



# American Journal of Fundamental, Applied & Experimental Research

journal homepage: <https://ajfaer.org>

Ukraine and Ukrainians Abroad Not-for-profit Corporation  
New York, NY, USA

ISSN 2474-9397  
ISSN-L 2474-9400

Published  
from the year 2016

## Theoretical fundamentals of psychocorrection program for gambling behaviors among college students and empirical data about its efficiency

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Accepted 30.06.2021

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**Urkaiev, V., Pleskach, B. (2021). Theoretical fundamentals of psychocorrection program for gambling behaviors among college students and empirical data about its efficiency. American Journal of Fundamental, Applied & Experimental Research, 21(2), 34-38.**

*The law "On state regulation of activities concerning the organization and conduct of gambling" recently adopted by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine sets the task of nivellation pathological gambling. Because the correction of pathological gambling is ineffective, it is promising to diagnose and correct this disorder in the preclinical stages. Using the term «gambling behavior» we mean that pathological gambling is in a premorbid state. In the scientific periodicals early youth age is considered as one of the vulnerable age periods when gambling behavior becomes pathological addiction. Therefore, it is necessary to create programs for the correction of gambling behavior designed specifically for this age period. The theoretical bases of the program of psychocorrection of gambling behavior in early youth age are considered in the article. The empirical study examined the impact of the created correction program: the sample consisted of 15 people (16 - 17 years; 7 boys and 8 girls) with premorbid to pathological gambling stage. Psychological diagnostics was performed before the start of work in the correctional group and after the end of group work. The study revealed positive improvements in the psychological functioning of group members, which led to the disappearance of gambling behavior in 47% of group members.*

**Key words:** *pathological gambling; gambling behavior; early youth age (16-17 years); psychocorrection of pre-disease form of gambling; principles of psychocorrection.*

**Volume 21, Number 2, 2021**

## Introduction

According to Tabachnikov (2014) in the population aged 16-17 years, pathological gambling is common in 9,6%. Because the treatment of pathological gambling is ineffective, requires significant material and time costs - it is promising to diagnose and correct this disorder in the preclinical stages. (Bahtin, 2016).

In the scientific literature, addictive behavior is described as the main pre-morbid condition (deviation) that precedes the development of pathological addiction (Bahtin, 2016). Adhering to the same position, we will consider gambling behavior as the main premorbid state before pathological gambling.

Early youth age is usually seen as a period of transition from deviation to full-fledged pathological gambling (Breyer, 2009). Therefore, age period of 16-17 years should be considered critical for correcting gambling at the level of deviation.

Meanwhile, the scientific problem of how to restore healthy processes of psychological development in early youth age, which is the basis of psychocorrection of gambling behavior, remains insufficiently studied.

**The aim of the work:** consider the theoretical foundations of psychocorrection of gambling behavior in early youth period (16-17 years old) and to investigate the effectiveness of psychocorrectional program developed based on the proposed methodology.

**The research sample:** 15 people (7 girls and 8 boys), 16-17 years old, who were medical college students at the time of the study, were examined to study the effectiveness of the psychocorrection program. Tested was performed twice: 1) a few weeks before the start of correctional work and 2) two months after the participant completed work in the psychocorrection group. All 15 people who took part in the study before starting work had a premorbid stage of pathological gambling.

## Research methods

Theoretical and empirical methods were used in the study. Theoretical methods: analysis and generalization of theoretical and practical ideas about the stages, principles, forms and practical methods of psychocorrection that are available in the scientific literature.

Empirical methods: Problem gambling severity index (PGSI); a modified Internet addiction test K. Young; Tucker Test of gambling (computer) addiction; Addictive identity (personal identity that is inherent for the individuals with addictive, N. Dmitrieva), Personal orientation inventory E. Shostrom (POI, adaptation Yu. Aleshina), Purpose in life test J. Crumbaugh (PIL, adaptation D. Leontiev), questionnaire for Identifying developmental trauma by B. Weinhold (adaptation A. Kocharyan), Spenn-Fisher Codependency scale (modified by A. Berdichevsky), S. Kulakov's Scale of general assessment of Codependency, test Integrative assessment of personal harmony by O. Motkov (IPH).

