

# **THE RESEARCH OF PERSONAL HELPLESSNESS AS THE DETERMINANT OF THE FAMILY SYSTEM**

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*Annotation:* This article is dedicated to the problem of personal helplessness in the family system. Family system, as an external determinant in forming of the personal helplessness, have the greatest influence on its formation. It does not only form the personal helplessness but also reacts on the presence of it among at least one of the family members (either both parents or one of them, or a child), as the system reaction on every change in it. This article provides the result of the research arranged among 21 nuclear families with one child.

*Key words:* family psychology, personal helplessness, family system

The concept and problem of personal helplessness in psychology appeared as a logical continuation of research already carried out in the twentieth century in the field of physiology of higher nervous activity, which began with practical research by I.P. Pavlov in describing the formation of experimental neuroses in dogs. In the 60s American psychologist Martin Seligman, along with his colleague Stephen Mayer, participated in a series of experiments on dogs in the psychological laboratory of the University of Pennsylvania, after which the Learned Helplessness syndrome was first described by the example of dogs subjected to electric stimulation. Under the influence of the results of these experiments of Seligman and Meyer, numerous studies around the world have revealed the existence of this phenomenon in humans, and the phenomenon of the learned (or trained) helplessness has attracted much attention abroad.

The phenomenon of learned helplessness is associated, first of all, with passive non-adaptive behavior of a person, and represents a violation of motivation as a result of the subject's uncontrolled situation, i.e. independence from the efforts made. To date, it is customary to distinguish between situational and personal helplessness.

Taking into account the situation, in which social system serves as the basis for the social qualities of the individual as a complex entity that includes a multitude of subsystems of different levels, and also analysing a number of studies on the problem of personal helplessness and about the features of family functioning in modern society, we turned to the problem of personal helplessness in the context of ideas about the features of the functioning of the family as a system. At the heart of the system approach, as a direction of the methodology of scientific knowledge, is the consideration of the object as a system: an integral complex of interrelated elements (I.V.

Blauberg, B.F. Lomov, V.N. Sadovsky, E.G. Yudin); a set of interacting objects (L. Bertalanffy); a set of essences and relations (A.D. Hall, R.E. Feigin, late L. Bertalanffy).

The concept of personal helplessness was first formulated by D.A. Tsiring in 2010. This phenomenon is defined as "the quality of the subject, which includes the unity of specific personal characteristics which are formed in the process of interaction of the internal conditions with external ones, due to the low ability to transform reality, coupled with the complexity of setting goals and achieving and managing life events"

Having analyzed a series of studies on the problem of personal helplessness and on the features of family functioning in modern society, we turned to the problem of personal helplessness in the context of ideas about the features of the functioning of the family as a system. Family, being a system, is a set of elements that are in relationships and connections with each other, which forms a certain integrity, unity.

From the point of view of the system approach, the family is viewed as a system with a certain structure and properties. The family system, as is well known, functions under the influence of two laws: the law of homeostasis and the law of development. The law of homeostasis is the tendency of the system to preserve a certain state, tendency to stability. Simultaneously with this law, the law of development operates, which says that any system tends to go through a complete life cycle. In this regard, it makes sense again to turn to the point of view of D.A. Tsiring, who studies the family as a system which is characterized by the reproduction of the level of differentiation in subsequent generations. The author emphasizes that "in families where parents have a high level of differentiation, children grow up more independent. In those families where parents are distinguished by a low level of differentiation, children often grow up helpless, since personal helplessness is one of the possible manifestations of the low differentiation of personality. The level of differentiation is produced by the entire system of interactions between parents and children ..."

Proceeding from the above, it seems logical to conclude that if there is at least one member with personal helplessness in the family, the family as a system will react in a certain way to this situation.

External factors, in accordance with the principle of determinism in psychology, have the greatest influence on the formation of personal helplessness, and environmental factors are key when a person develops personal helplessness. In turn, the personal helplessness of one of the family members influences the entire family system and leads to corresponding changes in this system. The family system, the family, as an external factor in the formation of personal helplessness, generates an endless repetition of the same situation, when the level of differentiation is reproduced in the following generations. Thus, we get a vicious circle in which the same scenario

will be repeated, and personal helplessness will pass from generation to generation. That is why it is particularly important to diagnose helplessness in a timely manner, to study all possible consequences of having personal helplessness and to develop systematic, universal methods of psychodiagnostics and therapy of helplessness, both for individuals and for family systems in general.

