Time perspective in late life depression

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The last decades have been characterized by a significant increase in elderly people in the populations of different countries. In the analysis of the process of aging the positive the same as the negative changes should be considered. In normal ageing we could affirm the existence of the processes of “antiageing”, or “vitauct”, responsible for the maintenance of the adaptive organism functions and the increase of life duration (Frolkis 1988). Besides a number of adaptive mechanisms of aging there are specific hidden dangers for the psychic of an aging person, like changes in brain functioning, in the social situation of development, etc. In old age appear mental diseases typical for this period of life, one of the most widespread of which is depression.

The significant role in normal and in pathological aging belongs to the psychological and the environmental, including social and cultural, determinants of behavior. One of the main factors which plays a leading connective role in the relationship between personal and social experiences is time perspective (TP). TP is considered as the main component in the construction of psychological time, which results from the cognitive processes which divide the life span and the life experience into the periods of the past, the present and the future (Zimbardo and Boyd 1999).

Differences in time perspective in normal and pathological aging were investigated. According to the first hypothesis, in depression the present hedonistic and the future orientations would be low. According to the second hypothesis, in normal aging the future orientation would be low.

**Method**

**Participants.** 48 elderly depressed patients aged from 50 to 80 and 26 older adults aged from 50 to 81 took part in the experiment. All patients were under treatment in the Mental Health Research Center (Moscow).

**Materials.** In the investigation was used the adapted for the Russian population ZTPI (Zimbardo and Boyd 1999; Sircova, 2004).

**Procedure.** The participants were individually tested in the 1st part of the day: 1st sample – in the cabinet of the clinical psychologist in the geriatric department of the Mental Health Research Center; 2nd sample – in a quiet room in a flat. They received the questionnaires and filled them in. The data collection took place between November 2011 and April 2014.

**Results and discussion**

Significant differences between the representatives of a clinical and a control group were stated by the analysis of the ZTPI completion (Picture 1). The “Past Negative” was higher in the clinical group (p<0,05); elderly depressed people showed high scores on this factor while the mentally healthy people got the low scores on the average. The representatives of both groups showed high scores on the “Future”, but the scores of the healthy controls were significantly higher than the ones of the depressed people (p<0,01). The average score on the factor “Present Fatalistic” was significantly higher in the clinical group (p<0,01): elderly depressed patients averagely got high scores while healthy elderly people – the low ones.

Picture 1. Distribution of the scores on the factors of the ZTPI in the clinical and the control groups (100% - all participants of each group).

The results confirmed the first hypothesis: in depression the present wasn’t associated with satisfaction, the future orientation was low. Contrary to the second hypothesis, healthy elderly people were highly future oriented. Our results support the assumption that the most expressed in late life depression is the tendency to pessimistic attitude towards the past and the fatalistic attitude towards the present (Sircova and Mitina 2008; Desmyter and De Raedt 2012). But according to our results also change other aspects of time perspective: lowers the ability to be satisfied here and now, to concentrate on positive aspects of one’s future. Thus, in late life depression several aspects of the time perspective profile of normal aging sharpen.

**Conclusion**

It was shown that the characteristics of TP in normal aging reflect predominance of its positive aspects. Among “compensatory” mechanisms are “shift to the future”, active and responsible life position which reflect psychological vitauct. The “depressive” TP profile shows ambivalent attitude to the past, helplessness in life organizing, low future orientation. Resources of the past, possibility to get positive emotions in the present are not closed up for depressed people. These results clear up how manifests vitauct in aging (respecting TP), which resources can play a supportive role for the compensation of the negative changes.

**References**

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