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Psychological Counseling Services in the Universities of Russia and the West

Abstract

The article reveals the importance of psychological counseling service in Russian and foreign universities. During their educational activities students experience the pressure of various stressors associated with it. There is also the specific character of psychological age. The article describes features of the psychological counseling in Russian and foreign universities; it analyzes the existing experience, identifies problem points and indicates the goals of further development of the psychological support services for students.

Keywords: psychological counseling, higher education, psychological service, internal university structure, professional resources, individual and group counseling, intermittent therapy, adaptation

Introduction

In teaching there is often a situation when students turn to teachers with personal concerns. To date, professional psychological support can be found both in preschool institutions and in secondary education institutions. This is a norm and practically no one is surprised by it. But at the stage of higher education this support is cut off as a rule. In the university structure there is no psychological support, when a competent psychologist can do counseling work with a student experiencing certain difficulties. On the one hand, educational activity is surrounded by various stressors and not every young person can adequately withstand their impact. On the other hand, the specific features of an individual's psychological age may provoke a number of experiences which are difficult to understand. The issue of introduction of psychological counseling services into the structure of higher educational institution is important and timely not only for Russia but for foreign countries as well. In European countries and in the USA practical psychology and psychological counseling have a significant experience of their effective development.

Psychological counseling in foreign universities

Psychological counseling in higher educational institutions is closely connected both with the specific character of the educational system and with the cultural, historical, national and political features of a particular country.

The psychological counseling services were widely spread in the 1970s. To date, most US universities are able to provide support to a student experiencing psychological difficulties (Shcherbaneva, 2003).

It is impossible to identify some general therapeutic model used by counseling psychologists in different higher educational institutions. The great variety of the existing theories generates different approaches of professionals to satisfying students' needs. In the practice of psychological counseling in foreign higher educational institutions, various modifications of the psychoanalytic method, cognitive behavioral therapy and family therapy can be found. It is rather the range of problems the professionals encounter that serve as a unifying factor, for example, the use of alcohol or psychoactive substances, anorexia nervosa, bulimia and others (Shcherbaneva, 2003).

Psychological counseling in foreign universities is focused on short-term therapy. This is largely due to a great burden on one counseling psychologist and lack of funding for hiring more professionals. The specific nature of the student's educational process also acts as a restrictor in the psychologist's choice of psychological work. Over the course of five year learning the student faces numerous stressors. This sometimes may result in breaking regular visiting of the psychologist. On the other hand, some unexpected psychological problems may require prompt resolution under the supervision of a qualified counselor.

Students' irregular visiting of the counseling psychologist is viewed as a completely natural behavior. They got accustomed to missing classes; in addition, the crisis periods may be unexpectedly overcome. This behavior causes difficulties for the counselors operating under the scenario of traditional therapy. The quality of the established relationship, the therapeutic alliance, becomes worse (Shcherbaneva, 2003).

Psychological counseling is part of the organizational structure of many universities in the developed countries. It is implemented within the framework of the service of counseling and psychological assistance (CAPS – counseling & psychological service). Its main activity is aimed at correcting mental health disorders of students, faculty and university staff (Annual survey of counseling in further and higher education, 2005).

According to foreign publications, the issues of students' mental health deserve special attention. Establishing psychological counseling in university helps strengthen the mental health of future professionals of industry, business and politics, ensuring the future of the whole country (Brown et al., 2006).

At the turn of XX-XXI centuries in foreign countries there is an increase in the number of the requests for psychological services. With the increased number of university students they have to wait a month for an appointment at a counseling center; meanwhile the staff size of psychological services remains the same. Researchers observe a tendency to deterioration in students' mental health; this is partially reflected in the report of the Board of the Royal College of Psychiatrists (2003). A number of studies note an increase in the number of students using alcohol and psychoactive substances, the spread of anorexia nervosa and bulimia, symptoms of depression, distress, and manifestations of suicidal propensity (Pickard et al., 2000; Webb et al., 1996). Similar problems are reflected in the report of the National Institute for Health Assessment (ACHA, USA) for 2012.

In the current situation, in foreign countries at the level of higher educational institutions various measures are taken to address the problems related to students' mental health. For example, in the UK, Committee for the Promotion of Mental

Wellbeing in Higher Education has been founded, principles of strengthening students' and faculty's mental health have been established and documented. Instructions for university staff were introduced to ensure the safety of students' mental health. In fact, the responsibility for the development of a mentally healthy student rests not only on a separate structural unit, but on the entire staff of a higher educational institution (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2003). Yet in the teaching-learning process the teacher is the closest to the student; in this regard, the requirements for his/her competence in the field of psychological health are increasing. Another important element of psychological counseling in university is a tutor (mentor), who, functioning as a "dispatcher", can find out a problem in a timely manner and help the student turn to a relevant professional.

