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FEATURES OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF CODEPENDENCE IN MIDDLE-AGED WOMEN WITH SELF-ESTEEM AND ANXIETY

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The article is devoted to the study of the relationship between middle-aged women's codependency and self-esteem and anxiety. The essence of the definition of the phenomenon of «codependency» and different views of researchers regarding this problem are analyzed in detail. In the context of the study, it was determined that there is no single interpretation of the concept of «codependency», which indicates its multifacetedness and heterogeneity. The main features of co-dependent persons are determined. The levels of manifestation of codependency are characterized: cognitive, behavioral, emotional, activity. The main research methods are substantiated. A correlational analysis was conducted to establish the relationship between codependency and the self-esteem and anxiety scale. It was established that codependent persons have a strong correlation with the anxiety scale. It was determined that there is a strong inverse correlation between codependency and self-esteem. In this regard, it was hypothesized that this may be related to an overestimation of one's own abilities in relation to the influence of a close dependent. On the basis of the conducted research, it is recommended to carry out psychological intervention and to point out the destructive manifestations of behavior to the co-dependent and to carry out work on their elimination.

Keywords: addict, dysfunctional family, chemical dependency,

autonomy, defense mechanisms.

Introduction. In the modern world, in connection with the spread of various types of chemical and non-chemical addiction, researching various aspects of the addiction itself has necessitated research into the psychological state of the addict's family members and loved ones. Codependency is one of the urgent problems of today, which prevents an individual from living a full life. This problem affects not only individuals, but also society as a whole, which creates conditions conducive to the development of codependent relationships and their transmission from generation to generation, it is characteristic of the majority of the adult population.

A person who has difficulties in interpersonal relations and is called codependent may be in a difficult emotional and psychological state. Usually, such people need approval, they need to maintain a sense of self-importance, as well as to be valuable to others. At the same time, they are able to maintain relationships in which there is humiliation and devaluation.

Researchers believe that those people who are surrounded by a person with a problem of both chemical and non-chemical dependence become codependent. Associated behavioral disorders lead to the formation of adaptation disorders and other mental disorders. Codependent individuals have certain characteristics that are manifested in their behavior and relationships with others, especially with close people. Manifestations of codependency are quite diverse and relate to various aspects of human life: behavior, mental activity, perception, worldview, system of vital values, physical health, etc.

The significance of the problem is determined by certain points. On the one hand, codependency prevents a person from feeling joy, satisfaction from love and intimate relationships, and also prevents a person from self-

realization, from fully forming a life perspective. On the other hand, codependency negatively affects the psychological state of the individual, his self-esteem, anxiety, «self-concept».

Literature review. In the scientific literature, there is a significant number of interpretations of the definition of the phenomenon of «codependency», researchers who consider this problem have not come to a common opinion on the definition of the concept. This is due to the fact that, firstly, there are a significant number of different approaches in the study of this phenomenon. Secondly, this concept is characterized by non-linearity, heterogeneity and difficulty in understanding. In addition, another reason may be the different contingent of respondents who participated in the study of codependency.

Also, the vagueness of the concept was influenced by different views on the causes of codependency. Some authors believe that codependency is a genetically determined state of the human psyche, others consider it a protective psychological reaction to circumstances that arose as a result of living with a chemically dependent person, and still others believe that it arose as a result of living in a dysfunctional family.

The term «codependency» arose in connection with chemical dependency, codependents were originally considered to be women living with a chemically dependent addict. From 1980 to 1990, the characteristics and dynamics of the development of codependency were studied in more detail, different views on the interpretation of this concept began to appear.

R. Subby and J. Friel consider codependency as a series of negative ways of overcoming life difficulties, which is a reaction to the abuse of alcohol or other chemical means by significant relatives[1].

According to E. Larsen, codependency is a certain set of behavioral forms or character defects, which leads to a decrease in the ability to initiate love relationships and participate in them[2].

According to Berry and Jane Weinhold, codependency is a psychological disorder caused by the incompleteness of one of the most important stages in early childhood – the stage of establishing autonomy[3].

T. Chermak interprets codependency as a personality disorder based on the need to control the situation in order to avoid undesirable consequences, inattention to one's own needs, violation of personal boundaries, fusion of all interests with a dysfunctional personality. The researcher considers depression, denial and somatic diseases to be other manifestations of codependency[4].

