

Dimensions of Interpersonal Relationships of Mental Deficient Pupils

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Abstract

For the majority having friends or being able to interact with somebody else is common most of the time. However, for people with a deficiency to have friends, to have social interactions with other people is not so easy. The experts in the field of social science have become interested in the topic of "interpersonal relationships" in the context of facilitating the social insertion of the persons with deficiency, in the context of creating sustainable strategies for getting a job, maintaining a job for persons with special needs. This paper is based on a complex research on 112 preadolescents with mental deficiency and 98 teenagers with mental deficiency, and it tries to underline the specific manner that pupils with mental deficiencies establish interpersonal relationships. The results that came out from data analyses (statistical and qualitative) allowed us to reveal a specific typology.

Keywords: Interpersonal Relationships; Socialization; Relational spaces; Social perception process; Mental deficient personality

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Introduction

The complexity of the interpersonal relationships that we notice in social groups, and in particular in the labor field, with specific dynamic both horizontally and vertically in each organization, depending on the field of activity and the type of activity performed, suggests constantly investigations of the ways in which the interpersonal relationships are structured [1]. Around the world experts have conducted series of research to offer some milestones that colleagues can use during the therapeutic process of people with mental disabilities, aimed to make them responsible citizens. Some of the experts have narrowed the interpersonal relationships of mental deficient persons with their state of health, of wellbeing [2] others have been were preoccupied for revealing the particularities of loneliness [3], of failing in love, or of sexual relationships, etc. This study approaches a penetration into the basic or derived processes connected with the wish to analyze the dimensions of interpersonal relationships at pupils with mental deficient in relation with the persons that are developed. There is a real spiral of criticisms regarding the quality of the therapeutically services with a real community awareness of the longterm implications resulting from the social policy. The analyses are focused on revealing the differences that are significant beyond the current information in the process valorizing the mental deficient' remaining potential.

Conceptual analyses and background

One of the major features that define the human personality is the ability to establish interactions/relations with other persons during his/her entire life. Each stage of a person's development is marked

by different types of human interactions, generically called social relationships [4]. Probably, the most important social relationship type is the interpersonal one.

But what does "interpersonal relationships" really mean?

Answering the above question is a hard task, due to the fact that the concept "interpersonal relationship" is no longer specific to the experts in psychology, pedagogy or social sciences. The experts from different domains use, the term "interpersonal relationships" in their vocabulary, due to the fact that they are present in every kind of social group, in organizations and they are shaped by the specificity of each group, or organization. Basically, interpersonal relationships designate those direct and reciprocal interactions between people [5], and they involve a conscious and direct psychological participation. There are different types of social relations, with manifestations and influences at all levels of social existence.

In 2015, Cristea, revealed that the interpersonal relationships are present at different levels: (a) "at the psycho-individual level" (p. 154), they are the direct expressions of psychic factors (cognitive, affective, motivational, etc.) through which interactions between partners are structured and carried; (b) "at the psycho-social level" (p.154), they are the indispensable framework of interactive processes and phenomena. The influences exerted by the society on the individual as well as the influences that the individual exerts on the social groups can only take place on the basis of a complex system of interpersonal relationships; (c) "at the social level" (p.154), they appear as a functional infrastructure on which the development and performance of different subsystems depend:

economic, political, educational, religious [6].

The development of interpersonal relationships is marked by the socialization process, by the primary social experience, by the level of personal attachment. In time, as Cristea pointed in 2015, those three processes contribute to the formation of a relational scheme, specific to each person who gradually becomes a matrix for all future interpersonal relations and which is generically called the "interpersonal relationship style" (p.159). The interpersonal relationship style has as its core the model of primary relations, but its configuration depends on: the temperamental-characteristic features of the individual; his/her social intelligence; the structure of the self and of the self-image [7]; the nature and quality of the experience accumulated in ontogenesis; the socioeconomic status (personal and family); the characteristics of membership groups; models and socio-cultural norms which regulates social relations.

Additionally, Cristea (2015) pointed the main dimensions of the interpersonal relationship style: the attitude towards the partner: such as equality, consideration, openness, receptivity, sympathy/superiority, non-receptivity, hostility; the personal involvement in a relationship; the constancy which refers to those attitudes and interpersonal behavior that are relatively constant, predictable or marked by inconstancy, imprecision; it has own techniques of priming, maintaining and cultivating relationships such as excessive politeness, using flattery to maintain a relationship, using different means of impressing another person, etc. The interpersonal relationship style, spontaneously or cultivated, to a great extent, has been a condition of the person's social performance, being an important factor in the development of the psychosocial environment [8].