In the University of Toronto psychological counseling is carried out through a corresponding service which is part of the organizational structure of the educational institution. The scope of the services provided and their forms are in many respects similar to the University Consulting Service in Cambridge. Psychological counseling is provided free of charge, which is typical of most foreign universities, but in case of missing a session without notifying the counselor a fine of \$ 30 is imposed. As in many foreign universities, only a short-term therapy is provided, which enables responding to more requests. However, if necessary, a staff member or a student can get an in-depth psychological assistance in the psychological center.

In many foreign countries the organized psychological service is comparatively young. The average number of counselors in one university in the USA and the UK is about 30 professionals. In Germany, Czech Republic and Estonia the number of psychological service professionals is about five. The specific character of the activities of these services is largely determined by their place in the organizational structure of a particular institution. For example, the German university provides psychological counseling through information and counseling centers which are also engaged in vocational guidance, social and legal consulting. CAPS staff members are outside the academic activity, which helps them focus on the role of a counseling psychologist.

Foreign universities, try to place psychological counseling services outside the educational institution in order to preserve the confidentiality of the student or employee seeking psychological help. In addition, foreign universities are actively developing the use of information technology for psychological counseling. In particular, online counseling is being implemented, which makes the access to a psychologist's help easier and more convenient for young people. Although this approach allows clients to keep the anonymity it cannot substitute for a face-to-face session and is only an addition to the traditional counseling.

Psychological counseling in higher educational institutions of Russia

Psychological counseling in higher educational institution is typically carried out through a separate structural unit that is often denoted as psychological service. The rudiments of using psychological counseling appeared in the 1920s; they could be observed in the activities of professional counseling bureaus and laboratories connected with industry and educational activities. The 30s in Russia were very tragic for the applied psychology. The branches such as pedologia and psychotechnics had been destroyed. The resumption of the development of

psychological counseling within education can be associated with the 70s, when the need for social practice and achievements in the areas of psychology of labor, pedagogical psychology, etc. becomes greater.

In Russia, the formation of the first psychological service in the university structure is associated with the initiative of B. G. Ananiev's students; in his studies he considered features of student personality structure (Kaltayeva, 2001). Ananiev's students established psychological services at the Novosibirsk Electrotechnical Institute; B. G. Ananiev himself supervised it at the initial stages.

Another attempt was made at the end of the 70s of the 20th century at the initiative of the Associate Professor of the Chair of Pedagogy and Psychology of Kazan State University, N. M. Peisakhov. He and his colleagues managed to create psychological service, to define its main goals, tasks and functions (Olifirovich et al., 2009).

Also, in the beginning of the 70s other higher educational institutions kept opening psychological services, but unfortunately they soon stopped functioning; partially because students and faculty were not interested in their work.

The development of psychological services at the level of preschool and secondary educational institutions greatly contributed to the introduction of the practice of psychological counseling into the activity of the university. In Russia's society, a new image of a psychologist gradually started to form; people began to show interest in psychology. However, it is wrong to extrapolate the methods of psychological services of secondary educational institutions to similar services of universities (Kolosov, 2009).

In our country the development of the psychological services in the context of educational activity is connected with the research by I. V. Dubrovina. She is the author of the experiment associated with the introduction into the structure of secondary education a position of psychologist (1982-1988). The obtained results formed the basis for the Regulation on the Psychological Service of Public Education which was actively used in the USSR.

I. V. Dubrovina (1998) proposed the following list of the main problems with which students turn to a psychologist:

- Subjective feelings about problem relationships with other people (shyness and fear preventing communication, non-acceptance by others);
- In-family problems: parents' lack of understanding, struggle for independence;
- Problems in the psychosexual domain (the boy-girl relationship, intimate complexes, sex, pregnancy, etc.);
- Existential problems;
- Problems of leisure and addictive behavior.

Another stage of the development of psychological services in the university structure was in the 90s of the 20th century; it is associated with the development of the personality-oriented approach in educational activities. In this period some higher educational institutions took part in implementing the Higher School of Russia program; in its context a scientific and methodological support of the psychological service was formed (Arsenieva, 2006).

Special attention should be given to the topic of psychological support for vocational education raised by E. F. Zeer (2003), since it reflects the vocational

orientation context of the psychological counseling in the university. Zeer (2003) examines the conception of professional education through the prism of the personality-oriented paradigm of higher education. The author notes that the choice of the future career by graduates has little to do with the choice of a higher educational institution. Indeed, the problem of professional identification in the face of a large number of options sometimes seems to paralyze the student, allowing circumstances to determine the future career.

In the last decade, the issues of introducing psychological counseling in Russia have been given more attention. For example, at the All-Russian Conference “The Role of the Service of Practical Psychology of Vocational Education Institutions in the Implementation of the Strategy of the State Youth Policy of the Russian Federation” held in 2007, the need for the development of psychological services in Russian universities was recognized. T. N. Arsenieva (2006) notes that the importance and timeliness of vocational practical psychologist service cannot be doubtful even for hardline skeptic bureaucrats.

