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Causes and Criteria of Disharmonies in Family **System Functioning**

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Abstract---The article highlights the problem of finding the causes of disharmonies in marital relations and the criteria for the normal functioning of a family system. Dysfunction or disturbances of family functioning are such features of family life that complicate or hinder execution of family functions. A dysfunctional family in a broad sense means a system determining distortions of personal development and, therefore, maladaptive, deviant behaviour or neurotic disorders at one or more of the family members. The aim of the study is to identify the causes of disharmony in marital relations and the criteria for normal functioning of a family as a system. The empirical part of this study was devoted to determining the causes of such disharmonies in marital relationships that subsequently led to divorce. The study was conducted during the family counselling of married men, women and married couples who were in the process of divorce. The next criteria for normal family functioning have been determined: respect for differences; sincerity in expressing thoughts and feelings; dynamic relationships; role sharing; observance of personal boundaries; family openness; emotional and spiritual intimacy.

Keywords---destruction, diagnostic system, marital relations, personality, psychological counseling.

Introduction

One of the important tasks of the state social policy is family support. Numerous state and non-state organisations (social services for children, families and youth, special children's services, etc.) focus their efforts on helping families in difficult living conditions. Practice shows that it is especially difficult to work with the families not recognizing existence of some problems, not wanting to come into contact with specialists, refusing psychological help. In this case, social intervention is needed, with a subsequent decision on the fate of such families: deprivation of parental rights or social support with recovery prospects. Addressing of this issue is impossible without determining the family resocialization potential, i.e. a degree of closeness to the family system with normal functioning. The problem is that, despite existence of numerous studies on the issues of socio-psychological support of families, the criteria for family normal functioning have not yet been determined. In turn, these criteria are closely linked to the causes of disharmonies in family system functioning. Thus, absence of such disharmonies testifies to the normal family functioning. The aim of the study is to identify the causes of disharmony in marital relations and the criteria for normal functioning of a family as a system (Richard, 2019; Narendran et al., 2021; Crowley, 2019; El-Sheikh et al., 2019).

Analysis of recent researches and publications. The works of Satir et al. (1991); Rogers (2002); Whitaker & Ryan (1989), lead to the idea that a properly functioning family is a family fulfilling responsibly its function, so the needs for growth and development of both the family as a whole, and each of its members are satisfied. Failure or improper performance of the family functions leads to the situation when the family becomes disharmonious (with problems), and further dysfunctional. Dysfunction or disturbances of family functioning are such features of family life that complicate or hinder execution of family functions. A dysfunctional family in a broad sense means a system determining distortions of personal development and, therefore, maladaptive, deviant behaviour or neurotic disorders at one or more of the family members. In modern Ukraine, a number of both objective and subjective factors influence families' powers to fulfil their functions. The economic factor should be noted as the first among the objective factors. The income level of the most population does not allow them to meet fully the material needs of their families.

The next factor is social instability. There were many changes in the social order in a relatively short period of time, Ukraine gained its independence as a state, the ideological orientation of society was radically changed, and so on. The parent generation was brought up under the influence of the Soviet ideology, but the generation of modern youth and adolescents is at the intersection of two (and sometimes more) cultural and ideological influences. First of all, it is the influence of the Western culture (cartoons, video films, advertising and informational products, etc.). The idea about an unregistered marriage was borrowed from there as an attempt to avoid liability – legal, financial, etc; this idea influences significantly on family relationships. Under the influence of various "progressive" public organizations, in particular feminists, the ideas have become popular that family is outdated and should be replaced with a "trial" marriage, free relationships, or even life in a common "commune", homosexual families, etc. The

objective causes for marital disharmony include also the crisis of relation development that occurs during transition from one to the next stage of family life. Among the subjective factors of dysfunctions, first of all, it is necessary to note existing stereotypes and biases that can be in a conflict with the present realities of life. One of the main sources of stereotypes about spouses' hierarchy and their role in a marriage are the elements of patriarchal consciousness in the modern society. The subjective factors of family dysfunctions include also the problems of interpersonal relationships and a family's role structure, peculiarities of personalities of family members, interrelationships of generations in the family, etc. (Johnsen et al., 2018; García-Mendoza et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2018; Badawy & Schieman, 2020).

