the normal flowing of psychical processes in educational activity (Bozhovich, 2008; Vygotsky, 2012; Zakharov, 2005; Mukhina, 2012; Ovcharova, 1998; Prokhorov, 2009, etc.). It has been proved by scientists that unidentified children's fears seriously hamper their learning activities, make parent-child relationships difficult, and also negatively affect social activity and relationship of a child with other children and adults (Dubrovina, 2000; Rutter, 1987; Eberlein, 1981). However questions of the interrelation of territorial factor and quantity of children's fears have not been studied in psychology-pedagogical researches to the full extent. Probably, children's life conditions result in the quantity of their fears. In our opinion, it is promoted by the proceeding process of urbanization which separates the person from their natural habitat, complicates interpersonal relations, intensifies the pace of life. Children living in separate apartments (Zakharov, 2005) experience fears more often than children from shared accommodation, especially girls. In the shared accommodation there are a lot of adults, more children of the same age, there are possibilities for joint games and as a result there are fewer fears. In separate apartments children are deprived of direct contacts with each other. They have a high probability of fears emergence: fear of loneliness, darkness, nightmares, monsters etc. Fears, emotional disorders respond to correction and disappear by the age of 10 without any after-troubles. Therefore, it is extremely important to take measures to overcome childhood phobias in good time. Thus, the goal of our research is to study the contents and types of primary school children's fears living in cities and in villages.

2. Methods

In compliance with the goal there have been applied the following methods in the process of the research: 1) theoretical (analysis of psychology-pedogogical and methodical literature, comparison, generalization), 2) empirical (stating experiment, testing). The results have been exposed to the statistic processing with the help of F-test. The test "Fears in little houses" (Zakharov and Panfilova's modification, 1999), designed to diagnose childhood fears, has been chosen as the diagnostic techniques. In the process of testing, the adult outlines two houses (on one or two sheets of paper): black and red. The adult appeals to the child with the following request: "Terrible fears live in the black house, and non-scary fears live in the red house. Help me to house fears from the list". And then the child is offered to put fears from the list into the houses (adults call fears in turn). It is necessary to write down those fears which the child settles down in the black house, i.e. it means that the child admits that he is afraid of them. After the task has been performed, the child is offered to lock the black house (to draw the lock), and to throw the key or to lose it. This act calms down the actualized fears. The analysis of the obtained results consists in counting the fears in the black house by the tester and comparing them to age norms. The child's combined answers are grouped according to the types of fears. If the child gives the affirmative answer in three cases out of four-five ones, then this type of fear is diagnosed as available. There have been singled out 31 types of fears (Vologodina, 2006). Usually children have 6-12 of them. Urban children have up to 15 types of fears. The next test "Philips-test of school anxiousness" is designed to study the level and character of the anxiety connected with school issues of primary and secondary school children. 72 children aged between 7 and 8 (42 children live in Kazan, 30 children live in the country) took part in the experiment. There were obtained the following results. In general, 47.8 children from the two samples have a hyper level of fears. It was found out that urban children have a higher level of fear than rural children. Girls have more fears than boys (for the two groups). The obtained results coincide with Zakharov' results who considers that girls have more fears than boys, and their fears are more closely connected between themselves, i.e. they influence each other in a greater degree, and they are strongly connected with their emotional sphere. As far as the hierarchy of childhood fears is concerned, we have observed the following. Children living in cities are afraid to die most of all (100%), they are also afraid that their parents will die (100%), besides they experience fears connected with natural disasters: storms, hurricanes, thunderstorms etc. (70%), conflagration (70%), wars (65%), fire (61 %), nightmares (52%), they are afraid to catch a disease (57%), to be attacked (52 %). The fear of death is the most widespread and specific for primary school age as it is connected with the changes in children's comprehension of the world, their awareness of death as the world termination. They are less scared by fairy-tales characters (26%), darkness (30%), water (26%), view of blood (26%). Children living in the country are afraid to die most of all (100%), they are afraid that their parents will die (86%), they are afraid of natural disasters (79%), fairy tales characters (64%). They experience less fear of sleeping (7%), cars, trains, planes (14%), open space (14%), fear of punishment (21%). The obtained data suggest that the fear of death unites primary schoolchildren fears. This fear is closely connected with fears of a disease, parents' death, elements, fire,

