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Family support and the sense of coherence (SOC) in adolescents

Authors (12) dealing with the effect of parents' attitude on the development of a child agree that democratic attitude, acceptance and love are fundamental factors for the harmonious development of a child's personality.

Family support is a leading factor determining a normal development of a human being. In the course of socialisation, on the basis of life experience to which a child is exposed from its early childhood to young adulthood, the sense of coherence is formed (2). The sense of coherence (SOC) is a global life orientation expressing the extent to which a person has a sense of confidence that (1) the stimuli which affect him in the course of his life are structured, predictable and explicable, (2) there are available resources that meet demands posed by these stimuli and (3) these demands are challenges worthy of investment and engagement. This life orientation is formed by three components: MAN – manageability, COM – comprehensibility and MEA – meaningfulness.

The effects of upbringing depend to a high degree on the relations of father and mother with a child, which are important factors in the development of personality (12).

The effect of the family environment on the development of the sense of coherence was studied by Wolff and Ratner (14). Margalit, Aviv and Ankonna (10) were trying to find the relationship between the sense of coherence and the atmosphere in the family environment and strategies of coping with stress. They found that parents of children with conduct disorders had a lower sense of coherence than parents of children without such problems. Antonovsky and Sourani (1) and Kaslow, Hansson and Lundblad (6) proved that there is a positive correlation between the level of the sense of coherence and the level of family life satisfaction. Sagy and Antonovsky (13) also proved that the level of adaptation, which reflects life satisfaction and health condition, correlates positively with the level of the family sense of coherence.

The aim of the study was to determine the effect of some chosen aspects of the family environment on the development of the sense of coherence in the group of secondary school students (age 16–19). Relations between studied youngsters and father, mother and siblings was analyzed, and then the relationship between these data and the sense of coherence was studied.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was conducted on 439 secondary school students, age 16–19 (285 girls and 154 boys) from October 2004 to June 2005 in Lublin, Biłgoraj and Tarnogród. Our own questionnaire was used in the study to evaluate various aspects of the family environment and Life Orientation the

Questionnaire (SOC-29) to evaluate the sense of coherence. U-Mann-Whitney test was used to study the significance of differences between the values of SOC in two groups classified according to: 1. upbringing in full family (yes/no), 2. relations with mother (good/bad), 3. relations with father (good/bad), 4. relations with siblings (good/bad).

Using the analysis of variance by Kruskal-Wallis, the significance of difference of SOC value was studied in groups classified according to: 5. father's education: primary school, vocational school, secondary school, college, 6. mother's education: primary school, vocational school, secondary school, college

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tables presented here contain the results of U Mann-Whitney tests for the classification into two groups and the Kruskal-Wallis test for the classification into greater number of groups divided according to the criteria presented above.

Table 1. Upbringing in full family (yes/no)

| Results of U Mann-Whitney test Classification according to upbringing in a full family or a broken home group 1 – full family, group 2 – a broken home | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------|----------|
| Variable | median group 1 | median group 2 | Z | p |
| Global sense of coherence (SOC) | 4.21 | 4.28 | -0.9158 | 0.359770 |
| Comprehensibility (COM) | 3.82 | 3.73 | 1.2643 | 0.206121 |
| Manageability (MAN) | 4.40 | 4.55 | -1.2941 | 0.195631 |
| Meaningfulness (MEA) | 4.62 | 4.75 | -1.5221 | 0.127987 |

Table 2. Relations with mother (good/bad)

| Results of U Mann-Whitney test Classification according to relations with mother group 1 – good, group 2 – bad | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------|----------|
| Variable | median group 1 | median group 2 | Z | p |
| Global sense of coherence (SOC) | 4.24 | 3.95 | 4.4763 | 0.000008 |
| Comprehensibility (COM) | 3.82 | 3.55 | 4.3910 | 0.000011 |
| Manageability (MAN) | 4.40 | 4.20 | 3.5010 | 0.000464 |
| Meaningfulness (MEA) | 4.62 | 4.38 | 3.5931 | 0.000327 |

All components of the sense of coherence in the group where the relationship with mother was perceived as good were found to be significantly higher than in the group where this relation was perceived as bad.

Table 3. Relations with father (good/bad)

| Results of U Mann-Whitney test | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------|----------|
| Classification according to relations with father | | | | |
| group 1 – good, group 2 – bad | | | | |
| Variable | median group 1 | median group 2 | Z | p |
| Global sense of coherence (SOC) | 4.24 | 3.97 | 7.6427 | 0.000000 |
| Comprehensibility (COM) | 3.82 | 3.55 | 5.8053 | 0.000000 |
| Manageability (MAN) | 4.50 | 4.10 | 7.0899 | 0.000000 |
| Meaningfulness (MEA) | 4.75 | 4.38 | 6.4287 | 0.000000 |

All components of the sense of coherence in the group where the relationship with father was perceived as good were found to be significantly higher than in the group where this relation was perceived as bad.

Table 4. Relations with siblings (good/bad)

| Results of U Mann-Whitney test | | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------|----------|
| Classification according to relations with siblings | | | | |
| group 1 – good, group 2 – bad | | | | |
| Variable | median group 1 | median group 2 | Z | p |
| Global sense of coherence (SOC) | 4.24 | 3.97 | 6.2160 | 0.000000 |
| Comprehensibility (COM) | 3.82 | 3.55 | 3.0581 | 0.002229 |
| Manageability (MAN) | 4.40 | 4.10 | 5.8416 | 0.000000 |
| Meaningfulness (MEA) | 4.62 | 4.14 | 6.8656 | 0.000000 |

In case of groups classified according to the relationship with siblings differences for the total SOC result and all subscales were found significant. Other results were higher in the group where the relationship with siblings was good.

