



Original Contribution

MENTAL CHARACTERISTICS STUDY OF CHILDREN DEPRIVED OF PARENTAL CARE THROUGH STANDARD DRAWING METHODOLOGIES APPLICATION

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ABSTRACT

The study concerns assessment of mental development of children deprived of parental care growing in an institution and in “Small group home”. The studied children are at the age of six and have spent half a year at a “small group home”, as well as children at the same age living in an institution. The assessment of children’s development is done through the application of two drawing methodologies. The task of our study is to indicate the direction of the children’s development after the change in their conditions of life – out of the institution and into the “small group home“. The main fields characterizing the mental development of this age, related to the cognitive skills development and socio-emotional development are analyzed.

Key words: children at risk, social, emotional and cognitive skills, “Small Group Home”, children living in an institution, children drawings.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary comprehension of optimal microenvironment necessary for the development of each child is in conflict with the practice of placing and growing them in institutions. Contemporary paradigm of children to grow in family environment makes the matter of deinstitutionalization more and more pressing.

Lack of care, lack of opportunity to receive constant individual attention and communication, encouragement and stimulation of development are factors which result in slow mental development of the child who grows out of family environment.

Growing in institutions most commonly leads to: considerable slowing of physical and motor development; more frequent mental and emotional disorders and stereotyped behavior;

inability to feel affection – this lies at the basis of the unstable emotional, behavioral and cognitive development, social competence and mental health; slow social development (low social inclusion); lower than genetically inherited IQ as a result of social and educational negligence.

International research indicates that children who are taken out of institutions show:

- considerable improvement in physical growth;
- decrease of mental and emotional disorders;
- increase of IQ. (1)

Family environment is not substitutable, but not all of the children have the opportunity to develop in it. Regarding this the existing alternatives, similar in their characteristics to a family can to a maximum extent improve the quality of the environment where the children deprived of parental care grow.

D. Tobis finds in his research that in Central and Eastern Europe most common are services of residential type. 1,3 million children in unequal

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position use this type of services. 1% of the children living in the region are in these institutions (2)

Providing children at risk with alternative care is already a fact. One of the services of residential type is called “Small Group Home” This is a new type of care for children deprived of parental care, alternative to the current big institutions, which is defined the following way: “Small Group Home” (SGH) is the title of a new type of homes for children deprived of parental care, alternative to the current big institutions. Children inhabiting small group homes live together in an environment similar to “the domestic” in a way like they live in their families – they go to kindergarten or to school, they have neighbours and friends in the neighbourhood” (3)

There are lots of studies and research which prove that children grow and develop best when they live in stable, dependable families providing them with good upbringing.

Deprivation, frustration and the presence of many mothers during the forming of a child's personality in a children's home result in slowing down of the child's development. If the need of maternal care has not been satisfied, children become alienated, they cannot build up stable affection and become detached and apathetic. Apathetic children become selfish, they do not learn to share like other children and they find ways to feel better when they are breastfed longer, masturbate, swing or hit their heads (4).

In institutions child's needs are satisfied at certain moments by different and frequently replaced adults. Mother's functions are distributed among the different staff members. This situation of “many mothers present” is the reason why children do not have the opportunity to build up a stable relation with an important to them adult, and this deprives them of emotional commitment. In these conditions the choice of the substitute for the mother is chaotic, unstable and accompanied by competing with many other peers (5)

As main reasons for the slow mental development of children living in an institution can be identified: closed environment, frequent replacement of adults upbringing the children, lack of necessary sensory experience.

