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Adolescents' personhood and the effects of their institutionalization

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Abstract: This paper aims to make a comparison of personality disorders in adolescents in residential care versus adolescents raised in natural families. The aim is to identify differences in personality traits and personal autonomy between adolescents living in residential care and those living in natural families, and to compare personality traits between the two groups, including by gender and age.

Keywords : personality traits, institutionalization, attachment

1. Human personality and its development

Personality is formed from birth and undergoes continuous development throughout life, based on hereditary traits and the influence of social and interpersonal relationships.

The term 'originality' (personality) has a broader content than the term 'origin' (person). Personality emphasises the typical and unique traits of people, which remain unchanged and help to change behaviour over time. The development of personality is provided mostly by heredity, change of upbringing (Allport G., 1991, p.16)

Inheritance is the elementary property of living organisms, which refers to the continuation of the genetic code from birth to offspring. Biological appearance is unassimilated for each individual being unique and differentiated in society by inherited genetic traits. The genetic identity card outlines a set of native predispositions. Heredity is controlled by genes. Hereditary traits are transmitted through DNA (a particle that stores genetic information) (Allport G, 1991, p.16).

The humanist perspective on personality brings an optimistic view of our innate potential, man being capable of development, personal and social growth. Humanist theories emphasize human dignity, creativity and the capacity for permanent actualization of the human being (...) The human being is seen from a non-pathological point of view, as having an innate potential for growth, emphasizing the positive aspects of self-actualization, self-awareness, creativity, etc. The



promoters of humanist theory emphasize human value, considering that each person is important and deserving just because he or she exists (Grigore M, 2016, p.15).

Human personality is the result of actions, of positive or negative psychological mechanisms that shape the individual's psychological structure. It is a whole mental organisation of the human being, regardless of the stage of the human being. It shapes all aspects of human character: intellect, temperament, morality. Personality is the only thing in the world that has the supreme value of distinguishing us from each other (Zlate M, 1997).

Bringing to the fore the role of the family in the development of the child's personality, we can define the family as the full environment that provides for the complex needs of children: for love and emotional security, for new experiences, for encouragement and appreciation, etc. There are situations where biological parents are unable or unwilling to take responsibility for the care of their own children. As a result, children from these families are at risk of abandonment and separation is a deep trauma with major repercussions on the child's personality, all the more so if the child remains institutionalised. Separation from parents and the lack of a secure family environment, whether it is a long-term separation or a short-term one, is felt as a trauma and leads to an emotional and behavioural imbalance for the child in this situation (Grigore M, 2016, p.28).

1. Institutionalisation and its effects on the child's personality development

„Every event, situation or traumatic factor brings unwanted repercussions on the person, both physically and psychologically. These effects of traumatic experiences on the human psyche can be identified by the changes in the person's understanding of self and the world in which they live. For an abandoned or abused child, the place that used to offer him security has become a place of fear, and if he had previously trusted and felt safe, he has become anxious and vulnerable. If for an adult life experience, skills and ability to control can be considered protective factors, for a child the feeling of loss of control, helplessness and vulnerability is very great” (Grigore,M, 2016, p.37).

There is a close connection between psyche, personality and behaviour, so that psyche and behaviour are part of the overall organisation of the personality system. Behaviour is defined as the set of observable reactions that an organism with a nervous system exerts in response to environmental stimuli. It appears as a genetic substructure but also as an objective framework of internal psychological cognitive, affective and motivational structures, structures that define and delimit certain personality types, and as their expressive form certain behaviours. Thus, it is personality that gives a unique hue to an individual's actions and behaviour, since it is perceived as a unitary internal organization of psychophysiological structures and endowments (Atkinson,R, E.E. Smile, Daryl J. Bem, 2000).

Din punct de vedere structural al personalității, afectivitatea are un rol semnificativ în dezvoltarea și autodezvoltarea individului. Afectivitatea stimulează psihicul copilului. Într-un climat favorabil unde afectivitatea se socializează cu o tonalitate calmă și blândă, aceasta accentuează emoțiile pozitive și îi oferă copilului siguranța unei copilării lipsite de grijă (Ceausu V. Pitariu H, Toma M,1988).

Institutionalised children suffer psychological trauma through separation from their families, regardless of the reason for their institutionalisation. The biggest factor behind the institutionalisation of a child is the poverty of the child's family. Whether we are talking about wanted or unwanted children, these families do not have optimal living conditions, they cannot



afford to clothe, feed and educate them because they do not have a stable job, their monthly income is not sufficient, they work by day or have addictions (tobacco, alcohol). Other factors that amplify institutionalisation are family abandonment, family breakdown through divorce, separation or death, children resulting from unwanted pregnancies (Bratianu.I., 2005, p.91).

The institutionalisation of a child has general, severe and long-lasting repercussions due to the lack of attachment and warmth. In addition to these causes, there are psychological delays due to lack of stimulation. Studies carried out in our country have found a comparison in the general development of the institutionalised child with the child brought up in a family.