Materials and Methods

Taking into account the objective and subjective factors of family dysfunctions mentioned above, the empirical part of this study was devoted to determining the causes of such disharmonies in marital relationships that subsequently led to divorce. The study was conducted during the family counselling of married men, women and married couples who were in the process of divorce. The sample consisted of 167 people aged 20 to 37 years old; men were 63 and women were 104. It should be noted that 62 persons from the sample were married couples who came to the consultation together. In accordance with the study aim, the information concerning the causes of the marital disharmonies that led to the divorce will be presented (Figure 1).

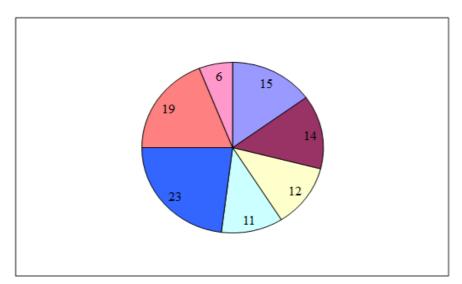


Figure 1. Concerning the causes of the marital disharmonies

 Value orientations and basic life principles of the spouses are opposite, and therefore incompatible. For example, one spouse believes that raising children is the most important thing in life, and the other does not want to have children at all. In the period of love, the couple did not concentrate seriously on this issue, and during marital life it turned out that the

- expectations of a certain style of behaviour from the partner were unrealistic (15%).
- Incomplete relationship with the parent's family. There are two possible types of disorders:
 - too frequent appeal for advice to parents instead of solving family problems between spouses;
 - refusal to seek advice from parents or other relatives for help in solving problems through fear of their disrespect, shame because of problems in the family life.

In this case, a wife or a husband tries to prove to everyone and to convince themselves that everything is wonderful, so existing contradictions are covered "inside" instead of being resolved (11%).

- False feelings. The couples thought that they married for love, but the feeling of happiness passed quickly. Passion, a stick of love seemed to have the greatest value, but this feeling was misleading. There were hypertrophied sexual fantasies in their relationship, but with development of habitude and natural passion decreasing, such relationships lose meaning (12%).
- Fear of differences. This phenomenon is based on the fact that spouses consider differences in their views and interests as the reason for quarrels and divorce. At the same time, people do not understand that because of educational styles of their parents and their growth in a particular society, they have certain ideas of what their marital life should be. They know how they should behave, but these ideas may not coincide with the ideas of their partners. During "relationship romanticization", each of the spouses seeks to prove their resemblance to each other, the newlyweds are afraid of revealed differences and make every effort to avoid disputes. However, their newly born children add new problems (Vrijmoeth et al., 2012; Kaygusuz, 2012). At this stage, called "working out of a family's own rules", contradictions appear necessarily and they require an open discussion. This stage is psychologically very difficult for such a marriage (14%).
- Problems of communication, when the partners are not able to negotiate all the problems of their lives. Open, true communication becomes impossible, which sooner or later destroys their relationship (19%).
- Negative personality formations or personality immaturity. For example, the need to dominate one of the partners, determined by his/her internal conflicts or other personality traits. This leads to appearance of guilty feelings at an oppressed partner or feelings of his/her secondary importance. In this case, the oppressed partner provokes even higher level of domination over him/her, leading to domestic violence, and phobias and even mental disorders appears at the victims of such violence. If the partner resists dominance, the marriage collapses. The personality immaturity of partners can be manifested in the avoidance of responsibility (Lehto et al., 2009; Javanmard & Garegozlo, 2013). One of the proofs of the expediency and importance of official registration of the family relationships is the fact that this procedure requires a man and a woman to declare their readiness for mutual responsibility and, most importantly, responsibility for the life of their future child (6%).

• Inconsistency of a motive to marry with family functions. The motives for marriage do not match the family functions, for example, when a person marries in order to raise his/her social status, improve material well-being, or if young people consider marriage as an opportunity to escape from their parents or are forced to marry because of pregnancy. Such a marriage from the very beginning is problematic. According to results, this cause was the most important for those who failed to create a happy family (23%). Let us consider what motives people had when they decided to marry (Figure 2).

