

## EGO STRUCTURE IN THE INSTITUTIONALIZED ADOLESCENTS

## STRUCTURAREA EGO-ULUI LA ADOLESCENȚII INSTITUȚIONALIZAȚI

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**Abstract**

The study focuses on the theoretical and applied analysis of the ego structure of institutionalized adolescents. The research group consists of 48 institutionalized adolescents. The history of life and the type of Ego of institutionalized respondents were studied.

**Keywords:** adolescence, family architecture, attachment, psychic court, personality structure.

**Rezumat**

Studiul este axat pe analiza teoretică și aplicativă a structurii ego-ului adolescenților instituționalizați. Lotul de cercetare este alcătuit din 48 adolescenți instituționalizați. A fost studiată istoria vieții și tipul Ego-ului respondenților instituționalizați.

**Cuvinte cheie:** adolescenți, arhitectură familială, atașament, instanță psihică, structurare a personalității.

**Introduction** The human psyche is constructed as a conscious or unconscious set of vital needs, emotional, cognitive and spiritual processes that make up the psychic life of an individual. The unconscious psyche has an apprehensible content (memorized content of which, however, the individual is not aware, but which may be evoked spontaneously or voluntarily in certain situations) and an inapprehensible (i.e. instinctual) content. This unconscious but apprehensible psyche is speculated upon by psychoanalysis (the seat of impulses) and cognitivism (the seat of cognitive schemas).

E. Erikson considers that the period of the identity crisis, characterized by an active search of the stable feeling of self-awareness, through the identity of the Ego and its realization, is adolescence [4, p. 212]. However, structuring for the psyche is the parental function, as established by Freud [7, p. 141]. The psyche is first of all a history in which "the psychic events become co-joined while impregnated by history as well as parental and social practices". Relationship patterns (current experiences) of adolescents are (relatively identical) reflections of the emotional experiences of childhood, and

the attachment behaviour pattern represents a predictor of the adolescents' attitude towards themselves and the quality of the relationships they will have with their peers [2, pp. 466-482]. The Theory of attachment developed by Bowlby drew on numerous studies regarding closely relationship between attachment and the state of health. Numerous studies suggest that early adverse life experiences contribute to the development of somatization in adulthood [2, pp. 34-43]. In particular, stories of childhood interpersonal trauma have been associated with somatization in adults [1, pp.397-401; 14, pp.39-47; 15, pp.1247-1258]. Vulnerability to develop psychosomatizations it could be related to the internalized patterns that individuals develop about themselves and others. Bowlby proposed for the first time the idea that repeated interactions between infants and their caregivers leads children to develop models so search both and receive care from those who depend. These models or styles of attachment tend to persist throughout life and influences the expectations that people have in their relationships with others and , in particular, relations with those who may need for and support or advice, such as family members, romantic partners and doctors [13, pp.292-300]. Stuart Noyes [15, pp. 34-43]. conceptualized that the internal models related to attachment to important people, especially parental figures are key-link between childhood trauma and concerns somatic adult. They assume that the experience of adverse relations in childhood draws on models of insecure attachment and this one, in turn, can do many adults vulnerable to somatization .

Empirically , associations established in previous studies between trauma in childhood and somatization among trauma complicated and attachment in childhood, between attachment and somatization support the hypothesis of uncertain attachment as mediator in the relation of trauma in childhood and somatic symptoms in adults. Thus , trauma in childhood favors the development of attachment uncertain, including the expectation that others do not meet complicated emotional needs, waiting emphasizing reporting concerns somatic as a way to seek help / attention to where it is expected not to provide response to emotional stress.

**View of the Family Structure.** Family architecture and parental practices, "of utmost importance in determining development" are "the turning pin around which an individual's life revolves, not only as an infant or a toddler, but also throughout his adolescent years and afterwards in his adulthood all the way to old age", as the "experiences of the individual's relationships with the others become a feature of the individual's relationship with himself" [7, p.80] and will be reflected in the adolescent's flexibility and resilience ability, but more importantly in his self-awareness.