conflagration and war. The motivation for all these fears is the threat to the life. It may be not direct but connected with their parents death. Natural elements which may fall upon a child can also, according to children, result in unique misfortune, threat to their life. The emergence of fear of death means the awareness of age changes irreversibility (Tapilina, 2002). Children begin to understand that aging means death at a certain stage. In general, all fears correspond to children's age. Further we have revealed reliable differences between the percentage shares of the two samples with the help of Fisher-test. The reliable differences at the level of value p = 0,05 have been obtained according to indicators "fear of attack" φ_{emp}=1,9908, "fear of strangers" φ_{emp} =1,7808; it testifies that urban children experience these types of fears more often. Probably, various mass media should be blamed for it: they daily inform the population about committed crimes on city streets. Parents, being afraid for their children's life, do not let them walk in the street on their own, they conduct preventive conversations with children that result in the increase of primary schoolchildren's fears. Reliable differences at the level of value p= 0,01 have been obtained according to indicators - "fear of fairy-tale characters" φ_{emp} =3,297, "fear of sleep" φ_{emp} =3,066, "fear of transport" φ_{emp} =2,44, "fear of open space" φ_{emp} =2,7846, "fear of blood" φ_{emp} =2,3184, "fear of pain" φ_{emp} =2,3184. These results testify that rural children experience magic fears (fears of fairy-tale characters) more. Perhaps, it is connected with the fact that in a rural area people have such fears to a greater degree than city dwellers. In the city the level of education is higher, urban people seldom resort to mystical rites, they try to explain all events from the point of view of logic. Besides, rural children are afraid of pain, blood and sharp sounds more than urban children. Probably, it is caused by the fact that rural children are more often subject to injuries than city children as they have to help their parents on the farm. City children are most of all subjected to fears of sleep, they are afraid of transport, open spaces. These fears, in our opinion, are caused by urban living conditions and education at city schools. The modern urban child is surrounded by high houses, in cities there are not enough parks, squares, places where it is possible to run, jump, but there are a lot of cars, public transport rushing along the streets. Parents are trying to keep the child next to them, they do not allow them to walk on their own because they are afraid that children can be run over by a car. So city conditions contribute to the emergence of these types of fears. Further we found out that there were singled out more than 20 types of fears of prime schoolchildren with a high level of anxiousness. As a rule, learners with hyper-excitability experience from 14 to 19 different types of fears. If junior children have standard level of anxiety, then boys revealed 7-10 types of fears and girls have 9-11 types of fears.

3. Conclusions and discussion

It is possible to state that living conditions influence the quantity and content of children's fears. We have found out that urban children have more fears. It is necessary to arrange stage-by-stage work with children having a large number of fears to get rid of these fears. Urban children should more often go to the country with their parents, and rural children should visit the city, different public events. Parents should allow children to invite their friends, to walk, to run, to craft. They should not frighten the child by wolves, doctors, police, fairy-tale characters, but create the benevolent atmosphere at home and avoid interfamilial conflicts, limit viewing of "horror films" on TV and reading scary books. If it is impossible, parents should watch such films with their child and be ready to give psychological support at the right time. Parents should analyze the style of upbringing, and adhere to democratic style of upbringing. Psychologists, teachers working with such children should conduct explanatory conversations, and if it is necessary to carry out trainings with the use of game therapy, fairy tale therapy. The important factor for the psyche normal development is child's socialization. Therefore it is useful for children to visit different kinds of children's organizations: societies, circles etc. Children should be involved in communication with many of their peers and children of other age groups.

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