The study concerns assessment of mental development of children deprived of parental care growing in an institution and in “Small group home”. The studied children are at the age of six and have spent half a year at a “small group home”, as well as children at the same age living in an institution. The assessment of children's development is done through the application of two drawing methodologies. The task of our study is to indicate the direction of the children's development after the change in their conditions of life – out of the institution and into the “small group home”. The main fields characterizing the mental development of this age, related to the cognitive skills development and socio-emotional development are analyzed.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The application of projective drawing methodologies in early child development studies has gained considerable popularity in our country for the past few years. This tool for mental development diagnostics has been extremely popular in Western Europe and USA since the beginning of the 20th century with the invention of Florence Goodenough's „Draw-A-Man-Test”. In her work “The Measurement of Intelligence by Drawings” (1926) Goodenough for the first time in the history of psychodiagnostics practically proves the hypothesis that a child's drawing of a familiar object reflects the degree of the acquired key concepts and shows the development of intelligence level. Her test “Draw-A-Man-Test” is substantially different from previous intelligence measuring tests. It allows a comparatively accurate assessment of the mental development level, regardless of the degree of acquired knowledge, as it does not indicate the acquired skills in the field of the drawing. The large scale studies which Goodenough made led to the reconsideration of a key principle in American testology that IQ is constant. Goodenough clearly demonstrates that certain social factors can considerably increase this index, i.e. intelligence is not an innate and stable property. The other projective drawing methodology, used in this study is the test of the American researcher Karen Machover. Using Goodenough's test for a long time she discovered considerable differences between the drawings of children with similar or the same levels of intellectual development. Describing the

characteristics of the details of human figure depicting, as well as its whole depicting and its positioning in the drawing field, the characteristics of the drawing line, the stroke and the contour of the drawing, she devised a test “decoding” the drawing of the human figure as emotional indicators of child's personality.

The application of these two methodologies does not claim to exhaust the study of the personality of children deprived of parental care living in a typical social institution and in “small group home”. It is a part of a larger scale study of the benefits of children leaving the institution and using the alternative service - “Small group home”. There is done a comparative analysis of the results of the mental, social and physical development of the same children before and after they settled in “small group home”. (6)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the study are included children at the ages of 6-8, deprived of parental care living in a home for children deprived of parental care and in “Small group home”.

In the studied children living in an institution the application of the projective drawing methodologies was hampered in the beginning due to their refusal to complete the task to draw a human figure. After their initial opposing to the task, the children started completing it, but not a small part of them, despite encouragements, did not follow the instructions and did not draw a human figure. A part of them (12%) outlined by contour their hand and the other part (4%) made scratches and scribbles typical of the drawings of children from the preschematic stage (ages 2 - 3). (Figure 1)

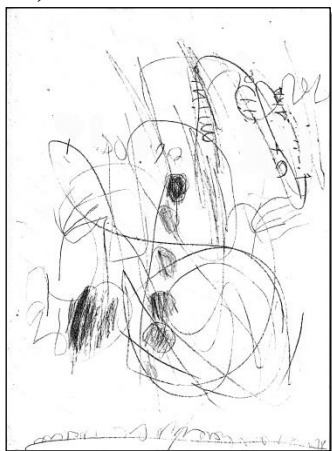


Figure 1. Scribbles typical of the drawings of children from the preschematic stage

Considerable number of children (24%) made drawings typical of the ages 4 - 5 where the head and the body were directly connected without the neck. Often there were important details missing, such as hands, nose, mouth, feet etc. which children at this calendar age are supposed to depict (Figure 2).

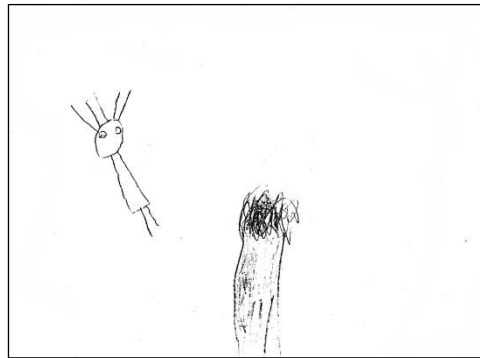


Figure 2. Drawings typical of the ages 4 – 5

The largest number of the studied children from an institution (almost 60%) drew a human figure which resembled to a “cephalopod”. (Figure 3) This way of human depicting is typical of children at the age of 3 and usually after 3,5 – 4 age they leave it, adding body to the head and the other specific details.

