

## DEPENDENCE BETWEEN LEVEL OF TERRORISTIC THREAT AND PARAMETERS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AT SCHOOLCHILDREN<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *Dependence of parameters of psychological well-being on the level of terroristic threat at indirect victims (those who were confronted with acts of terrorism by means of MASS MEDIA) was investigated. SUBJECTS: 84 schoolchildren (52 girls and 32 fellows). The age average was 16. METHODS: a questionnaire of terroristic sensitivity (QETT-50) (J.V.Byhovets, N.V. Tarabrina, 2010), a questionnaire of “The Scale of psychological well-being» (SPW) (adapted by T.D. Shevelenkova, P.P. Fesenko, 2005), a method of motivational induction (MMI) (in Tolstyh N.N.'s adaptation, 2005), a questionnaire «Prospect of my life» (E.A. Misko, N.V. Tarabrina, 2004). RESULTS: girls are more troubled under a threat of terrorism acts, than fellows. Sexual differences are absent in assessment of psychological well-being. Terroristic sensitivity is correlated to such scales of psychological well-being as «the Person as an open system» and «Life comprehension» in senior schoolchildren ( $R_s=0,25$  and  $R_s=0,22$   $p<.05$ ). Results show that terroristic sensitivity is correlated to components of psychological well-being.*

**Keywords:** *psychological well-being, terroristic sensitivity, mental health, indirect victims, schoolchildren, terrorist acts.*

Problems of mental health of children are among most acute in modern science. Experts of the World Health Organization observe a significant growth of psychological frustration in children and teenagers. Neurotic states make up 63 cases out of 1000 children. In Russia permanent mental disorders are registered in 15 % of children. According to the Institute of sociopolitical research of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the number of schoolchildren who are mentally absolutely healthy decreases from 30 % in 1-3 grades to 16 % in 9-11 grades. Thus, as the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation reports, pupils' health worsens 4–5 times during school years and 85 % of poorly performing children are sick with this or that disease.

Mental health is a multidimensional construct which is studied at different levels:

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genetic, biological, clinical, social, etc. Experts use different definitions of this term. From our point of view, the concept of «psychological well-being» most adequately corresponds to the psychological level of mental health research (N. Bradburn, C. Ryff, P.P. Fesenko, A.V. Voronina, L.V. Kylikova et al.).

Russian and foreign psychologists are inclined to consider psychological/subjective well-being either as “experience”, sense of happiness, satisfaction, pleasure (the hedonistic approach), or as level of achievements, a degree of success, self-actualization (the eudemonic approach).

Both these directions supplement each other. Any component of psychological well-being (social, material, etc.) always has objective indicators: objective characteristics of life quality, health indicators, social, psychological and other development opportunities, presence/absence of outward features of well-being and social success.

Estimation of one’s own well-being against social standards depends on subjective criteria. These criteria have individual differences. Criteria are generalized, concretely specified and acquire a steady character in the course of life. Understanding of this relationship is crucial for solving real life problems of optimization of social, psychological, economic relations in a society and improving quality of life. However, outward parameters cannot cause well-being experience as such, as this is how the nature of mentality works. They operate only through subjective perception and assessment of a person. Hence, any component of well-being can be characterized as subjective.

The most well-founded modern concept of psychological well-being is a model by Carol Ryff. She has defined a structure of psychological well-being and has designed a psychodiagnostic questionnaire - «The Scale of psychological well-being» (C. Ryff, 1989). The questionnaire is focused on measurement of six basic components of psychological well-being: self-acceptance, positive relations with people, autonomy, management of environment, life aims, personal growth. These components integrate structural elements of various psychological theories (A.Maslou, G.Olport, K.G.Jung, E.Erikson, S.Bjuller, M.Jahoda, D.Birren). It is possible to assume that each of six components is an aspect of positive functioning of a person. They can reach a different degree of expressiveness and define unique structure of psychological well-being of each person.