Various perception phenomena take place inside the psychological environment

Baron and Bryne (2011), defined social perception as a segment of the cognitive process through which the individual arrives to form a self-image and, at the same time, he/she outlines impressions and appreciations about the others [3]. Two aspects are involved in the ample process. First, the individual approaches the problem starting from the Self, and, second, the representation of another is part of the vast process of self-perception [1]. The social perception outcomes make any persons to stick a series of "labels" to facts, behavior, events. In interpersonal relationships, the individual takes on a series of labels and classifications related to relationships with others, to psychic traits. Thus, the individual forms a brief mental representation, a representation stemming from the individual's need to "control" reality by reducing the complexity and the differences that make it up. Based on these representations, each person will get sets of criteria that will be used in classifying objects, phenomena, persons, situations in different categories [9]. Moscovici (1998) reached to the following conclusions (p.27): "the ability to classify in a compartment, to categorize objects is an indispensable adaptation capacity. Categorization favours simplification [10], and this in turn transforms the world into a more predictable and more manageable place". (p. 30). Categorization is involving, as Baron and Bryne revealed (1991), in social perception process, when social subjects make an impression on each other [3].

Urea (2012), analysing "The continuum model of impression" that Fiske and Neuberg (1990) developed to explain the Alter's social perception [11], reached the following conclusions: "(a) the subject perceives the other as a unique continuum process of evaluating impressions; (b) both assessments based on individual features and on categories constitute the two extremes of this model; (c) the answers that have priority are those based on categories, not on individualized judgments; (d) the movement along the continuum, from category-based responses to individual responses, relies on interpretation, motivation and attention factors." (p. 42). So, the subjects who perceive social reality meet, in a first stage, a target and automatically classify it as a part of a particular social group. In a second step, they consider personal targeting so categorized according to current interests, goals [12]. If the target has only a minor interest, then the impression process will be shortened and the evaluations will be essentially category-based. If the target is of major interest, the perceiving subject will activate all the personal attention resources so as to evaluate all the personal characteristics of the target, triggering the search for a more individualized impression.

The social perception, as well the interpersonal relationship style, is marked by the person's features: age, the state of health, social experiences, type of activities, etc. In particular, at persons with mental deficiencies, the influences upon interpersonal relationship style will come out from the specific traits of mental deficient personality. There are several areas of investigation that concern the specificity of the interpersonal relationships that occur during the recovery process between the mental deficient pupil and the persons involved in (teachers, doctors, speech therapist, social worker, etc.) especially in the context of individualized and personalized therapeutic program aimed on valorizing and developing the mental deficient' remaining of functional potential.

Methods

Cases "Choosing Alter's Test". It is a test, created for pupils with mental deficiencies in 2011 by R. Urea and it is focused on revealing the criteria for choosing a friend. Each investigated subject was asked to underline from a list of 45 adjective those adjectives that characterize his/her friend. The test' features are: internal consistency=.834, fidelity index=.727. "Relation with others" is a questionnaire created for pupils with mental deficiencies in 2014 and it is focused on revealing the criteria underlying the assessment of interpersonal relationships established with an authority and it has 30 statements [13]. Each investigated subject was asked to assess each statement on a scale from 1 (not agree) to 5 (total agree). (Internal consistency=.794, fidelity index=.762).

We also used in our research non-directive interviews.

In our investigation, in order to analyze the collected data, we used IBM SPSS 25.

Participants

We performed our research on: (a) 112 preadolescents, coming from the urban environment, subjects aged 11-14 years, 58 boys and 54 girls (with mean of 12.7 years and median=12.9 years) with I.Q between 59-85. (with mean 72 and median 71). The

participation of the preadolescents in this investigation was with their parents' consent; (b) 98 teenagers, coming from the urban environment, subjects aged 15-18 years, 52 boys and 46 girls (with mean of 16.4 years and median=16.7 years) with I.Q between 56-85 (with mean 74 and median 73). The participation of the teenagers in this investigation was with their parents' consent.

Procedure

Our research had an initial testing procedure on 40 preadolescents with mental deficiencies and the obtained Cronbach Alpha indexes ($\alpha_1=0.659$ at preadolescents testing procedure and $\alpha_2=0.687$ at teenagers with mental deficiencies) allowed us to proceed to extended research. Our research had an actual testing procedure on 210 pupils with mental deficiencies: 112 preadolescents and 98 teenagers that had the following stages: (a) revealing the specific

manner of developing friendships; (b) revealing the specific manner of establishing relationships with persons that have official authority.

