



Original Contribution

SOCIAL INTEREST AND MOTIVATION

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ABSTRACT

The idea of the social interest formed in childhood is a key concept of the Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler, wherein it is defined as a community feeling and a disposition towards cooperation and mutual assistance. The present research studies the impact of academic education on the development of social interest as well as the interconnection between social interest and a person's motivation.

Key words: social interest, motivation for achievement, academic education, students in social and special pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

The importance of understanding human nature from the perspective of the social relationships and the belief that human behavior cannot be viewed in isolation from the social context are some of the most significant ideas of Individual Psychology.

The founder of Individual psychology, Alfred Adler defines the human being as a cohesive system of interconnections and an integral component of larger systems - families and communities. "Individual Psychology regards and examines the individual as socially embedded. We refuse to recognize and examine the isolated human being."(1:2)

Thus, Individual Psychology places the main focus on the unity and cooperation between the individual and the community, and the conflict between these entities is regarded as unnatural.

The concept of social interest expresses the conviction that people are social beings and if we want to achieve a deeper understanding of ourselves, we need to examine our relationships with the others and the socio-cultural context in which we exist.

Alfred Adler believes that the potential for the development of social interest is innate and like other similar innate dispositions, it does not arise automatically, but requires conscious development and effort. Social interest develops within the social environment:

the mother, the family and the whole ambience in which the individual exists all contribute to the development of social interest.

The manifestation of social interest is a useful criterion for assessing the psychological health of an individual. It is regarded as a "barometer of normality" - an indicator that can be used to evaluate the quality of a person's life. Alfred Adler regards the significance of human life as lying in the contribution one makes to the lives of others. (2) In the spirit of this notion, we can also define and describe the term "innate interest" or motivation.

A number of authors in many fields of science have discovered a positive connection between curiosity and adaptation. Robert White reached the conclusion that motivation provides a basis for learning, effective presentation and personal satisfaction. (3) He noted the similarity between his concept of competency and effective motivation, and the Adlerian principle of striving for superiority. Alfred Adler's view on identification or the interest in non-social objects

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and activities is what constitutes the similarity between Adler's and R. White's theories.

The concept of social interest undoubtedly focuses the attention of researchers on establishing procedures for measuring this human phenomenon. One of the most famous scientists associated with the attempts to structure an approach and create the necessary tools for measuring social interest is James E. Crandall, professor of psychology at the University of Idaho in the United States of America. He studied the interests affecting human motivation and individuality. J. Crandall adopted a strategy for developing a measurement of social interest in its more limited sense. The scale places the main focus on measuring the relation between one's own interest and the care for others. Choosing more characteristics connected with the manifestation of empathy, readiness to help or interest in the problems of the others, is an indicator of a higher level of social interest. According to J. Crandall, this scale correlates positively with values in the individual's system of values such as: equality, peace, family safety. (4)

On the basis of these theoretical foundations and research experience, a concept was developed to measure the social interest in students with a professional orientation in the fields of general and social pedagogy. It also explores the link between this psychological phenomenon and the motivation for achievement.

CONCEPT AND METHODOLOGY

This research is an opportunity to study the social interest of students in an academic setting and to investigate the relative connections with the motivation for achievement. The goal is to search for a correlation between the level of social interest and career choice. The core idea is that young people's orientation towards careers in the fields of general and social pedagogy is not random, that instead it is based on a profound interest in the problems of other people: children, adults, disabled people. The connection between the level of social interest and the motivation for achievement was explored. It was assumed that the interest in the problems of other people could limit to an extent the chance of achieving one's own goals. Of course, the motivation for achievement can include a strategy for personal success in the form of providing help to the others. In the most common

scenario, however, the motivation for high achievements usually requires such a concentration of individual efforts that it leads to the individual's attention being focused exclusively on his/her own goals, and limits the individual's interest in the goals and problems of other people. The research is aimed at testing experimentally this concept and the main source of information used in this process can be found in the results of J. Crandall's test for studying students' social interest.

The **goal** of this research is to determine to what extent social interest affects the students' choice of professional orientation.