Analysis of the currently available studies allows us to say that the problem of the influence of personal helplessness on the family system at the moment remains unexplored. And if, based on the data received by the researchers, there are already conclusions about the influence of the family on the formation of personal helplessness, then any conclusions about the features of the functioning of the family, in which there are already members with personal helplessness, can only be made theoretically based on the available data and require experimental confirmation.

In the study conducted in 2017, 63 people took part, i.e. 21 nuclear families, each of which has one child, a student of 9 grade (15-16 years). The choice of this age was not random. Ninth grade students are in the serious stressful period of their study process – it is the time of the state exams, and also the time of the decision whether to continue getting full school education or to start getting professional knowledge in the system of the intermediate vocational education. It is also a time of psychological pressure from parents and teachers.

To determine the helplessness of adolescents the "Questionnaire of Personal Helplessness" was used (D.A. Tsiring, M.O. Krylova). It is consisted of 98 questions which allow to research four following components: emotional, motivational, cognitive and conative.

Personal helplessness of parents was diagnosed via analyzing the data obtained during MMPI testing (Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory) on three key scales: the second (Depression Scale, which measures a person's depressive symptoms level), the seventh (Psychasthenia Scale, which measures a person's anxiety levels and tendencies) and the ninth (Mania Scale, which measures a person's energy, excitability).

The Olson questionnaire "Family adaptation and cohesion scale" (FACES-3) was used for the determination of the level of the family adaptation and cohesion.

For the possibility of determining personal helplessness among parents, the average ranges for the selected scales were calculated. According to these calculations, those adults who have an increase in the second and seventh scales and a decrease in the ninth scale have personal helplessness. Independent are those adults whose values for the second and seventh scales are below the average, and on the ninth scale - above the average:

- Average level on the second scale (D) - 45,1 - 63 T-scores
- Average level on the seventh scale (Pt) - 43,56 - 58,4 T-scores
- Average level on the ninth scale (Ma) - 44,02 - 55,7 T-scores

Further, all families were divided into two main groups: the first group included those families in which there is at least one member with personal helplessness (Group A), and the second group, respectively, no one have personal helplessness (Group B). Thus, we obtained the following result: group A included 10 families, group B - 11 families. Of 63 participants in this research, personal helplessness is observed in 19, which is approximately 30.1% of the total number of subjects.

To interpret the results, both groups of subjects were processed and the ranks were compared using the Mann-Whitney test, during which the following results were obtained:

### **Cohesion and adaptation in the studied families**

FACE-3 Questionnaire Scale	Family status	Average rank	Sum of ranks
Cohesion	Group A	17,18	515,50
	Group B	45,47	1500,50
Adaptation	Group A	19,02	570,50
	Group B	43,80	1445,50

Based on the analysis, we can conclude that both the level of cohesion and the level of adaptation in the families of Group A (families where members with personal helplessness are presented) is significantly lower than in Group B. This result indicates that the very fact of having personal helplessness in the family, even if only one of its members has it, changes the level of perception of the family system, which proves the hypothesis about the influence of personal helplessness on the functioning of the family system. The family, being the main environment that forms the level of differentiation of children, affects not only the reproduction of the level of differentiation of parents, but also the perception of the family in terms of studying cohesion and adaptation, as integral elements that characterize a healthy family environment.

It is important, however, to note that in families where members with personal helplessness were observed, it was inherent to fathers to overestimate the level of cohesion and adaptation with a minimal gap between their real family and the ideal.

Thus, proceeding from the above, it's possible to say that the family system reacts to the presence in it of members with personal helplessness, and personal helplessness, in turn, is a factor in changes in the attitude of the members of the family; elements of the system, the level of cohesion and adaptation in the family.

The problem of personal helplessness acquires special significance when considering it in the context of ideas about the features of the functioning of the family as a system.

The results of current study can not only determine the changes in the family system determined by the personal helplessness, but in the future, when continuing and deepening, it will not only become a purely scientific problem, but will also allow developing practical techniques for practicing specialists and consultants in order to reduce the probability of children's inheritance of parents' behaviour patterns, which in its turn will help to avoid, prevent or mitigate the consequences of the influence of the personal helplessness on the family, interrupting the vicious cycle of transferring the level of differentiation from generation to generation. Also it will make possible to clarify the goals, tasks, forms and methods of advisory and corrective work with families; and develop better techniques of psychological impact on the family as a system.

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