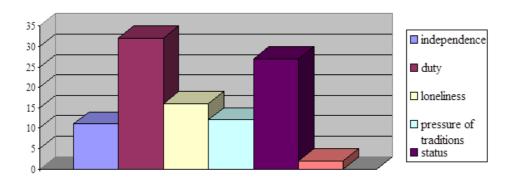


Figure 2. The reasons for entering a marriage that do not correspond to the family functions

The "independence" motive means the desire to become independent and often caused by a protest against the parents' authority. Making a marriage because of "duty" almost always means that a woman is pregnant or premarital sexual relations have caused a sense of guilt. The "loneliness" motive is the result of the experience of existential emptiness, that is, the marriage was based on a deficiency of love, and not because of the desire to be with this very person. The "revenge" motive is in general contrary to the family concept, but it also took place. It was about the fact that a person was married to avenge a beloved, with whom he/she quarrelled. It is often necessary in the work of a psychologist and a social worker to determine whether a particular family is harmonious, disharmonious or dysfunctional. To do this, the specialist should rely on the criteria for the normally functioning family (Silva et al., 2018).

Results and Discussion

Basing on the result of this study and authors` previous studies (Maksymova, 2011; 2017), the following criteria were identified:

• Respect for differences. Each family is a union of two cultures that exists in parent's families of the spouses. If one partner tries to impose a culture of relationships existing in his/her parent's family in the new family, that is to re-educate his/her spouse, it is a sign of dysfunction. In a normally functioning family, spouses are aware of the fact that each of them has the right to have own vision of the world. Family members must respect the differences, and not be afraid of them. Fear of differences in views on relationships, traditions, and stereotypes of behaviour leads to

- misunderstandings. Communion does not mean uniformity. The way to harmonize family is to discuss openly issues, reconcile them in mutual concessions, and is not in aspirations for dominance. If the style of one parent's family becomes dominant, then both spouses will lose. It is best to eliminate approaches "My-culture", "His/her-culture" and to work out "Ourculture", to understand that "we" is a new, common culture of the family (Banovcinova et al., 2014; Adams et al., 1994).
- Sincerity in expressing thoughts and feelings. It is about the peculiarities of communications. If communications are impaired, then this is a dysfunction. If spouses believe that love is incompatible with contradictions, then they avoid expressing sincerely their wishes, assessing events, etc. Bad bias - "love means consent to all manifestations of a partner" - leads to a breach of relationship. For example, the phenomenon of waiting for "thought reading": "You must understand me without words", "I love you, therefore, I know what you need", "If you do not understand why I'm offended, then it's better for us to break in", "I wish you good, therefore, trust me and do what I say". In this case, the natural differences in views are not discussed openly, and the spouses use manipulations: reference to authority, tradition, tears. The manifestation of this dysfunction is incongruence. This dysfunction is manifested mostly in those areas that are "closed topics" for the couple. In a normally functioning family, people are not afraid to express their thoughts and feelings openly, they do not have closed topics. Erosion of communication points not so much to the mistakes of people, but to problems of a family system as a whole. It is often easier for spouses to blame one another for the problem than to search for real causes in wrong means of communication, for which both are responsible. Applying the systematic approach, it is worth focusing not on changing of people, but on changing of the ways of their interactions, studying the factors that affect the communication problem (Absatova et al., 2021; Bocheliuk et al., 2021).
- Dynamic relationships. Marriage is a process. Normally, a family system is always dynamic: rules, stereotypes are changed, and the personality of each spouse is always in development (professional, personal growth). If a person stops in his/her development, if relationships become rigid, then their stagnation occurs. Stagnation of relationships is a sign of dysfunction. If development has been stopped, rules became dogmas, everything is known in advance, then life becomes boring. An obstacle on the way of a family's harmonious relationships is a misconception of youth that a good choice for a partner is enough to guarantee a happy family life. That is, if a person has found exactly that person he/she needs, "his/her second half", everything will be okay, and if he/she has made a mistake, he/she should look for another partner. Of course, the choice of a partner is important, but much more depends on how relationships are developed during married life. Consequently, marriage can be regarded as a line of processes in which people interact (Kawiana et al., 2018; Widana et al., 2020). Each spouse initiates these changes, takes part in them and is responsible for all areas of the family's functioning: sexual life, child upbringing, mutual economic obligations, joint accommodation, etc. The main thing here is the feeling and understanding that marriage is a dynamic process that is created by each participant and is continuously renewed.