## Research results

Psychocorrection can be defined as a careful intervention in the processes of mental and personal development, the task of which is to correct deviations in these processes, which will help to revive the individual's ability to actively develop and adaptation (Panok, 1999, p. 284; Yatsenko, 2004, p. 18). Therefore, for the implementation of psycho-correctional influence it is necessary to understand the nature of disorders (when gambling behavior are present) and the peculiarities of psychological development in age when correction is conduct.

The basic principles of psychocorrection are formulated and fixed in its principles, they determine the purpose, direction, and type of correction (Burmenskaya, 1990, p. 99). When developing a program for the correction of gambling behavior among 16-17-year-olds, it is advisable to be based on the following theoretically formulated provisions:

1. Features of the psychological development in early youth age (16-17 years) is the execution of self-determination, which is associated with the development of holistic identity and the formation of life goals (that related with understanding individual role and place in the society, vision of individual future etc.). Therefore, according to such principles of psychological correction as "importance of abidance all major stages of development" and "from top to down", it is necessary to promote the formation in young people: clear life goals, holistic identity and the ability to self-determination and self-actualization in the chosen profession.

2. In previous theoretical-empirical study was found that individuals of early youth age with gambling behavior (in contrast to peers without the studied deviation) have the following psychological traits: psychological dependence; falling of identity and the process of self-actualization; dissatisfaction with the level of individual achievements and the degree of emotional saturation of life; lack of high self-esteem; psychological distress; lack of clearly defined life goals; mediocre purposefulness (Urkaev, 2021). According to the psychocorrectional principle "development - as a process of a complex system", the above traits should be considered as causal of psychological development disorders in early youth age, and these traits are closely related to gambling behavior. Accordingly, psychocorrection should be aimed at these traits (targets).

3. According to the principle of "leading activity", it is important to carry out psychocorrection based on the main activity, which is specific to a particular age period (Burmenskaya, 1990, p. 104). In the works of G. S. Kostyuk, E. Erickson, I. S. Kon are proved that early youth age is characterized by the active development of abstract and generalizing thinking, the ability to establish logical connections, a leap in the development of self-awareness. Therefore, at the age of 16-17, to comply with the principle of "leading activity", psychocorrection should promote self-reflection and self-awareness. Therefore, one of the promising options for correcting gambling behavior is group work, because the unbiased feedback from other participants is an excellent basis for the development of self-awareness.

To develop a psychocorrection program, it is important to understand the mechanisms by which psychotherapeutic changes occur. They are most crystallized by I. Yalom as factors that determine the effectiveness of group work (Yalom, 2006). From the nine factors identified by scientists, we will consider only five, which seem to be the most significant factors in terms of psychocorrection of gambling behavior in early youth years:

1. *Imparting information.* I. Yalom notes that the creation of an information model of group work (possible difficulties, typical fears of the group and group anxiety) can contribute to a calmer adaptation of the participant to work and increase the effectiveness psychocorrection program with have information model (Yalom, 2006, p. 13). In addition, the systematic education about the violations and psychological defects that underlies these violations, allow you to create information schemes that will promote psychological correction (Yalom, 2006, p. 12). Given this factor, it is advisable to introduce into psychocorrectional practice systematic education about the psychological defects associated with gambling behavior.

2. *Altruism.* I. Yalom notes that members of psychotherapeutic groups «gain through giving» (Yalom, 2006, p. 15). Thus, the clients of the therapeutic group, helping others, overcome a morbid self-absorption, and this, in turn, promotes self-realization. (Yalom, 2006, p. 16). In group psychocorrection of 16–17-year-old young people with gambling behavior, the influence of this factor may contribute to psychological development. We expect that the willingness to help other members of the group will contribute to greater responsibility, recovery of purpose and finding meaning in life in our opinion, manifestations of altruism, responsibility to other participants, the emergence of life meanings outside own ego – will help to overcome psychological dependence, which is one of the causal factors correlated with gambling behavior.

