Relationship between Pathological Personality Traits and Defense Mechanisms in the Community Sample of Russian-Speaking Adult Inhabitants of Latvia.

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Personality disorders is contiguous area between psychiatry and psychology. Psychiatrists officially recognised concepts of enduring personality disturbances in the first DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) in the 1950s. (Vahia, 2013)

Since that time, psychologists and psychiatrists had major changes in their understanding of personality disorders. One of the biggest issues was to distinguish one personality disorder from another. Often different personality disorders contain same personality traits, what makes more difficult to define and study this phenomenon. (Bornstein, 2011)

In the course of the last decades there is an on-going discussion between the psychologists regarding the definition of normal and abnormal personality. They are trying to establish, whether pathological traits are the specific formation, which is part of the personality? Or are they common for all individuals, but become highly manifested in some individuals under certain conditions?

Lately there was an increasing consensus that normal and abnormal personality variation can be treated within a single, unified structural framework (Eysenck, 1994; O'Connor, 2002; Widiger & Costa, 1994). A variety of studies have indicated, for example, that personality structure is essentially the same in clinical and nonclinical samples (O'Connor, 2002), that normal and abnormal personality are strongly related at the etiologic level (Jang & Livesley, 1999; Markon, Krueger, Bouchard, & Gottesman, 2002, quoted from Markon & Krueger, 2005), and that abnormal personality can be modeled as extremes of normal personality variation (O'Connor & Dyce, 2001).

Despite consensus about the possibility of describing normal and abnormal personality within a single structural framework, however, there is less consensus about what this structural framework might be. Although there is emerging consensus about the superordinate structure of normal personality (Goldberg, 1993), less consensus exists about a similar structure of abnormal personality (Livesley, 2001).

Samuel and Widiger (2004), who tried to figure out what kind of traits characterizing each personality disorder brought substantial contribution in resolution of this question.

In order to investigate the correlation between personality disorder models and trait models, Samuel, Widiger, Lynam and Ball (2012)

created the group of experts and psychologists who were studying personality disorders. In their research, they tried to describe each personality disorder through a number of personality traits.

The first aspect of the proposal made by the DSM-5 compilers is the inclusion of a dimensional trait model that attempts to organize the universe of personality pathology into component parts, consistent with the approaches of Clark (1993), Livesley (2003), and Widiger (2005). The transition to a dimensional trait model has the potential to address several limitations of the previous diagnostic system. For example, a dimensional trait system might eliminate the problematic comorbidity across and the heterogeneity within the DSM-IV categories by providing a trait profile that is unique to each individual (Widiger & Trull, 2007, quoted from Samuel & Widiger, 2008). Additionally, such a model holds the promise of improving diagnostic stability as traits have demonstrated greater temporal consistency than diagnostic categories (Morey et al., 2007, quoted from Samuel & Widiger, 2008).

Beside that, in the last decades, there has been a growing interest in the study of defense mechanisms in psychotherapy and psychopathology (Cramer, 1998a, quoted from Kramer, Roten, Perry & Despland, 2013).

Presniak, Olson, and MacGregor (2010), Perry, Presniak, Olson (2013) made researches which aimed to define the relationship between personality disorders and defense mechanisms. But what is substantially new in this research, is that instead of personality disorders used pathological traits.

Research objective was to define what kind of relationship exist between pathological traits and defense mechanisms. Results showed that between pathological traits and defense mechanisms exist many correlations. Correlations also exist on factor level, in Multidimensional Clinical Personality Inventory all traits united in factors, so there is substantial correlation on factor level too.

Most of correlations on factor level were with neurotic defenses according to Vaillant (1992) classification, in particular with repression and displacement. All together 26 traits correlated with neurotic defenses. With other defenses just a few traits correlated, three traits with mature defenses, two traits with immature defenses and two with psychotic defenses.

This research provides substantial information about the nature of personality disorders and can help to develop flexible approach and help psychologists to assess personality disorders more accurately.

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