To date, psychological counseling as a component of the psychological service exists in some Russian Universities of Moscow, St. Petersburg, Nizhny Novgorod, Tver, Kazan, Rostov, Astrakhan, Arkhangelsk, Kursk, Tomsk, and others. However, it is more often connected with the initiative of the faculty of humanities. The general model describing goals, tasks and methods of counseling has not been formed yet. Despite this, it is possible to distinguish similar areas of activity and common methods of work that are to a great extent based on the experience of secondary school psychological services (Kolosov, 2010).

Psychological counseling in university can be implemented in two lines: actual and prospecting. The actual one addresses students’ difficulties directly related to learning, development, deviant behavior and communication problems. The aims of the prospecting line are the development of students’ professional features, providing assistance in self-determination and strengthening students’ mental health (Zeer, 2003).

It is evident that the problem of introducing psychological counseling into Russian universities is recognized and its solution depends largely on creating a psychological service in the university structure. The general objectives of this structural unit in general terms are outlined, but it is not enough. It is possible to identify a number of interconnected factors hindering the development of psychological counseling in the university structure. For example, it is not quite clear what principles and methods will be used by a psychological counselor in his/her work; who and how will be responsible for the outcome of the psychological work; how the psychological service will be financed; and how to evaluate a counselor’s work.

Psychological services are quite a young structural unit in a number of Russian universities, existing for 10-15 years. The difficulties they encounter are quite typical: lack of regulatory framework for the activities; poor material and technical equipment; professional resources; weak integration into the educational environment.

In order to provide psychological services with professional resources, it is important to determine the number of counseling psychologists necessary for solving the tasks. For the Russian higher educational institutions the standards of

workload for a psychologist have not been developed. These standards are developed for secondary education institutions; however, as practice shows, they do not correspond to a psychologist's real opportunities and require revision.

In addition, factors related to the adaptation of freshmen to the new educational process should be mentioned: dissatisfaction with training, inability to withstand a new high rate of life, unpreparedness for new ways of the perception and processing of information, student anxiety, inability to systematize knowledge, physical fatigue, lack of self-presentation skills in a group, unpreparedness for self-expression in learning activity.

From this it follows that the work of the psychological counseling services should be aimed at making the adaptation period of first-year students easier. It is not always that the students can independently adjust to new requirements; and in case of failure, the risk of the negative impact of disadaptation on the development of personality characteristics is higher.

It is also important to mark the main lines of the counseling psychologist's work in the Russian university structure. First, it is individual and group counseling aimed at personality and professional self-determination of students. Today one can often see a fourth year student who cannot imagine himself/herself working in the profession for which he/she has acquired competencies. Second, an important line of psychological services is counseling for the university teachers. Focusing on educational activities, the counseling work can be aimed at developing competent communication, reflexive activity culture, orientation to dialogical communication with students and avoiding an authoritarian model.

The previously identified problems hindering the introduction of psychological counseling in the educational activity of the university play an important role in forecasting further development and determining main current tasks:

- development of theoretical and organizational basis for the university psychological services work;
- development of normative documents (primarily of the federal level) regulating its work;
- creation of methodology centers supervising psychological services professionals;
- having regular meetings, seminars and round tables that enable learning and exchanging the experience;
- scientific and methodological support for the activities of professionals working at psychological services (publication of educational and methodological manuals containing information necessary for the work of the services, as well as the creation of a site on which methodological information, diagnostic techniques, developments and documents will be posted) (Kolosov, 2010).

Conclusion

The functional contents of psychological counseling services in Russian and foreign universities is different. Their views on the professional resources of the services necessary for valid functioning also differ. However, the ideas about the main goals and lines are similar.

Particular attention in the foreign university psychological counseling is given to the student's mental health and methods for its strengthening, as well as to the preventive control of disorders caused by the use of alcohol and psychoactive substances.

The work of a psychological counselor in foreign universities is legally regulated, which provides legal protection to the counselor and the client. In its turn, the lack of legal basis and regulation of activities at the federal level is one of the main problems hindering the introduction of psychological counseling services in the organizational structure of Russian universities.

The number of professional psychologists in psychological counseling service in foreign universities is greater than in the Russian ones. In the UK universities, the current standards of the workload of a counseling psychologist working all day long are 3,500 students per counselor. For the Russian universities the workload standards have not been worked out yet, although the actual load is sometimes more than 3500 students per counselor in some universities.

Establishing psychological service in Russian universities depends largely on the social and economic situation in the country. However, the key problems are lack of a legal and regulatory framework for psychological counseling, residual material support for the existing services, and an insufficient level of professional resources.

In many developed countries psychological counseling is recognized as a necessary component of the organizational structure of the university. In some foreign countries this process is going on quite intensively and is supported by the state by providing the services with the necessary material and technical means. In Russia, one can observe formation and development of full psychological services in the internal structure of university.

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