Determinants of psychological well-being/trouble of an individual compose a whole complex of interconnected internal and external components (personal, sociocultural, political, sociopsychological determinants, etc.). Results of some research studies make it possible to assert that neither political, nor economical factors can form a constant basis for psychological well-being. For example, in the research case of ethnosocial well-being of individuals it is shown that one can meet people who feel happy more often in India and most rarely — in Sweden (L.V. Kulikov). In the given research, the concept of “happiness” is identical to the concept of “psychological well-being». Hence, it is possible to assume that ethnic and cultural factors influence the well-being level.

However there is evidence, proving that such fact of modern sociopolitical life as the terrorist act adversely impacts mentality of population (L.E. Delisi et al., 2001; S.Galea et al., 2003; Gordon H. Cormick, 2003; R. Pangi, R.C. Silver et al., 2002; A. Speckhard, 2003; N.V.Tarabrina, J.V.Bykhovets, 2006). There are people who realize an act of terrorism as a direct threat to their life and to psychological well-being, though they have not suffered from an act of terrorism directly. We assume the following hypothesis:

high level of psychological well-being can be a restraint factor of intensive terroristic sensitivity. Psychological well-being can activate coping resources through a self-efficiency increase. People with a high level of psychological well-being have a much higher level of comprehension of life. The structure of their terminal values has a more concrete character. They have a sense of competence and a more mature coping strategy.

Complex research of the link between of the level of terroristic sensitivity and psychological well-being is done in the Laboratory of Psychology of Post-Traumatic Stress Institute of Psychology RAS. In the given article a part of this research is described. The current research was conducted in senior-grade schoolchildren. The selection of the given age group is not occasional. The teenage period is one of the crisis ages when one intensively develops abilities of self-knowledge (L.I.Bozhovich, N.I.Gutkina, I.S.Kon, V.A.Alekseev, E.Ericson). At this age influence of various external socio-political threats has a vital importance. A terrorist threat is considered as a threat to realization of life plans and prospects.

Some authors have shown that the acts of terrorism which occurred in Moscow brought about a lot of unpleasant and disturbing experience (N.V.Tarabrina, J.V. Byhovets, 2008, 2010; V.V. Znakov, 2010; E.B. Batueva, 2005). This event loses its emotional saturation in the course of time (V.V. Nurkova, D.M. Bernstein, E.F. Loftus). One remembers not only the image of terrorism attacks and the experience related to it, but also the relation to this image in the future. It is not the visual images of terrorism attacks (destruction, weapon, capture of hostages, death of innocent people, etc.) broadcast by mass-media that one’s mind captures first, but it is more the prospect of life under a terrorist threat that stays firmly in one’s consciousness (fear, horror, feeling of helplessness, etc.).

The **goal** of this research is to reveal the correlation of the level of sensitivity to a terrorist threat and psychological well-being at indirect victims (witnesses of acts of terrorism by means of mass-media). According to this purpose following tasks have been identified:

- 1) to study dependence of an indicator of terroristic sensitivity on scales of psychological well-being in schoolchildren;
- 2) to study features of a psychological well-being structure in groups with various intensity of terroristic sensitivity;
- 3) to reveal sexual distinctions in terroristic sensitivity and evaluation results by scales of psychological well-being.

## Methods

Participants of research - 84 pupils of 11 grades Korolev city (the Moscow region)

Table 1. The descriptive statistics of age of respondents

	Age				N
	Mean	Median	Range	Std.Dev.	
Girls	16,08	16	3	0,68	52
Fellows	16	16	2	0,62	32

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The following Questionnaires have been used to attain the purpose and goals of the research: a questionnaire of terroristic sensitivity (QETT-50) (J.V.Byhovets, N.V.Tarabrina, 2010), a questionnaire of “The Scale of psychological well-being» (SPW)(adapted by T.D.Shevelenkova, P. P. Fesenko, 2005), a method of motivational induction (MMI) (in Tolstyh N.N.’s adaptation, 2005), a questionnaire «Prospect of my life» (E.A. Misko, N.V. Tarabrina, 2004). The results of two questionnaires are studied in this article - SPW and QETT. SPW is a questionnaire whose main objective is to study actual psychological well-being. Indicators of the SPW are general points:

- In a classical variant of the questionnaire (by C.Ryff) there are 6 evaluation scales: «positive relations», “autonomy”, «management environment», «personal growth», «the purposes in life», “self-acceptance”;
- In the new adapted variant (by T.D. Shevelenkova, P. P. Fesenko) there are 4 scales: «balance of affect», « life comprehension», «the person as an open system», “autonomy”.