- The idea on marriage as a happy crown, a reward for lovers united despite all the obstacles is just a fabulous allegory. The well-known phrase "after their wedding they lived long and happily", unfortunately, does not correspond to reality. Harmonious relationships between men and women require hard work; they must be constantly built and rebuilt, renewed due to mutual personal growth. This is applied to both partners. When development happens only with one partner, is not encouraged and cultivated by the other, then the distance between the spouses only increases and becomes unbridgeable. Therefore, each spouse must understand the importance of this movement, approve it, rejoice for him/herself and for the other, for each step made by both of them. This is the family function called emotional support that ensures creation of conditions for personal growth of each spouse. A particularly dramatic situation is when one of the spouses is developing, and the other is not, it leads often to marital infidelity. If, however, a person developed actively resists to development of his/her partner, it means a psychological abuse (Cook et al., 2018).
- Role sharing. The criterion for the normal family functioning is flexibility of their roles. This means that, if necessary, family members can easily replace each other, carry out activities that are inherent to the other. For example, a father always plays chess with his son in evenings or solves crosswords, logical tasks, and therefore acts as the one who develops his son intellectually. The mother prepares dinner at this time. However, when the father is on a business trip, father's role takes on the mother, and later she prepare dinner together with their son. Families with flexible roles never raise the question who is the main one: the dominant role is either situational (today, in a particular situation, one spouse is the main one, tomorrow it can be the other) or depends of spheres of family life. For example, if a family decides what kind of food processors is best to buy, then the decisive word remains for the mother, because she dominates in this area. If the family chooses a colour of new wallpapers in the room of their son, then the decisive word will be for their son. In a normally functioning family, parents do not need to prove their authority all the time, to demand obedience and subjugation of children only because they are children. On the contrary, if a four-year-old son wins his father in puzzles, then his father sincerely congratulates him without fear of losing his credibility because of the loss. In such families, family members like to play games where everyone has equal opportunities to win, or in games where roles need to be exchanged. For example, parents play the role of children on weekends, and their children do the parents' roles. The children wake up earlier, cook breakfast, remind their parents that they need to do morning gymnastics, brush their teeth, and the parents do not want to get up, begin to play, behave like naughty children (Kupka et al., 2003; Singh & Parmar, 2016). Such games help children understand better their parents, think about what an adult is, and accept a reflexive position. In such families, behaviour is regulated by commonly worked out rules, and not by just a dominant will. These rules are obeyed by all family. For example, if the family rules demand warnings when a family member is late, then parents will follow this rule as well as children. In families where the "role sharing" criterion is absent, the dominant position for many years and in all