The objective cause of codependency is the family, as a functional system that has its own self-regulation mechanisms. All family members are in the same energy field, so the state of one affects all others. This is codependency. If one member of the family tries to change his behavior, then others overtly or subconsciously interfere with him, thus the balance in the family is disturbed, which is the reason for the change. Most often, this happens in dysfunctional families, when rules are applied in the family system of relations that suppress the personality, do not allow family members to fully express their feelings.

Among Ukrainian researchers, it is worth noting O. Nikonova and O. Savchuk, who believe that the family is one of the factors in the formation of codependent behavior[5; 6].

It is worth noting that psychoanalysis considers dependent relationships primarily as pathological. Dependence exists in a symbiotic relationship, supported by the mechanisms of projection, introjection, identification, internalization and externalization, as well as projective identification, which leave the «I-concept» no chance for development. Those features, qualities and feelings that a person refuses to recognize in himself, the projection locates in another person. In turn, introjection includes elements of the outside in the inner world, and identification uses my «I» to

someone else's «I». In the process of developing codependency, defense mechanisms make another person an ideal, giving him traits and qualities that are absent in reality.

Codependence, as a disorder of personality development, can also develop due to lack of dependence in family members. The reason for the emergence of such codependency is the incomplete processes of separation of children from their parents, as well as unmet needs at an early age. Early relationships with parents are internalized and exert a determining influence on the formation of mental structures and the development of internal conflicts.

The reasons for codependency often stem from early life experiences and can be traced back to individuals who had a «difficult» childhood: those from dysfunctional families where one parent is absent, families where children were victims of violence, and individuals who experienced childhood trauma not only within their family but also in school, from peers, teachers, and other influential adults. This also includes victims of physical, sexual, emotional, and sectarian violence.

Individuals who grow up in codependent families acquire the experience, life script, and behavioral patterns of codependent relationships. Codependent parents create tangled, dysfunctional, and symbiotic family systems where each member is dependent on one another. In such families, there is a lack of independence, personal autonomy, and individuality. The psychological boundaries of family members are constantly violated, and each person struggles to define themselves since their self-worth and opinion depend on others.

One way that such relationships are maintained is by upholding the illusion of a «happy family», so misunderstandings are not typically acknowledged outside the family. As a result, individual interests and needs

are overshadowed by the facade of a harmonious family, and life within society becomes restricted, leading to passivity and self-rejection.

In most psychological theories and approaches, the dynamic of development moves from the expressed dependence of the child to emotional autonomy, inner freedom and the ability to create interdependent relationships.

Thanks to the theoretical analysis, it is possible to distinguish features that are characteristic of a codependent personality. Codependent people have certain traits and characteristics of behavior:

- a codependent person has difficulties in defining their own boundaries and needs;
- control of others;
- inability to adequately assess oneself, i.e. low level of self-esteem;
- psychological defense in the form of denial;
- the presence of fear;
- tendency to maintain destructive relationships;
- anxiety;
- depressive states;
- feelings of guilt, despair, fear.

Codependence manifests itself on several interconnected levels, so its components can be distinguished:

- cognitive. The cognitive features of a codependent personality include low self-esteem, insufficient willpower and self-confidence, and an external locus of control. Sometimes an external locus of control is a defense mechanism that allows one to avoid responsibility for failures;

- motivational. Reflects the need for support and guidance from others. Codependents are characterized by manifestations of «acquired helplessness», so the individual considers himself incapable of making decisions and controlling events;

– behavioral. Manifests in the search for help, approval, reassurance along with a tendency to yield to others in interpersonal interaction. A codependent personality demonstrates manifestations of conforming-adaptive behavior: suggestibility, compliance, adjusting to someone else's opinion, striving to avoid conflicts;

– emotional. Associated with feelings of anxiety or fear, even in normal situations. Codependent individuals show less resistance to frustration, they are more vulnerable.

Middle age is the age of the flowering of mental productivity, when a person can find the strength to achieve significance in society, in the family, in his own eyes by expanding the boundaries of his own «I», by returning to the meaning of his life, by realizing its existentiality. At this age, such needs as the realization of one's creative potential, the need to transfer knowledge to the next generation, correction of activities, concern for preserving relations with relatives and friends, and preparation for a peaceful old age become more acute. [7]. At the same time, the totality of a person's experiences at this age flows unevenly. One of the features of the middle age period is individual subjectivism. During this period, people often feel depressed and lonely. All basic existential problems are actualized (loss of meaning, isolation, etc.), the need to find a purpose and self-realization sharply increases, a number of specific socio-psychological problems arise (maladaptation, complete change of values, social loneliness, change of social status), depression, apathy, anxiety.