3. *Imitative behavior.* I. Yalom note that: "Group members may model themselves on aspects of the other group members as well as of the therapist" (Yalom, 2006, p. 19). These reactions are caused by interpersonal identification. Imitative behavior and interpersonal identification are very important process in the early stages of a group and causal "therapy through observation", when members learn from watching one another tackle problems (Yalom, 2006, p. 20). Given this factor, it seems important that the psycho-correctional group includes people without a predisposition to gambling addiction. This composition of the group seems appropriate in order to enable young people with deviation to identify with people who have healthy behavior.

4. *Interpersonal learning.* To this general factor I. Yalom refers the several socio-psychological phenomena that arise in the group – first, the desire to correspond to the expectations and positive assessments of people important to the individual. Based on the ideas of G. Sullivan, I. Yalom notes the following: "... the child needs security, so he tries to demonstrate character traits approved by his significant environment, and to avoid behavior that causes a negative reaction from this environment" (Yalom, 2002, p. 707). In psycho-correctional groups, this regularity manifests itself in the following: after the emergence of relations between group members, clients in group become more sensitive to

the expectations of other important participants and seek to correspond them (Yalom, 2002, p. 710). Based on this factor, for the functioning of our correctional group, it is desirable to form such group values that will contribute to the following expectations to group members: to be responsible for the social well-being of themselves and their families; be purposeful in life, quit gambling, avoid infantile problem solving.

5. *Group cohesiveness.* I. Yalom notes that there is a correlation: the growth of the person's identification with the group, causes an increase in the need for acceptance and approval by this group. (Yalom, 2002, p. 729). Therefore, the development of group cohesiveness (which is characterized by the identification of all participants with the group) is one of the mechanisms of correction, which, on the out, changes behavior in accordance with the expectations of other group members.

According to Yatsenko (2004, p. 10), psychocorrection is possible due to the materialization of the "essentiality forces of human" (i.e., his abilities, will, aspirations, consciousness, etc.) in a concrete social and cultural matter. In the social relations between the members of the psycho-correctional group, deep personal disorders materialize, and thanks to the feedback, the individual can realize the violations expressed in the relations (Yatsenko, 2004, p. 19; Yalom, 2006, p. 508). Also, the materialization of psychological properties can be achieved through role-playing games, special psychological techniques (Yatsenko, 2004, p. 24).

*Summing*, given the great opportunities provided by group work to correct gambling behavior, its psychocorrection should be carried out in a group.

Given the above principles and psychotherapeutic mechanisms, each session of the psycho-correctional program should contain the following content components: 1) psychoeducation (see factor "Imparting information"), 2) group meetings (to provide feedback and create conditions for reflection and implementation of the above-described therapeutic factors of group correction) and 3) psychological exercises (for the purpose of purposeful materialization and elaboration of disorders of personal development, which underlie gambling behavior).

In the process of further work, we have developed a program of psychocorrection, which includes 17 meetings once a week. The meetings were focused on: development of life goals and purposefulness; development of skills of defending one's own position and finding a mutually beneficial solution in a conflict situation; formation of a holistic personal and professional identity; development of self-actualization, creative approach, formation of positive self-esteem; correction of psychological dependence, co-dependence, and counter-dependence.

The main methodological principle based on which the group of meetings functioned was the K. Rogers triad: unconditional acceptance, empathy, and congruence (Rudestam, 1990). Unconditional acceptance provides a comfortable atmosphere and a basis for personal growth; empathy promotes healthy and therapeutic interpersonal contact, is the basis for interpersonal understanding and helps to formulate feedback that is acceptable for perception; congruence creates a material on the basis of which sufficiently objective feedback can be provided.