- situations is preserved for one family member. This power role is defined either by social stereotypes (the husband is the family head), or by religious concepts, or by personality traits. Roles in such families are tight and fixed. For example, if cooking is the wife's area, the husband coming from his job before his wife will sit hungry and wait for her, but will not cook dinner himself.
- Observance of personal boundaries. This criterion regulates the balance of unity and freedom. In the case of normal functioning, family members respect the personal space of everyone. This is applied to everyone, ranging from toy cube towers, which a mother will not touch without her son's permission (although this castle prevents her from washing the floor), and to the inadmissibility of reading SMS-messages in a wife's phone or checking her email. Each member of such family feels free, independent and has the right to regulate the degree of proximity to others at a certain time. In such families, family ties are highly appreciated, family members tend to spend their leisure time with the family, but they accept quite easily existence of personal friends, favourite occupations, belonging to certain communities (sports clubs, religious and community organizations) outside the family. In dysfunctional families, unity and freedom are perceived as antagonists. Here is the polarization: either the desire for a complete merger, symbiosis, control, or dissociation and indifference. In the case of a symbiotic relationship, the partner is treated as property, hence jealousy appears. In such married couples, one family member controls and does not let the other go, and the other merges emotionally with him/her, identifies him/herself with his/her partner, dissolves in the partner and actually loses own personality, ceases to live own life. Interestingly, such an option of emotional merging is prised in literature and songs. In reality, such relationships are called "toxic love", or neurotic ligament. The danger of symbiotic relationships is that all behavioural manifestations of a partner are perceived as own, that is, the person automatically feels anger if someone criticizes his/her partner without even understanding the reasons for criticism. All requirements and offers of the partner are unconditionally fulfilled (because they are already perceived as own), even if they objectively harm the person (Epstein-Lubow et al., 2009; Nikolaev et al., 2016).
- Family openness. In the case of a normally functioning family, it is an open social organism. Such family is part of a wider social system; it is always open to others. Friends, neighbours, relatives, colleagues, friends of children are accepted happily in the family space, taken with joy, without strain and suspicion. Friendly relationships with their social environment, the ability to sympathize, help and receive help, a sense of unity with people give a very valuable experience for children socialization. If problems arise in such families, they are not ashamed to "take garbage out of the house", but sincerely seek advice from people in their environment, from whom they trust, or from specialists (psychologists, social workers). Therefore, with the help of these people, they can successfully implement their powers, which allow them to solve virtually any problems. On the contrary, closed families avoid communicating with anyone. They may have a lot of friends, business partners, but all these are "necessary people", which are important as a means to achieve goals, but completely indifferent themselves. In these families, the attitude towards people is cautious, mistrustful; disdain or

- envy, rivalry, hostility prevail. Families with such dysfunction can indeed be presented as closed systems. Because of this, they have very limited resources and, at the same time, are not capable of solving their own problems.
- Emotional and spiritual intimacy. This criterion reflects the essence of love, when the desire to be together is determined not by the fact that this proximity gives some benefits (a status, material benefits, sexual pleasure), but that love is most important idea for a person. In this case, needs and aspirations of a beloved person are equal with own needs and aspirations: not higher, as in the case of toxic love, and not lower, as in the case of consumer attitudes. True intimacy and openness do not arise immediately; this is the result of long and laborious work of the spouses over themselves, on their relationships, the result of common experiences, successes, difficulties, joys and grief, divided into two. Such life experience creates a lasting sense of tenderness, caring, trust, and support. The family is the centre of security, with love and appreciation, where no one will offend and a person is always understood. On the contrary, dysfunctional families are characterized by dominance of distrust, fear, feelings of loneliness, being unnecessary, neglected and misunderstood, and sometimes hated (Tynyshbayeva & Makhadiyeva, 2014; Rückert, 2015).

Conclusion

Each family is a union of two cultures that exists in parent's families of the spouses. In a normally functioning family, spouses are aware of the fact that each of them has the right to have own vision of the world. In a normally functioning family, people are not afraid to express their thoughts and feelings openly, they do not have closed topics. Erosion of communication points not so much to the mistakes of people, but to problems of a family system as a whole. An obstacle on the way of a family's harmonious relationships is a misconception of youth that a good choice for a partner is enough to guarantee a happy family life. The choice of a partner is important, but much more depends on how relationships are developed during married life. Consequently, marriage can be regarded as a line of processes in which people interact. Each spouse initiates these changes, takes part in them and is responsible for all areas of the family's functioning: sexual life, child upbringing, mutual economic obligations, joint accommodation, etc. Harmonious relationships between men and women require hard work; they must be constantly built and rebuilt, renewed due to mutual personal growth. The criterion for normal family functioning is also the flexibility of their roles. In the case of normal functioning, family members respect the personal space of everyone, it is an open social organism, needs, and aspirations of a beloved person are equal with own needs and aspirations. On the basis of the revealed criteria of the normal functioning of a family system, it is possible to determine its resource potential. Prospects for the study are to develop a diagnostic system based on these criteria.

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