For most people, the transition to middle age is imperceptible. A midlife crisis is characteristic of those who avoid introspection and use defense mechanisms of denial, trying not to notice the changes that occur in life [8].

A midlife crisis is associated with an internal problem characterized by a loss of meaning in life. A person falls into a state in which his personality ceases to function as before. Usual patterns of behavior cease to work and

bring pleasure.

E. Erikson, the author of the theory of identity crises, considered middle age to be the stage when a person experiences dissatisfaction with his own self-realization, and the crisis, by its psychological essence, is a feeling of obstacles to this dominant need. Despite the fact that E. Erikson considered the crisis of adolescence to be significant for the personality, the crisis of middle age occupied an equally significant place in his research. He said that a person, being in certain objectively existing conditions, can feel a disruption of life satisfaction, and the center of the experience is his internal conflict – the definition of prospects and further realization for himself or their lack and the hopelessness of his own existence. According to E. Erikson, this is manifested in a change in productivity, which, in his opinion, is the main characteristic of the personality of the adult period of life (together with creativity and care) [9].

Women with codependency during the midlife crisis may be disappointed in the profession they have obtained, as the choice of education may have been influenced by the opinion of their parents, and there is no interest in specialization. Relationships with the opposite sex may be unsuccessful, due to manifestations of a tendency to love addiction (codependence) or avoidance addiction (counter-dependence), there may be difficulties in establishing close, trusting relationships [10].

Middle-aged women prone to codependency are characterized as follows:

1) too much time is devoted to the person on whom the addiction is directed. Thoughts about this person dominate the mind, this process has features of obsession, combined with violence from which it is extremely difficult to get rid of;

2) a woman is in the power of experiencing unrealistic expectations regarding her partner, without criticizing her condition;

3) a woman forgets about herself, stops worrying and thinking about her needs outside of dependent relationships [11; 12]. This applies to the attitude towards family and friends. The woman has serious emotional problems, at the center of which is the fear of being abandoned, which she tries to suppress. At the subconscious level, the fear of intimacy is represented. Because of this, a woman prone to love addiction is unable to tolerate «healthy» intimacy. She is afraid to remain in a situation where she will have to be herself, this leads to the fact that a woman subconsciously chooses a partner who also shows passivity in intimate relationships. This may be due to the mental trauma she suffered as a child.

Middle-aged women suffer codependency in relationships especially acutely, because they feel a constant need for approval from the environment, are not aware of their own desires and needs, are unable to feel true intimacy and love, and tend to maintain «toxic» relationships.

Codependency, which was previously invisible, but already formed by middle age, can manifest itself during this period in crisis situations: divorce, destructive relationships, chemical dependence of a husband or teenage child, violence by an addicted family member, etc.

Thus, codependency becomes a barrier to living a fulfilling life, as it prevents a person from feeling joy, creates psychological problems, and prevents self-realization. Codependent relationships are characterized by excessive emotional dependence between two people, which leads to the devaluing of other areas of life, but such relationships do not bring satisfaction.

Purpose and methods of research. The purpose of the study is to determine the relationship between middle-aged women's codependency and self-esteem and anxiety.

For the diagnosis of codependency, the method «Scale for measuring the level of codependency» by L. Span and D. Fisher was used. To identify

the level of self-esteem of an individual – «Self-esteem test: «I-real», «I-ideal»» by S. Budassi. To determine the reactive and personal anxiety of an individual – the «Anxiety Scale» method by C. Spielberger.

Determination of the relationship between codependency, self-esteem and anxiety was carried out using K. Pearson's correlation. Comparative analysis using the student's t-test made it possible to determine statistically significant differences in the level of anxiety and self-esteem in codependent persons and persons without codependence.

Analysis of research results. 186 middle-aged women took part in the study. During the research, various degrees of manifestation of codependency in the subjects were revealed. Thus, 47.8% of respondents have strongly pronounced codependency, 32.8% have moderately pronounced codependency, and 19.4% have normal codependency (Fig. 1).