The **tasks** of the research can be formulated as follows:

1. To determine whether there is a connection between the level of social interest and the person's choice of profession.
2. To determine whether there is a connection between the level of social interest and the motivation for achievement.

Research hypotheses. On the basis of studying the scientific literature on the topic of social interest, the first hypothesis of the research is that students with a professional orientation in the fields of general and social pedagogy exhibit average and above-average levels of social interest. The second hypothesis is that the high social interest in the problems of the others is not conducive to very high motivation for individual achievement.

The Subjects of the research were 167 students majoring in "Preschool and elementary school pedagogy", "Social pedagogy" and "Special pedagogy". 132 of the students were pursuing Bachelor's degree, while 35 students were pursuing Master's degrees. The research was conducted between May 3 and May 29 2009 at the Faculty of Education at Trakia University in Stara Zagora. Participation in the research was strictly voluntary. The confidentiality of the individual results is guaranteed and only the summarized results are presented here.

The research uses the Social Interest Scale developed by J. Crandall (4,5) and the test "Motivation for Achievement", Bulgarian approbation by I. Paspalanov and D.Shtetinski.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The distribution of the results of the respondents' replies corresponds to a normal Gaussian curve, as indicated in **Fig. 1.**

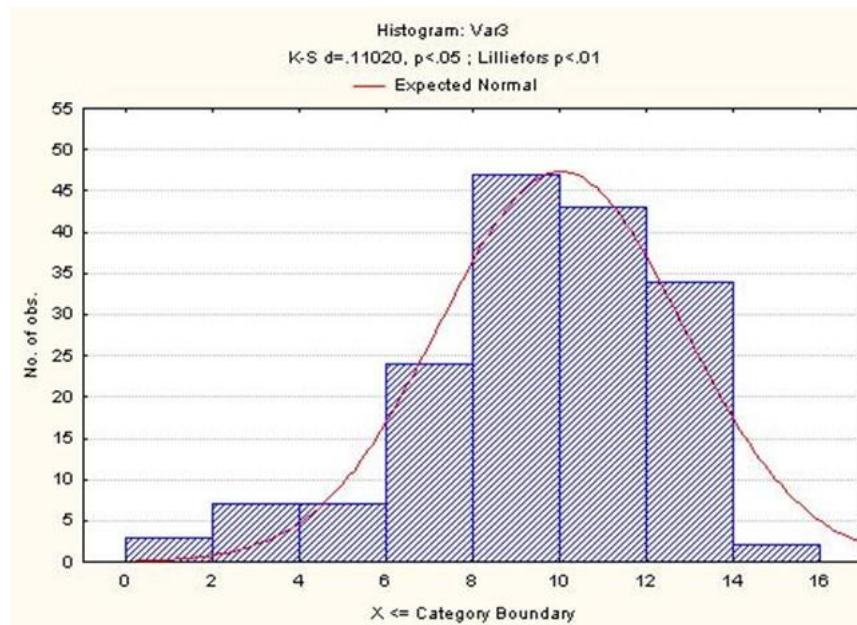


Fig. 1. Distribution of the respondents' results on the **Social Interest Scale** where Var3 are the values of the respondents' social interest.

The mean of the respondents' results on the Social interest Scale has the following characteristics:
Mean =10.04192 ; min = 2 ; max = 15; Std Dev = 2.816375; N = 167

In comparison with the standard quality norms of social interest, the mean value ($X_{av.} = 10.04$) lies at the higher end of the average level of social interest in the range between 7 and 11 points.

This demonstrates a tendency towards increase in the level of social interest among the students in all pedagogical specialties, which is noted both with the Bachelor's and the Master's students.

The results of the research on the students' motivation for achievement also show a Gaussian distribution.