The evaluation of the results of the psychocorrection program was executed based on the analysis of the work of two correctional groups, in which 15 young people with gambling behavior completed psychocorrection together with the healthy peers. The study used a sequential design of the experiment, in which compares the results before and after a particular event. In the Table 1 shows the statistically significant differences in mean values, in individuals with gambling behavior (n = 15), before psychocorrection and after its completion according to the T-Student test for related samples. The table presents only the scales of methods, with significant differences.

Table 1

**Significant differences in mean values before work in the psycho-correctional group and after its completion**

Methods of on which significant differences were found	The value means at the methods at two diagnostic points		Sign. by Student's T-test
	Before correction	Correction complete	
PGSI	5,4	4	p < 0,01
Test K. Young	10,2	8,1	p < 0,01
Tucker Test	7,6	5,1	p < 0,01
PIL, scale «Locus of control - Ego»	17,13	18,46	p < 0,01
Addictive identity	58,17 T	52,88 T	p < 0,01
POI, level of self-actualization by V. Markelov	43,18 T	44,99 T	p < 0,01
PIL, scale «Targets in life»	26,06	28,93	p < 0,01
PIL, «Satisfaction with life»	21,86	23,47	p < 0,01
PIL, general score	87,73	93,0	p < 0,01
POI, Self-esteem scale	48,6 T	50,4 T	p < 0,01
IPH, Self-assessment scale	3,24	3,39	p < 0,01

From the table 1 shows that the proposed psychocorrection program significantly reduced the dimension of gambling behavior, which was reflected in the reduction of the average values of the three methods designed to detect the studied deviation. In particular, the mean value of the Problem gambling severity index (PGSI) decreased from 5,4 to 4 points (p < 0.01). By the modified K. Young Test, the mean values decreased from 10,2 to 8,1 score (p < 0.01). By the Tucker Test, the mean values decreased from 7.6 to 5.1 score (p < 0.01).

It should be noted that at the beginning of psychocorrection in all 15 surveyed persons by the three methods used there were values higher than critical scores (that are separated the deviation from the norm). After complete correction group the 7 (of the 15 participants), according to the three methods used, have values lower than the critical scores; this means that almost half of the participants lost their gambling behavior.

From the Table 1, it should be concluded that the proposed program of psychocorrection of gambling behavior has shown its effectiveness in: reducing certain aspects of psychological dependence (increased mean values on the scale of «Locus of control - Ego» from 17,13 to 18,46 scores); development of holistic identity (decreased mean values on the scale «Addictive identity» from 58,17 T-scores to 52,88 T); strengthening the level of meaningfulness of life

(increased mean values on the scales «Targets in life», «Satisfaction with life» and the general score by the Purpose in life test); improving the ability to self-actualization (values on the corresponding scale increased from 42,18 T-score to 44,99 T); improvement of Self-esteem and Self-assessment scales (increased scores by the appropriate scales on the tests: Personal orientation inventory and Integrative assessment of personal harmony).

**Conclusions**

The proposed program of psychocorrection of gambling behavior was effective in reducing certain aspects of psychological dependence (increased scores on the scale of «Locus of control - Ego»), contributed to the development of holistic identity, improved self-actualization, and self-esteem, strengthening the level of meaningfulness of life. These psychological changes (which were obtained due to psychocorrectional influence) led to a decrease in gambling behavior, which is reflected in a decrease mean score in the next methods: Problem gambling severity index, modified Internet addiction test K. Young and Tucker Test. Examination of specific indicators among members of the correctional group showed that gambling behavior disappeared in 47% clients. Thus, the proposed program aimed at psychocorrection of gambling behavior was effective.

The prospect of further research is to study the possibilities of strengthening the psychocorrectional effect of the proposed program by developing additional thematic classes aimed at correcting psychological dependence and codependence.

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