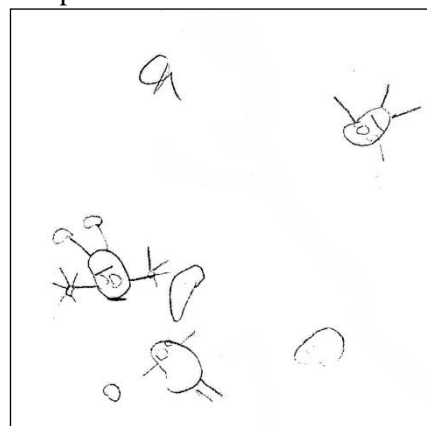


Figure 3. Drawing of a human figure which resembled to a “cephalopod”)

Using the Florence Gudina's test for pictures' evaluation, we could not evaluate the degree of intellectual development of the first group of children, due to their refusal to do the test. This fact though, is an important indicator for the psychic inhibitions, as well the lack of confidence and low self-esteem related to the task completing.

The IQ evaluation of this test is calculated by a standard formula - $IQ = MA / KB \cdot 100$, where MA

(mental age) is calculated on the basis of the number of drawn details in the human figure. With the second group of children or 24% of the examined this coefficient is 70, and with the third group which is multitudinous – 60% of the examined children in Institution for children deprived from parental care (ICDPC) the coefficient is 60. As **Table 1** shows, all examined children are within the limit of low intellectual coefficient which is considerably below the average level.

Table 1. IQ evaluation

IQ	EVALUATION
below 70	poor
70-90	Below average level
90-110	Average level
110-135	Above average level
above 135	High level

It is very difficult to make a qualitative interpretation from the drawings of these children using K. Machover's methods which study the emotional indicators in the drawn details in human figure. Machover's methods are intended for the study of children between 5 and 13 years old and as we saw the presented drawings correspond to the drawings made by children under this age. In our analysis it would be difficult to stop over the important meaning of the figure placement in the image field. The studied children from ICDPC placed the figures chaotically in their drawings, often the sheet was being turned into different directions, i.e. there is no meaningful and compositional relation between the different elements, which is a typical behavior of the pre-pictorial period as well in the earliest stage of the pictorial period – 3-4 years. An important indicator of Machover's methods is the size of the human figure, as its size related to the size of the image field has relation to the self-esteem of the drawing child. All children who have completed the task of the test to draw a human figure, have drawn very small figures, which shows insecurity, narrow-mindedness, low ego and strong embarrassment regarding the relations with the people around.

The examined children from "little group home" have shown considerably higher results for the

evaluation of the human figure drawings according to F. Gudina's test. About 22% from the examined children have shown results that corresponded to 125 points of the IQ evaluation, which is within the range of high intellectual development. (**Table 1**) The rest 78% of the examined children from the residential institution "Little group home" have shown results, which were evaluated using the above mentioned formula between 90 and 110 points of their intellectual coefficient or in other words they are in the average norm of intellectual development. (**Table 1**) Children with normal intellectual development, who feel happy and loved, try to fill the whole image field because this makes them feel secure and creates balance in the environment they stand. (7).

Evaluating the "little group home"-children's drawings using the method of K. Mahover could start with the considerably bigger figures, drawn by these children compared to the figures drawn by children from ICDPC. The bigger figures here (**Figure 4, 5, 6**) fill the whole image field without going out its boundaries and they speak for good self-esteem, self-confidence and vitality. These indicators can be proved also by the strength and pressure of the drawing line, which in this case is confident, with average width and pressure, without unnecessary breaks.

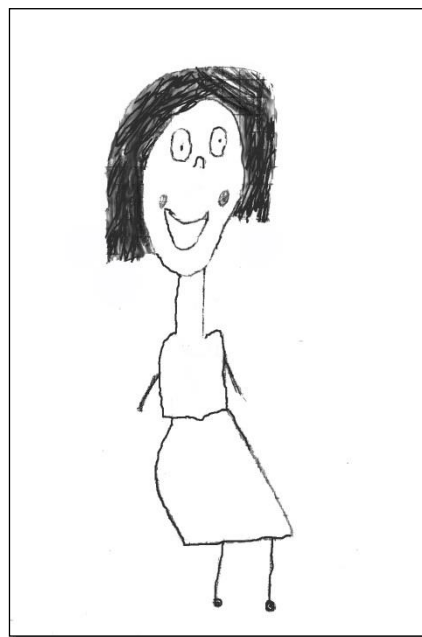


Figure 4. Drawing of human figure by children from ICDPC

speak for lack of confidence and low self-esteem and this combination will be seen in more than 66% of the examined children's drawings. (Figure 4 and 6).