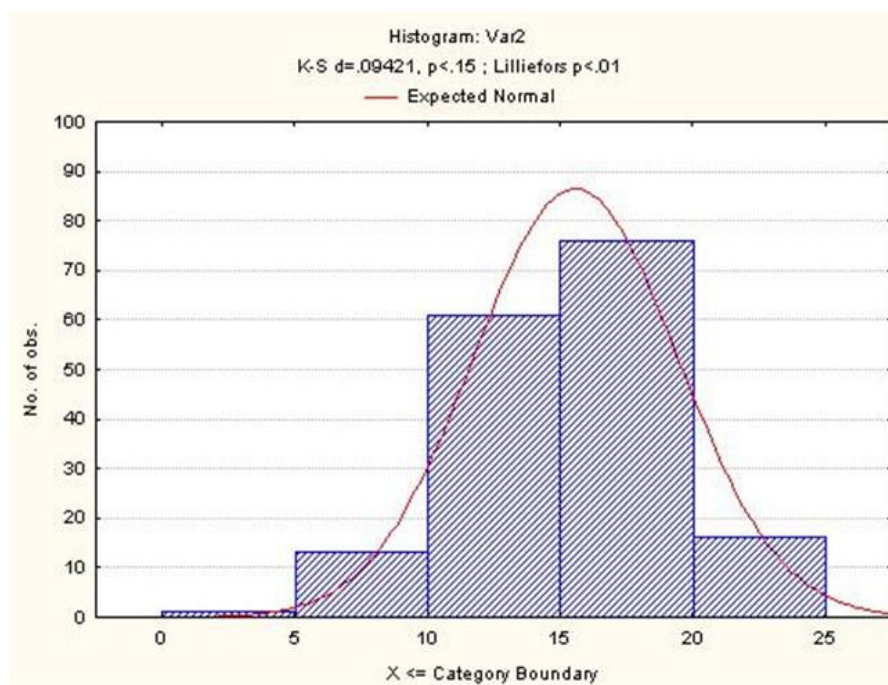


Fig. 2. Distribution of the respondents' results on the “**Motivation for achievement**” test where Var2 is the motivation for achievement.

The mean of the respondents' results on the test measuring motivation for achievement has the following characteristics:

Mean =15.58 ; min=5 ; max=25; Std Dev=3.85; N=167

With these results, the correlation coefficient was calculated in order to determine the type of connection between the two variables as well as its strength.

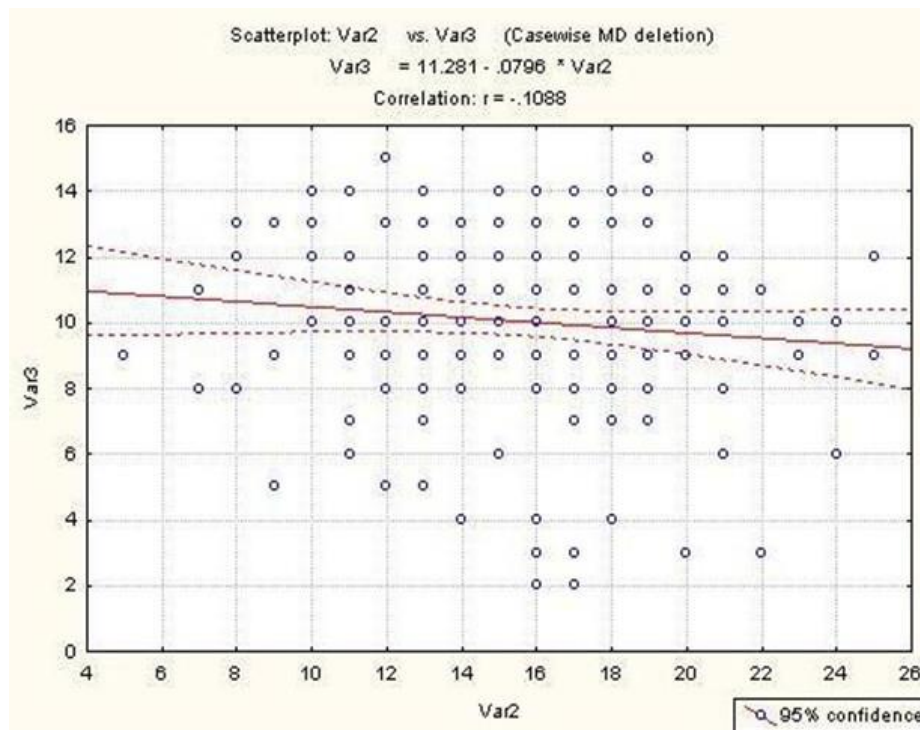


Fig. 3. Interconnection between **Social Interest** and **Motivation for achievement** in the overall sample