Results

Investigation of specific manner of developing friendships

The first objective of the research was aimed at revealing the specific criteria used by our investigated subjects in developing friendships. The data analyses process pointed that the distribution was uniform the skewness index values from 1.248 to 2.504 and with standard error of skewness from .768 of 1.431, and kurtosis index values from .907 to 1.604, respectively standard error of kurtosis from 1.322 to 2.056 [14]. We are further presenting the data related to the answers analyzed on the following criteria: Friend's psychological characteristics, Friend's behavior towards

Table 1 The criteria used by investigated mental deficient in developing friendships

Friend's behaviour towards society (%)	Friend's behaviour towards the person that choose (%)	Friend's behaviour towards the learning process (%)	Friend's behaviour towards labour (%)	
11	49	29	8	8
42	4	10	23	21

society, Friend's behavior towards the person that choose, Friend's behavior towards the learning process, and Friend's behavior towards labor (Table 1)

Investigation of the specific manner of establishing relationships with persons that have official authority

The second objective of the research was aimed at revealing the

specific manner of establishing relationships with persons that have official authority by investigated subjects. The data analyses process pointed that the distribution was uniform, the skewness index values from 1.821 to 2.132 and with standard error of skewness from .817 of 1.533, and kurtosis index values from .928 to 1.850, respectively standard error of kurtosis from 1.371 to 1.958. We are further presenting the data related to the answers analyzed on the

Table 1 The criteria used by investigated mental deficient in developing friendships

Subjects	The Authority's psychological characteristics,	The Authority's skills for solving the person 's problems	The Authority's behaviour towards the person that makes the assessment	The Authority's reactivity to stressful situations
Preadolescents	23	31	49	9
Teenagers	19	41	12	25

following criteria: The Authority's psychological characteristics, the Authority's skills for solving the person's problems, the Authority's reactivity to stressful situations, the Authority's behavior towards the person that makes the assessment (Table 2).

Discussions

Investigation of specific manner of developing friendships

From the data collected in Table 1, we have found that the investigated preadolescents with mental deficiency used as the primary criterion for choosing friend: "the friend's behavior towards the person that chooses him/her ". Using this criterion reflects, in a clear manner, the mental deficiency specific egocentrism. In fact, the process of choosing a friend and establishing interpersonal relationships with him/her by mentally disabled preadolescents,

is made on the basis of genetic viscosity, in order to satisfy the needs related to personal security, The second criterion that the investigated mental deficient preadolescents used in choosing a friend was "the friend's behavior towards the learning process". The use of this criterion for the choosing a friend by the investigated mentally disabled preadolescents offers new perspective for understanding their entire interpersonal relationship process.

The investigated subjects, from the perspective of satisfying their own needs, have the ability to identify "the strengths, the weaknesses of an individual", "to validate" those persons who can help them solve their learning issues (problematic situations). On the other hand, establishing an interpersonal relationship with a "strong friend" helps to improve the status that he/she has within the social group.

The criteria used in choosing a friend by the investigated preadolescents with mental deficiency are, at the same time, an expression of the type of interpersonal relationships established in the intimate and personal space. Using the Pearson 's correlation analysis, we were able to highlight significant correlations between: interpersonal relationships established with boyfriend/girlfriend in the intimate space and the criterion "friend's behavior towards the person that choose" direct, very significant correlations ($r=.803$, $p=.05$); interpersonal relationships established with a friend in personal space (mutual attractions) and the criterion "friend's behavior towards the learning process". direct, very significant correlations ($r=.790$, $p=.05$). Taking all the findings into consideration, we can say that that the preadolescents with mental deficiency "use" in establishing interpersonal relations with a friend, infantile criteria related to satisfying personal security needs and increasing the status within social group.

Investigation of specific manner of establishing relationships with persons that have official authority

The data synthesized in Table 2 allowed us to see that the investigated preadolescents pointed as primary criterion in establishing interpersonal relationships with a person that has an official authority, his/her behavior towards the person that makes the assessment. The situation can be explained if we take into consideration that, at this age, the subjects with mental deficiency are characterized by egocentrism, which puts its mark on the way of interacting with persons that have authority. In other words, the person that has authority is perceived in terms of "punishments that he/she can be applied " (highlighted in 61% of the 98 non-directive interviews conducted with investigated preadolescents). Due to the limited character of the proximal development area they are not able of understanding the social utility of the activities that a person with an official authority accomplishes.

The second criterion that our investigated preadolescents use in establishing interpersonal relationships with a person that has official authority is: his/her skills for solving the person's problems. In fact, by using this criterion, they underline that "their problems are the most important" (highlighted in 58% of the 98 non-directive interviews conducted with investigated preadolescents), "that they have priority" (highlighted in 51 of the 98 non-directive interviews conducted with investigated preadolescents), "that they must be resolved quickly" regardless of their nature" (highlighted in 44% of the 98 non-directive interviews conducted with investigated preadolescents) – which are also a clear expression of their egocentrism.