An interesting fact is that in the human figure pictures nearly 60% of the examined children (Figure 5 and 6) from "little group home" draw ears. The ears are the latest element of the head to appear in children's drawings of human figure. It is expected to appear in the drawings of the older (13-14- year-old children) and here it appears in the drawings of 6-8-year-old children. Well-drawn ears show sociability and readiness to receive external information.

CONCLUSION

The related facts show that children raised in institution demonstrate social, emotional and cognitive skills which does not correspond to their calendar age, i.e. the skills they are expected to demonstrate at this age are at a considerably lower degree of development compared to the same age children raised in "little group home". This is due to the living conditions, monotonous environment, and the non- individual approach to children. The table shows that with the first group children there are no results about their cognitive development. Here, we have to clarify that the children have cognitive skills but they are not developed to a degree which is typical for their age. The deprivative conditions in which they have been raised have also influenced on the development of their communicative skills. The slow speech development of children raised in children's homes is also a consequence of the inadequate communication with the grown ones. The speech the child hears is not personally addressed to him and is also in poor social context. The slow speech development of children raised in children's home includes late beginning to speak, poor active dictionary which includes mostly concrete notions, problems in the speech use as a means of communication. (4)

To raise a child outside his family has negative influence on child's direct experience as well on his life later as a grown up. This influence can be traced through all forms of mental and physical health.

With the second group of children – settled in "little group home" the data analysis shows



Figure 5. Drawing of human figure by children from ICDPC

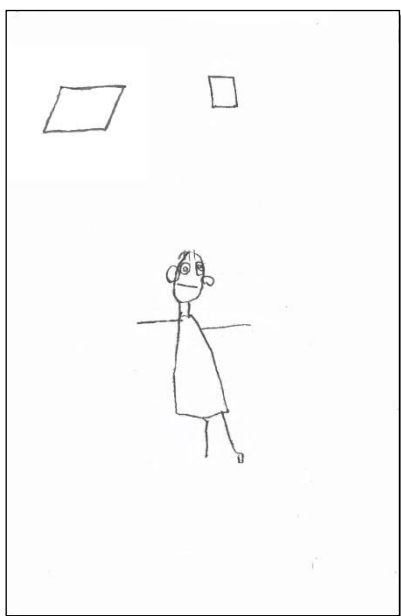


Figure 6. Drawing of human figure by children from ICDPC

Some of the emotional indicators speak for increased anxiety and fear from new experiences. Such are for example the position of the figure in the upper central area of the image field. (Figure 6) Similar meaning has also the way in which the eyes are drawn in pictures 4 and 6 – as circles, with pupils like spots, without iris. This way of eyes depicting shows fear and strong anxiety of the drawer. Small feet combined with missing palms also

dynamics in children's development. As a consequence of taking the children out of the institution we can see change in their cognitive and social-emotional development. From the analysis we can see that their achievements are higher than the achievement of the children raised in institutions and the percentage of success is higher too.

On the basis of these results we surely can say that taking children out of institutional care could lead to a permanent positive influence on their possibilities for realization in life and successful social integration.

From the results' analysis it was found that the institutional conditions of living reflect negatively on the emotional-social development of children. Institutions cannot provide children with the emotional care and love they need. The lack of family and their raising in close institutions, deprivation of their own home and family comfort leads to serious consequences in children's mental development.

The comparative analysis of the results of children's mental development shows that with all children settled in "little group home" there are positive changes of social-mental and individual-mental level.

Abbreviations: SGH - "Small Group Home", IQ - intelligence quotient, MA - mental age, ICDPC - Institution for children deprived from parental care.

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