The psychoanalytic view argues that the father plays the role of the Super-Ego in the family, which means that he brings into the life of the family, and of the child implicitly, the rules and norms of social conduct which are restrictive but necessary for the development of healthy social relationships, while the mother shall be responsible with the child's emotional development. Nuclear family architecture

facilitates a better environment for youths' wellbeing as compared to non-nuclear families [1, pp.108-132]. This theory suggests that adolescents and children growing up in single-parent homes perceive the situation as a handicap. Adolescents who live with both parents have higher overall satisfaction and self-esteem [12].

**Family Functioning View** The family functioning model suggests that adolescents can function better in a non-nuclear family than in a conflicting family with both parents present [11, pp.475-490].

In constructing the personality, its courts, (the Ego and Super-ego), Freud maintained the primary-ness of the Oedipus complex, because the Oedipal structure refers to the "set of representations and memories having a strong affective value, partially or completely unconscious, which start from interpersonal relationships belonging to childhood history", which can structure all personality levels (emotion, attitude, character, behaviour).

The Oedipus complex is referred to the phallic period, characterized by ambivalent feelings towards one's parents. The structuring of feelings from one's affective relationship with one's parents takes place concomitantly with the progressive construction of identity, of the self-image. The decline of the Oedipal structure without de-structuring it, but with repressing it in latency, will leave traces that will reactivate later as an overt symptom or as a character feature (susceptibility, aggressiveness, inhibitions, anxieties, etc). Freud also introduced the idea of a "pulsional ego, successor of the Oedipus complex and of parental prohibi-

tions, of an Ego that is idealized, amplifies, diminishes, completes or devalues", being established on the dynamics of the fundamental rhythms and oscillations of the environment (C Drive) – image (S Drive).

Recognition, idealization represent an inner demand of the psyche, called the Super-ego by Freud; "the expression of the Super-ego in the subject's behaviour is influenced by the parents, which gives moral conscience the appearance of generational history." [6]

Freud proposed a topographic description of personality structure, the three main elements being the Id, the Ego and the Super-ego [5, pp.30-36] The Id is the primary component of pulsional energy, which remains unchanged throughout one's life, where "its formations behave as virtually immortal" [6, p.89)], while the Ego is a derivative of the Id and the modifications that occur from the interaction with the environment produce the construction and organization of the Ego. The role of the Ego will be to mediate between the pulsional drives of the Id and the exigencies of the outside world, "to establish a coherent organization of the personality by regulating the manners in which the pulsional drives that originate in the Id are discharged" [6], so that, by identification and repression mechanisms, the conflicts with the external reality or with the ethical demands of the Super-ego are avoided.

Carrying on Freud's research, Szondi systematized the Freudian ideas about the self-injured psyche in the light of the four dimensions of existence each human being experiences: Contact-related problems, Sexual-related problems, Legality-related

problems, as well as the problems of the Self. Consequently, the Leopold Szondi test reflects personality as a dynamic process subject to fluctuations caused by the build-up and discharge of the tensions coming from the pulsional zone. The test comprises eight factors grouped into four vectors (the Sexual Drive – S – the passive abandonment need versus physical activity, the Paroxysmal Drive – P – describes the psychological area of emotional control and the manner in which the individual expresses his emotions, the Ego Drive – Sch – reflects the structure and degree of rigidity as compared to the fluidity of the ego, the Contact Drive – C – refers to the sphere of the individual's relation with reality).

**Study on Personality Structure in the Institutionalized Adolescents.** The present research is a cross-sectional study that targets the organization of the psyche, by identifying the psychodynamic structures constructing the representation of the relationship with the Self and of the object relations, since emotional attitudes lived through the significant objects, and in particular the emotionally charged interactions between the child and the carer paint not only the image of these objects and the attitude of the adolescent towards them, but also his self-esteem and image. The following are to be identified: the personality structure through the “abysal”, dynamic interpretation of the individual's characteristics, the regulating mechanisms and the general expectations regarding his capacity to reach the desired objectives, the extent to which the individual attributes an external causality (environment-related factors) or an inter-

nal causality (his own decisions) to his behaviour.