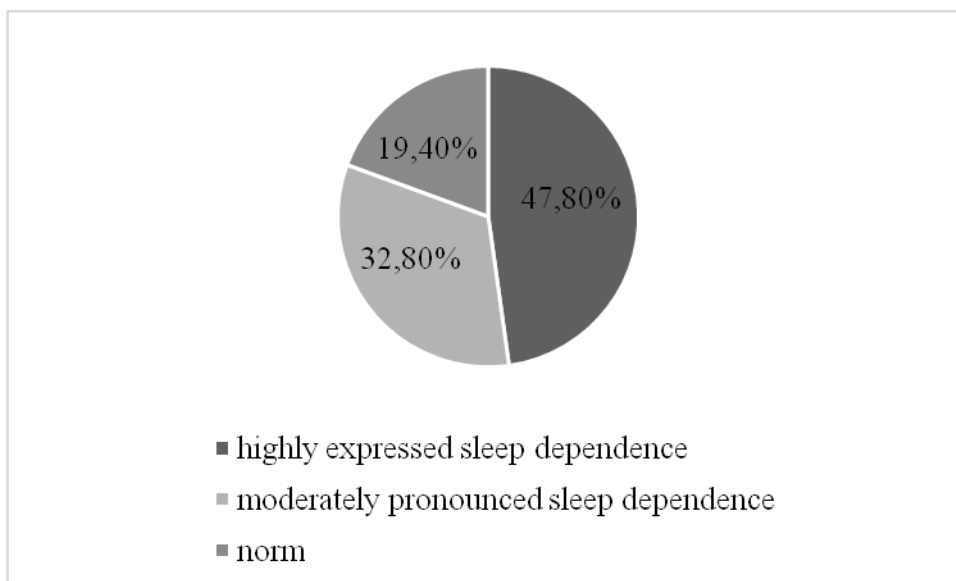


Fig. 1. Degrees of manifestation of codependency in middle-aged women

The comparative analysis of the statistical data of the subjects showed that on the «self-esteem» scale, the indicators of codependent women are higher than those of women without codependency ($m_1=6.035$, $m_2=2.968$), which indicates the absence of a person's ideas about the features of his ideal and real features. In codependent people, self-esteem is based on the

successes or failures of their partner. If the partner feels unhappy, the codependent feels responsible for making them happy.

According to the «anxiety» scale, indicators of codependent women and women without codependency are statistically different ($m_1=5.298$, $m_2=4.868$). Therefore, middle-aged women with codependency have a high level of anxiety, while subjects without codependency have a low level of anxiety. Anxiety in codependents arises for various reasons: lack of stability, security, due to the fact that the codependent takes responsibility for the other. Codependents usually have more problems than others, even though they think they don't exist. As a result, external problems and lack of stability form a constant background anxiety, from which it is impossible to get rid of. An additional factor of constant anxiety is the attempt to hide everything that happens in the family from others or from oneself. A person shows that he is doing well, but constantly feels anxious that others may find out the truth.

The result of the correlation analysis is statistically significant at the $p=0.01$ level. In the process of identifying the correlation between the level of codependency with self-esteem and anxiety, it was established that there is a strong direct correlation with codependency and anxiety ($r=0.86$). A strong inverse relationship was found between self-esteem and codependency ($r=-0.86$), which indicates the absence of a relationship between the given scales. Therefore, we can say that people with a high level of codependency do not necessarily have a low level of self-esteem.

Conclusions. The phenomenon of codependence is multifaceted and complex, as evidenced by various research approaches. In various works, researchers presented the features of a codependent personality: denial, low self-esteem, external locus of control, dependence on external evaluation, anxiety and depressive states, feelings of guilt, fear, despair.

In the process of research, it was found that codependency is characteristic of most of the researched subjects. After analyzing the

indicators of codependency with the «anxiety» scale, it was established that codependent persons are characterized by a high level of anxiety. This is due to the fact that they do not feel stable and constantly try to «run away» from problems. Respondents without codependency have a low level of anxiety. It was also found that there is a strong direct correlation between these scales.

According to the results of codependency indicators and the «self-esteem» scale, it was determined that codependents have no idea about the real traits and traits of their ideal, although the correlation results show that there is no connection between these scales. Therefore, it can be assumed that codependent individuals can overestimate themselves, that is, be too confident in their abilities to influence a significant relative, and because of this, they have an inflated self-esteem.

The obtained results prove the need for psychological intervention in order to overcome codependency. The psychologist's task when working with a codependent is primarily to point out the client's destructive behavior, build counseling in such a way that the codependent is able to define his own boundaries, change the pattern of behavior, reduce the level of anxiety, change his thinking to a more positive one, and form an adequate self-esteem. Coping strategies, such as rationalization of one's behavior, denial and avoidance of problems should be noted, let the codependent understand their negative side, and at the same time, an alternative should be chosen.

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