1. Research methodology

1.1. Research objectives and hypotheses

The overall objective is to identify differences in personality traits and personal autonomy in institutionalized and non-institutionalized adolescents.

Specific objectives:

O1- Meaningful identification of personality traits in foster adolescents and adolescents from birth families.

O2- Significant identification of personal autonomy in foster and birth adolescents.

Research hypotheses

1. Presumed significant differences in personality traits in institutionalized vs. non-institutionalized adolescents.

2. Presumed significant differences in personal autonomy in institutionalized vs. non-institutionalized adolescents.

3.2. Study participants

The research encompassed a cohort of 40 adolescents, bifurcated into two homogenous groups, comprising institutionalized youths and those from biological familial settings. Each contingent maintained a balanced representation of genders.

3.3. Research tools

The instruments employed for data collection on personality disorders within the two cohorts consisted of the administration of two personality assessments: the Personal Autonomy Assessment Questionnaire (AP questionnaire) and the Five Factor Personality Inventory (FFPI), which evaluates the five superordinate factors of the Big Five model.

3.4. Presentation of the results obtained

From the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data resulting from the research and the comparisons analysed between the samples, the following emerged:



Hypothesis 1 - Presumed significant differences in personality traits in institutionalized vs. non-institutionalized adolescents

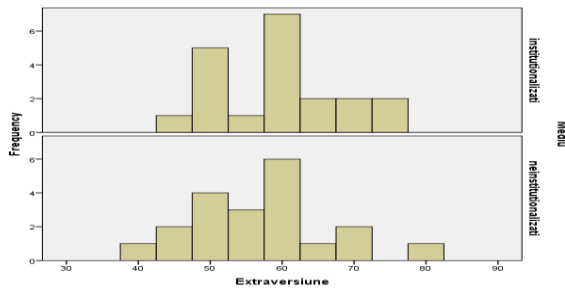


Figure.1 Graphical representation of Extraversion in the two categories of adolescents

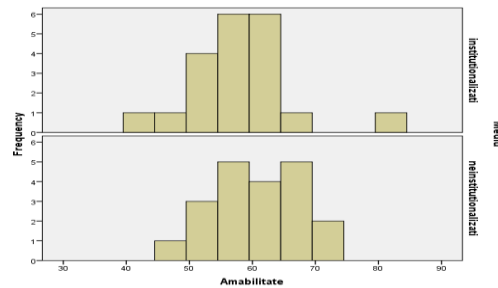


Figure.2 Graphical representation of Agreeableness in the two categories of adolescents

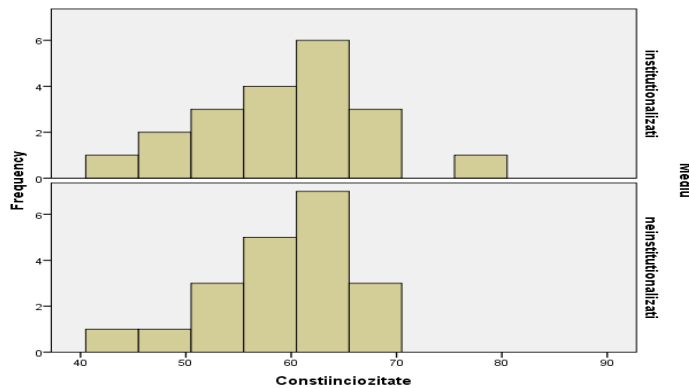


Figure.3 Graphical representation of Agreeableness in the two categories of adolescents

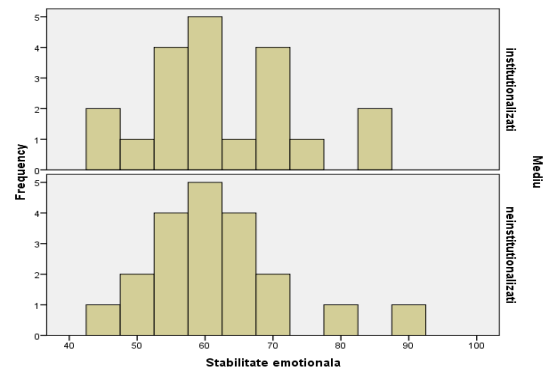


Figure.4 Graphical representation of Agreeableness in the two categories of adolescents

Based on the hypothesis that there are significant differences between the personality traits of institutionalized and non-institutionalized adolescents, the analysis of the graphical representations shows variations between the scores obtained by the two groups studied. These differences are observed in the context of Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability variables. The scores suggest that environmental factors and demographic characteristics of the samples may influence these personality dimensions. Differences may reflect divergences in life experiences, access to social resources and emotional support, and the structure and quality of social interactions.



Hypothesis 2 It is assumed that there are significant differences in personal autonomy in institutionalized vs. non-institutionalized adolescents.