The criteria used in establishing an interpersonal relationship with a person that has an official authority by the investigated preadolescents with mental deficiency are related to those used in choosing a friend. Using the Pearson 's correlation analysis, we were able to highlight significant correlations between: the subjects that used the criterion "the/a Friend's behavior towards the person that chooses him/her ". They also used the criterion "the Authority's behavior towards the person that makes the assessment" direct, very significant correlations ($r=.808$, $p=.05$); the subjects that used the criterion "the/a Friend's behavior towards the learning process" also used the criterion "the

Authority' skills for solving the person 's problems" direct, very significant correlations ($r=.784$, $p=.05$).

Instead, the investigated teenagers pointed as primary criterion in establishing interpersonal relationships with a person that has official authority: his/her skill in solving the person's problems and it is completed by the second criterion: "the Authority reactivity to stressful situations". So, the situation has raised a question: What does the association of those two criteria in the process of establishing an interpersonal relationship with a person that has official authority mean?

To answer this question, we applied 79 non-directive interviews and we found that the association of those two criteria signified: "She/he always knows how to solve problems" (founded at 74% of nondirective interviews); "She/he was always nice to me" (founded at 69% of nondirective interviews); "She/he always found the mistakes I made" (founded at 59% of nondirective interviews); "She/he has to help me" (founded at 44% of nondirective interviews). These answers reflect that the interpersonal relationships that they have established with a person that has authority are based on previous interactions with that person, on "personal history" and are geared to solving their own problems. So, we can state that egocentrism in the case of the investigated teenagers (amid the extensive educational recovery process that these subjects receive), has narrowed itself as an area of objectivity, from a generalized behavioral level to a contextual one.

The criteria used in establishing an interpersonal relationship with a person that has an official authority by the investigated teenagers with mental deficiency are related to those used in choosing a friend. Using the Pearson 's correlation analysis, we were able to highlight significant correlations between: the subjects that used the criterion "the Friend's behavior towards society" also used the criterion "the Authority skills for solving the person 'problems" direct, very significant correlations ($r=.821$, $p=.05$); the subjects that used the criterion "the Friend's behavior towards labour" also used the criterion "the Authority reactivity to stressful situations" direct, very significant correlations ($r=.784$, $p=.05$). Taking all the findings into consideration, we can say that in the case of interpersonal relations established with a person who has an official authority, a process of social modelling of the criteria occurs from criteria marked exclusively by egocentrism (specific to mental deficient preadolescents) to a criterion marked by contextual social-decisions (specific to mental deficient teenagers).

Conclusion

This research had the goal to reveal specific manner in which the pupils with mental deficiency structured their interpersonal relationships. In our investigation we used specific and adapted instruments. With the help of statistical analysis, we found that the Cronbach's Alpha is 0.854.

We found that:

(1) The interpersonal relationships structured at mental deficient pupils are marked by the specific traits of the mental deficient personality.

(2). A specific typology in structuring the interpersonal relationships at mental deficient preadolescents:

- Type A is represented by the subjects that: (a) establish a friendship relation based on criterion “the Friend’s behavior towards the person that choose”; (b) establish a relation with a person that has an official authority based on the criterion “the Authority’s behavior towards the person that that make the assessment”
- Type B is represented by the subjects that: (a) establish a friendship relation based on criterion “the Friend’s behavior towards the learning process”: (b) establish a relation with a person that has an official authority based on the criterion “the Authority’ skills for solving the person ‘problems”

(3). A specific typology in structuring the interpersonal relationships at mental deficient teenagers:

- Type A is represented by the subjects that: (a) establish a friendship relation based on criterion “the friend’s behavior towards society ”; (b) establish a relation with a person that has an official authority based on the criterion “the Authority’s skills for solving the person ‘problems.
- Type B is represented by the subjects that: (a) establish a friendship relation based on criterion “the Friend’s behavior towards labour ”; (b) establish a relation with a person that has an official authority based on choose in the formal space a person that has an establish a relation with a person that has an official authority based on the criterion “the Authority’ reactivity to stressful situations”.
- The assumption of our research was confirmed.
- We can use the previous conclusions for:
 - increasing the quality of relationships establish among the therapeutical program between the mental deficient and experts involved in;
 - improving the quality of the services provided to pupils with mental deficiency;
 - developing, on short time or on long time, specific educational programs meant to form, at preadolescents and adolescents with mental deficiency: team work abilities, vertical relationship skills, social evaluation patterns of Alters;
 - developing strategies to combat the phenomena of exclusion from the different social groups of people with mental disabilities;
 - stimulating the participation of people with mental deficiency

in community life.

Conflict of Interest

The author’s declared that they have no conflict of interest.

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