Processing of the statistical data was carried out by means of software packages «SPSS-10», «STATISTICA 6.0.» It included Spearman’s rho (rs); Mann-Whitney U.

## Results

### 1. The dependence analysis between level of terroristic sensitivity and parameters of psychological well-being in schoolchildren.

We have used nonparametric coefficient Spearman’s rho because of a small number of participants under study. The result of the analysis is presented in table 2.

Table 2. Significant coefficient of Spearman’s correlation between indicators of QETT and SPW

Indicators	N	Rs	p-level
QETT – scale «life comprehension» (SPW)	84	0,22	0,04
QETT – scale «the person as an open system» (SPW)	84	0,25	0,02

Respondents with an expressed terroristic sensitivity are sure that the future has prospects in a greater degree, they assess themselves as goal-oriented to a larger extent, they show a greater ability to acquire new information, have a complete and realistic outlook in life and are open to new experience.

### 2. The analysis of features of psychological well-being structure in groups with various levels of terroristic sensitivity.

According to some research an especially sharp and deep character of sensitivity to a terrorist threat is observed in children and teenagers. Unlike in adults, their mentality has not yet developed protective mechanisms. These protective mechanisms allow people to “hide” from danger, to forget it, to be absorbed by household problems. In 2001 Schuster with co-authors (M.A. Schuster, B.D. Stein, L. Jaycox, R.L. Collins, G.N. Marshal, M.N. Elliot et. al.) conducted research to define a level of terroristic sensitivity in children. The data the authors have obtained show that about 1/3 of adult

respondents who were parents did not notice presence of stressful reactions in their children after 9/11.

The information about acts of terrorism in mass-media and other communication media can be considered as a traumatic stressor. It can lead to loss of life prospects and ability to cope with vital difficulties in indirect victims (D. Simeon, 2002).

We have singled out three subgroups by a terroristic sensitivity level to verify this assumption. The bottom quartile of distribution QETT included estimations: for girls from 67 to 112 points ( $M=95,77$ ;  $SD=14,09$ ) and for fellows from 54 to 97 ( $M=72,71$ ;  $SD=14,55$ ); top quartile – for girls from 144 to 212 ( $M=161,34$ ;  $SD=19,56$ ) and for fellows from 132 to 168 ( $M=146,22$ ;  $SD=14,48$ ). The respondents who have scored on QETT from 112 to 144 points for girls ( $M=128,62$ ;  $SD=8,64$ ) and from 97 to 132 for fellows ( $M=116,71$ ;  $SD=10,13$ ) have entered a group of «inclined to intensive terroristic sensitivity».

The sample of respondents has been divided into 3 subgroups:

- 1) subgroup “resilience” ( $n=21$ , 13 girls and 8 fellow). They have low values of indicators on QETT. They are psychologically steady against psychotraumatic influence of acts of terrorism;
- 2) subgroup «inclined to intensive terroristic sensitivity» ( $n=41$ , 26 girls and 15 fellows). They have average values of an indicator in QETT;
- 3) subgroup “vulnerable” ( $n=22$ , 13 girls and 9 fellows). Their level of terroristic sensitivity is most expressed. They have high values of the indicator in QETT.

We have obtained the following data: the mean of SPW in subgroups «inclined to intensive terroristic sensitivity» and “vulnerable” stays within a corridor of average estimations. In the “resilience” subgroup the dispersion of estimations on each scale in SPW was is in the range of average values. However, the fellows have shown low values in the scales of «life comprehension» and «the person as an open system». It is obvious that fellows resistant to a terrorist threat are characterized by lack of life comprehension. The past and the present are perceived by them as senseless. The feeling of boredom and aimlessness of existence prevail in them. It is typical of them to have a fragmentary, insufficiently realistic perception of various aspects of life. However, the respondents of subgroups «inclined to intensive terroristic sensitivity» and «vulnerable» are characterized by prevalence of positive self-appraisal, acceptance of themselves with their merits and drawbacks. They are capable to resist social pressure and are able to defend their own opinion.