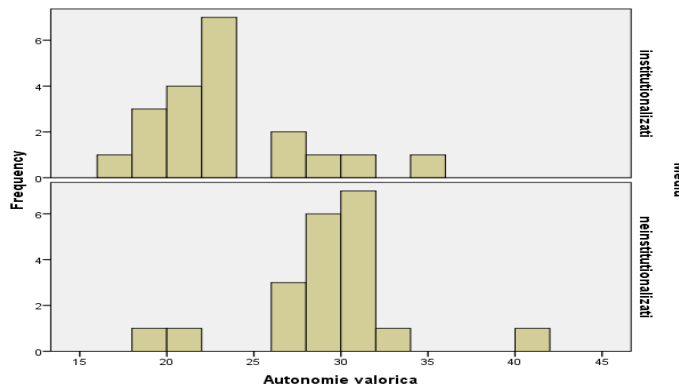


Figure.5 Graphical representation of Value Autonomy in the two categories of adolescents

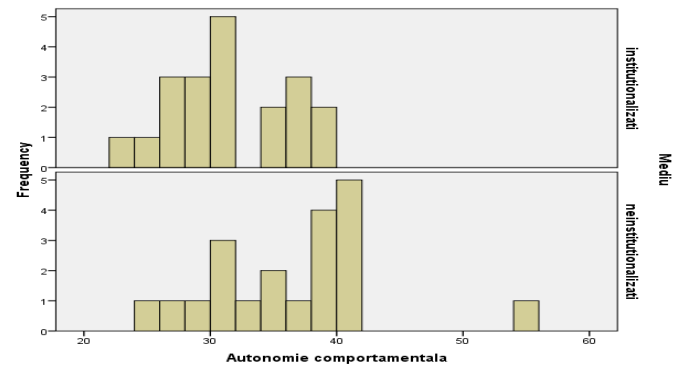


Figure.6 Graphical representation of Behavioural Autonomy in the two categories

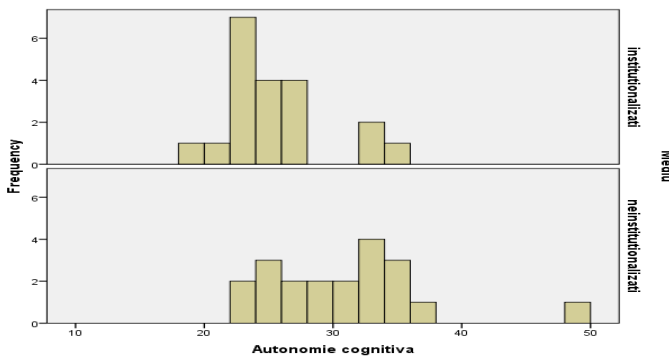


Figure.7 Graphical representation of Cognitive Autonomy in the two categories of adolescents

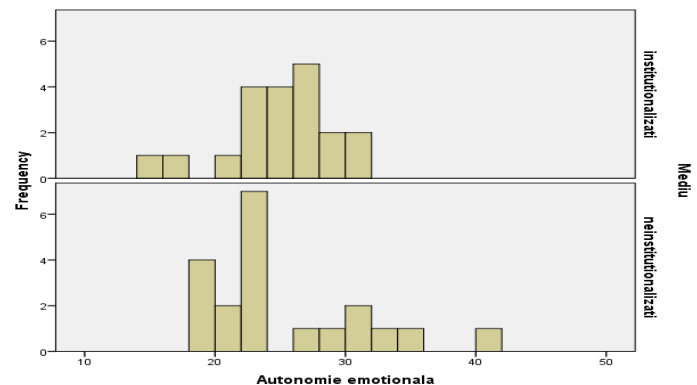


Figure.8 Graphical representation of Emotional Autonomy in the two categories of adolescents

Based on the hypothesis that there are significant discrepancies in the level of personal autonomy between institutionalized adolescents and those raised in a natural family environment, data analysis suggests that adolescents in institutions show a low degree of independence in different aspects of autonomy. Indicators of personal autonomy, which include value, behavioural, cognitive and emotional dimensions, were assessed using standardised measurement instruments.

According to the graphical results, it can be observed that institutionalized adolescents show a trend of decreasing autonomy on these scales. It is possible that this phenomenon is the result of a less stimulating environment in terms of decision-making and self-regulation, compared to a family environment that promotes and supports the development of individual autonomy through more diversified daily interactions and the assumption of personal responsibilities.



Conclusions

The main objective of this study was to explore and elucidate differences in personality traits and the degree of personal autonomy between two distinct groups of adolescents: those who were institutionalized and those who grew up in a stable family environment, unaffected by abandonment in any form. According to the anticipated theoretical foundations, it is recognized that minors who are under a form of social protection are likely to be exposed to traumatic experiences, which derive from the separation from the biological family and the formation of an insecure attachment.

The impact of these experiences of separation and growing up in an alternative family setting, which is often deficient in providing personalized and consistent care, is palpable and can be inferred from the results obtained in the course of this research. It is suggested that these conditions can have substantial repercussions on the development of individual personality and autonomy, reflected in the social adaptability and self-management skills of affected adolescents. The analysis of the collected data emphasizes the need for a thorough understanding of the psychosocial dynamics specific to this vulnerable group, in order to be able to develop therapeutic interventions and support programs adapted to their particular needs.

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