On **Fig. 3** are presented the values of social interest (Var3) and motivation for achievement (Var2) of the respondents from all pedagogical majors, including both the Bachelor's and the Master's students. The value $r = -0.1088$ shows that there is an inversely proportional connection between the two variables, which in this case lies in the range of little dependence. The relative insignificance of the inversely proportional dependence between social interest and motivation for achievement could be due to the fact that in the overall sample there are a number of students majoring in general pedagogy, for whom there is a direct dependence between their academic achievement and their future teaching position. In the overall sample, most of the respondents (90 students majoring in general pedagogy) were aspiring after high academic achievement and were motivated by the fact that in their future role as teachers they would work with highly motivated subjects, namely their students. That is why an attempt was made to

explore the connection between the social interest of the respondents and their motivation for achievement, where the influence of this artifact was not present. For this purpose, a correlation was sought between the motivation for achievement and the social interest of students in the Master's degree program in special pedagogy.

Fig. 4 shows that there is an inversely proportional connection between the social interest and the motivation for achievement of the respondents who were students in the Master's degree program in special pedagogy. Even though the correlation coefficient $r = -0.3018$ lies within the range of low dependence, this result is significantly higher than in the overall sample ($r = -0.1088$). This result can be explained with the greater focus of students in social pedagogy on the problems of the others than on their own individual achievements.

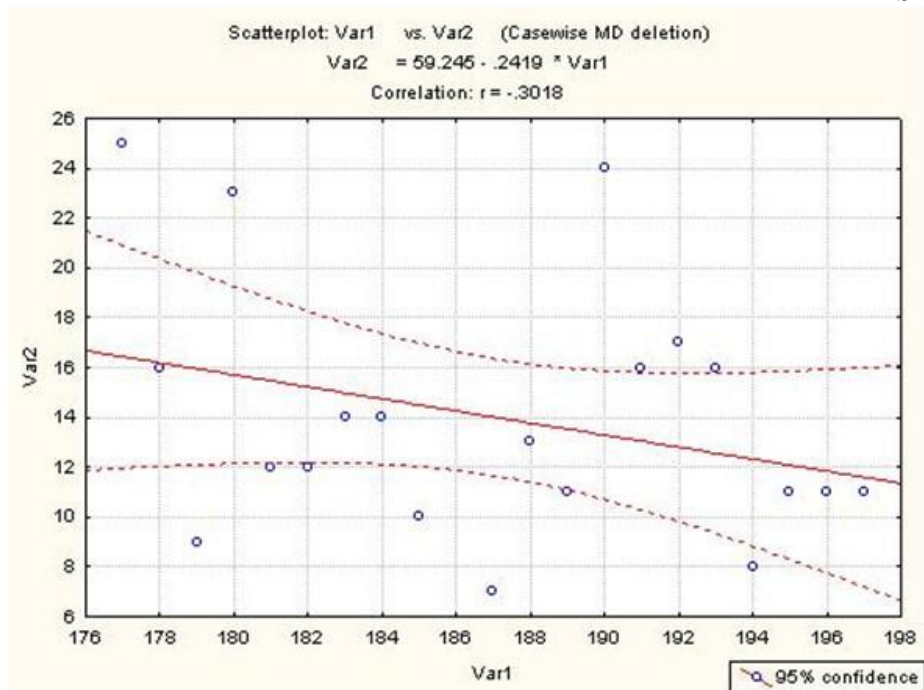


Fig. 4. Interconnection between **Social interest** and **Motivation for achievement** in students majoring in social pedagogy.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the research lead to two main conclusion:

First. The level of social interest, which is formed during childhood and adolescence, affects the individual's professional orientation. Individuals that exhibit an above-average or high level of social interest are more likely to pursue a career in the helping or socially oriented professions.

Second. Social interest has a tendency to be in an inversely proportional dependence with the motivation for personal achievement. The strength of this connection is different and depends on multiple personal, interpersonal and social factors.

This research confirms the basic Adlerian premise that social interest formed in childhood under the influence of the family is stable and consistent, while the variation in its development

resulting from other social factors is relatively insignificant.

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