**Sample Selection** – The sample consisted of **48 adolescents** from the Olt County,  $M \approx 17.2$  years of age in average, of whom: 16 are in institutional care, 12 are placed in foster care, 4 live in family-style houses, 9 are adolescents who live in 6 single-parent families as result of the parents' separation, 3 adolescents live in 2 single-parent families as result of a parent's death, 4 adolescents live in 4 single-parent families as result of the parent's choice not to formalize the relationships and 16 adolescents live in 12 complete families.

**The research tools used: The SZONDI test Experimental diagnosis of pulsions.** The Szondi Test, although considered as more of an empirical use, is already utilized in the fundamental research and was the analysis tool for the genotropic theory in full. (16/14). Test description: **The Sexual (S) Drive** reflects the intensity and the manner in which the subject's sexual and aggressive drive needs are expressed. **The Paroxysmal Drive (P)** indicates the degree of instability or inflexibility of affective censorships, i.e. the manner in which emotional manifestations are controlled. **The Contact Drive (C)** shows how stable and satisfactory the individual's object relations are. Based on the conceptualization of Leopold Szondi, with descriptive approach of Susan Deri in her book named „Introduction in Szondi Test” (2000),

**Results Obtained in the Research Experiment and Their Interpretation:** Analysis of the results following the ap-

plication of the Szondi Test (20) reveals that most of the adolescents coming from the institutionalized environment, namely 56.25 %, show the characteristics of an

unrealistic Ego, predominantly dualistic ( $k+p-$ ), 31.25% show a detached Ego ( $k\pm p$ ), and 12.50 % an integrated Ego ( $k\pm p\pm$ ) (vezi fig.1).

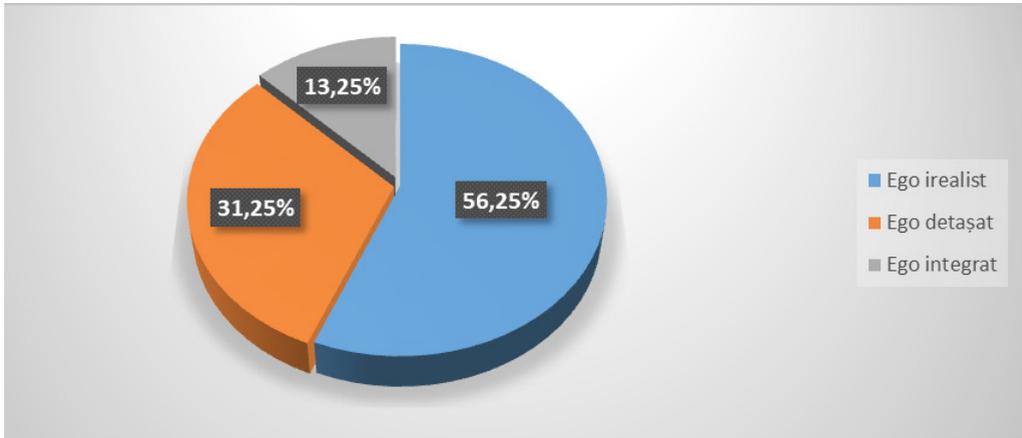


Fig. 1 The structure of the ego of the adolescents from the institutionalized.

The majority of adolescents found with unrealistic ego, indicate their marking institutionalized for life. This type of Ego is a consequence of the trauma of birth, tending to consider the world as a „uterus” whose primary function is to meet its needs.

Institutionalized people strongly feel the need to find in the environment the right objects or people to be invested libidinally for the purpose of complete fusion. Although these people seem to be rigid and nonemotional, under apparent calm, they feel intense emotions, experiencing a strong emotional attachment.

### Conclusions and Discussions

The coherent organization of the personality depends on the capacity of the Ego to regulate the instinctual drives discharge modes in harmony with the limits imposed by reality and with the moral de-

mands of the Super-Ego.

The result of the investigations on the adolescents from institutionalized environment highlights a relation with the environment marked by detachment, the subjects’ tendency being to hold on to the childish feeling of all-powerfulness, having the ability to stubbornly persist in their beliefs and actions, and thus taking the contour of atypical, unconventional individuals.

This study stimulates the development of correctional programs to help in social integration and create emotional comfort.

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