Table 5. Father's education: primary school, vocational school, secondary school, college

| Results of Kruskal-Wallis test | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------|--------|
| Classification according to father's education | | | | | | |
| group 1 – primary school, group 2 – vocational school, group 3 – secondary school, group 4 – college | | | | | | |
| Variable | median group 1 | median group 2 | median group 3 | median group 4 | H | p |
| Global sense of coherence (SOC) | 4.10 | 4.17 | 4.28 | 4.21 | 9.4702 | 0.0237 |
| Comprehensibility (COM) | 3.55 | 3.73 | 3.91 | 3.82 | 8.1244 | 0.0435 |
| Manageability (MAN) | 4.30 | 4.40 | 4.50 | 4.40 | 14.8665 | 0.0019 |
| Meaningfulness (MEA) | 4.62 | 4.62 | 4.75 | 4.50 | 10.8342 | 0.0127 |

Table 6. Mother's education: primary school, vocational school, secondary school, college

| Results of Kruskal-Wallis test | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------|--------|
| Classification according to mother's education | | | | | | |
| group 1 – primary school, group 2 – vocational school, group 3 – secondary school, group 4 – college | | | | | | |
| Variable | median group 1 | median group 2 | median group 3 | median group 4 | H | p |
| Global sense of coherence (SOC) | 3.98 | 4.21 | 4.24 | 4.24 | 18.3822 | 0.0004 |
| Comprehensibility (COM) | 3.45 | 3.82 | 3.82 | 3.82 | 23.8749 | 0.0000 |
| Manageability (MAN) | 4.10 | 4.40 | 4.50 | 4.40 | 15.4791 | 0.0015 |
| Meaningfulness (MEA) | 4.50 | 4.50 | 4.75 | 4.62 | 7.2121 | 0.0655 |

The study reveals that persons who had good relations in the family (with mother, father, siblings) perceive the world as more meaningful, comprehensive, they are more creative and resourceful. The obtained results confirm previous studies by Kaslow et al. (6) and Sagy and Antonovsky (13).

Antonovsky (2) stresses the effect of emotional climate in relations between a child and his close family and full acceptance of models of upbringing on the development of a strong sense of coherence. He thinks that communicating a message to a child that he /she is an important person is significant for his early life experience. Jelonkiewicz (5) explains this mechanism as a specific social heredity of the sense of coherence, treated here as psychological feature describing cognitive and motivated interactions of a human being with the surrounding world. A positive correlation between the positive atmosphere in the family and the sense of coherence was also found by Margalit and Eysenck (9). Flick and Homan (4) showed the positive correlation between SOC and the quality of relation mother-child and the atmosphere in the family environment.

The results of our study reveal that children of well-educated parents (secondary school or college) cope with problems of life better and the world seems to them to be more comprehensive and rational. These results correspond with the study by Sagy and Antonovsky (13) carried out among the elderly. In retrospection their higher sense of coherence was related to good education of their parents. The level of education, as proved by Czaplinski (2), correlates with the economic status of the family. Mroziak et al. (11) also stress a significant relationship between the sense of coherence and economic status in the families of the studied teenagers. The sense of coherence was significantly lower in teenagers who considered the economic status in their families to be unsatisfactory and their fathers to be poorly educated. Also Zwoliński (15) came to the conclusion that systemic resources of the family, which include education and economic status, result in the increase in the sense of coherence in the child.

However, no significant differences were found in SOC scales in the groups classified according to upbringing in a full family or a broken home. Similar results were obtained by Krantz and Ostergren (7) and Lundberg (8).

CONCLUSIONS

Persons who have good relations in the family (with mother, father, siblings) perceive the world as more meaningful and comprehensive and they are more creative and resourceful. No significant differences were found in SOC scales and in the groups classified according to upbringing in a full family or a broken home. Adolescents with widely-educated parents (secondary school or college) had a higher sense of coherence.

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SUMMARY

The aim of this study was the evaluation of the influence of family support in the process of shaping of the sense of coherence. The study was carried out in the group of 439 secondary school students, aged 16–19 (285 girls and 154 boys) The level of the sense of coherence was measured by the Life Orientation Questionnaire (SOC-29). A specially devised questionnaire was used to identify family factors. The influence of these factors in the development of the sense coherence was analyzed. A statistically relevant associations have been demonstrated between family factors and SOC. Significant differences were found between the group of girls and the group of boys. Positive family climate is associated with the high SOC level.

Wsparcie rodziny a poczucie koherencji (SOC) u adolescentów

Celem badań była ocena wpływu wsparcia rodzinnego na kształtowanie się poczucia koherencji. Badaniem objęto 439 uczniów szkół średnich w wieku od 16 do 19 roku życia (285 dziewcząt i 154 chłopców). W badaniach zastosowano Kwestionariusz Orientacji Życiowej SOC-29 do pomiaru poczucia koherencji oraz własny protokół naukowo-badawczy do oceny czynników rodzinnych. Następnie badano wpływ tych czynników na poczucie koherencji. W wyniku przeprowadzonych badań wykazano istotny statystycznie związek pomiędzy czynnikami rodzinnymi a poczuciem koherencji. Pozytywny klimat środowiska rodzinnego łączy się z wysokim poczuciem koherencji.