As a next step we evaluated distinctions in scales of psychological well-being between the defined subgroups. On the scale «the Person as an open system» the group “vulnerable” ( $M=66,14$ ;  $SD=4,04$ ) surpasses the group “resilience” ( $M=60,67$ ;  $SD=9,41$ ) (value of Mann-Whitney U criterion  $U=138,5$  and  $p=0,024$ ). Distinctions are not revealed on other scales of SPW between the selected subgroups.

The results have shown that the level of terroristic sensitivity is connected with some components of psychological well-being - «The person as an open system» and «Life comprehension». The senior schoolchildren intensively perceiving terrorist threat in a greater degree assess themselves as goal-oriented, comprehending life, capable to acquire new information.

### 3. Distinctions of level of terroristic sensitivity and assessment results by the scales of psychological well-being in groups of girl and fellows.

The value of Mann-Whitney U criterion has been calculated to compare those groups (tab. 3). For this particular age group the results are presented for the first time.

Table 3. Comparison of terrorist sensitivity level in the groups of girl and fellows (Mann-Whitney U criterion)

Indicators	Group 1				Group 2				U	P		
	m	M	R	D	m	M	R	D				
QETT	Girls	130	131	145	722,08	Fellows	Mult	Mult	154	1147,43	609,5	.04

Note: m – median, M – Mode, R – Range, D – Dispersion, U- Mann-Whitney U criterion.

Higher values of QETT indicator are found in the group of girls as compared to the group of fellows. However, the group of girls and the group of fellows do not differ on the scales of psychological well-being ( $p > 0,005$ ).

## Discussion

The data obtained in our work supplement the results of foreign research of the influence of age and sex on psychological well-being. C.Riff has shown that a category of woman had higher indicators on all basic components of psychological well-being in the age from 20 till 35, except for the scale of «Personal growth». Self-assessment results on this scale were identical in both sex groups. The data of our research show that senior schoolchildren (middle age - 16 years old) do not have sex distinctions on the scales of psychological well-being.

Our results manifest that sensitivity to a terrorist threat is related to some components of psychological well-being – «the person as an open system» and «life comprehension». These components reflect either presence or absence of life ultimate goals and ability to acquire new experience. The following regularity has been noticed: intensity of terroristic sensitivity is high in those respondents who have life goals and beliefs and are capable to perceive new information, have a realistic life perception. They are open to new experience. Whereas terroristic sensitivity is not expressed in the respondents who feel lack of life comprehension, the past and the present are perceived by them as senseless. The sense of boredom and aimlessness prevail in them. They show an inability to effectively integrate separate aspects of their own life experience.

Psychological well-being is characterized by an orientation degree on positive aspects of functioning and an intensity degree of this orientation. The data on similarity of psychological well-being structure in persons with various intensity of terroristic sensitivity are obtained in the course of this research. This structure can be described as follows: close, confiding and cordial relations with people feature the respondents of this study. They are capable to resist social pressure in their thoughts and acts. They are

able to satisfy their personal requirements and cherish values. They appear to practice continuous self-development. They recognize and accept the diversity of their personalities. Positive self-appraisal prevails in them. They prefer their own internal standards. Distinctions in structure of psychological well-being have appeared between the groups with high and low level of terroristic sensitivity on the scale of «the Person as an open system». Senior schoolchildren with high level of terroristic sensitivity possess a realistic and complete life perception which is combined with openness to new experience.

Similarity of psychological well-being structures and one distinction between the groups in the level of terroristic sensitivity allow us to make a conclusion about lack of dependence of psychological well-being and terroristic sensitivity. Subjective judgment about psychological well-being/trouble is an individual criterion. This criterion allows one to assess and analyze the degree of self-efficiency and satisfaction with quality of life on the whole. This statement is essentially important from the point of view of psychology. Well-being of a person depends not so much on biological factors, material prosperity, a social status, sociopolitical events, but on perception and self-evaluation of success and degree of self-realization measured against individual standards. There are persons especially vulnerable to terrorist threat both among psychologically healthy and unhealthy groups to an equal degree. A high level of psychological well-being can not be considered as the only terrorist threat coping resource. Probably, there is a third variable which mediates and increases a buffer influence of psychological well-being under a terrorist threat.

Awareness of one's well-being and its assessment (cognition and emotional components) limit/expand the possibility to enjoy life. They influence the ability of a person to function comprehensively, to actualize oneself successfully and to adapt in a society (N.G. Novak, 2009). Terroristic sensitivity can be considered as a factor of psychological well-being decrease. This argument, unfortunately, has not been confirmed in our research. Some data obtained in this research indicate that the more goal-oriented a person is and the more indirect and natural his feelings are, the greater is the degree of his terroristic sensitivity.

The result of the study allows us to make assumptions about further research. Firstly, it is necessary to study psychological influence of terrorism on civilians at different levels of inner organization of an individual. Secondly, it is necessary to consider sexual and age characteristics while studying psychological terrorism impacts. The most obvious psychological consequence of the influence of terrorist acts on a person is actualization of fear. It leads to development of different forms of mental disadaptation and to a decrease of a level of psychological well-being in a vulnerable part of the population. The present research is a part of continuing complex research whose results will allow a wider coverage of a topic in question.

## **Conclusion**

- 1) terroristic sensitivity is correlated to such scales of psychological well-being as «the Person as an open system» and «Life comprehension» in senior schoolchildren;
- 2) the structure of psychological well-being is identical in groups with various expressiveness of terroristic sensitivity. Lower values on SPW scales - «the Person as an open

system» and «Life comprehension» are an exception in fellows from a group with a low level of terroristic sensitivity.

- 3) there are sexual differences in intensity of terroristic sensitivity in senior schoolchildren: girls are more troubled under a threat of terrorism acts, than fellows. Sexual differences are absent in assessment of psychological well-being.

## **ZÁVISLOST MEZI ÚROVNÍ TERORISTICKÉ HROZBY A PARAMETRY DUŠEVNÍ POHODY U ŠKOLNÍCH DĚTÍ A MLÁDEŽE**

**Abstrakt:** Studie se zaměřila na zkoumání souvislosti mezi parametry duševní pohody a úrovní teroristické hrozby u nepřímých obětí (tedy těch, kdo byli konfrontováni s teroristickými činy prostřednictvím MASOVÝCH MÉDIÍ). **SUBJEKTY** studie: 84 žáků (52 dívek a 32 chlapců). Věkový průměr byl 16 let. **METODY:** dotazník zjišťující citlivost vůči terorismu (QETT-50) (J. V. Byhovets, N. V. Tarabrina, 2010), dotazník „Stupnice duševní pohody“ (angl. zkratka SPW) (upravili T. D. Ševelenkova, P. P. Fesenko, 2005), a metoda motivační indukce (angl. zkratka MMI) (v úpravě Tolstyh N. N., 2005), dotazník „Perspektiva mého života“ (E. A. Misko, N. V. Tarabrina, 2004). **VÝSLEDKY:** dívky hrozba teroristických činů znepokojuje víc než chlapce. V hodnocení duševní pohody se neprojevují rozdíly mezi pohlavími. Citlivost vůči hrozbě terorismu koreluje s těmito měřítky duševní pohody: „Osobnost jako otevřený systém“ a „Chápání života“ u starších žáků ( $R_s=0.25$  a  $R_s=0.22$   $p<.05$ ). Výsledky ukazují, že citlivost vůči terorismu koreluje se složkami duševní pohody.

**Klíčová slova:** duševní pohoda, citlivost vůči hrozbě terorismu, duševní zdraví, nepřímé oběti, žáci, teroristické činy