Mental Health: Dislocation of the Concept in the Small Group

Lidiya Chorna, Pavlo Gornostai, Halyna Tsyhanenko, Olha Pletka,
Olha Korobanova, Viktor Vus

Institute for Social and Political Psychology, National Academy of Educational Sciences of
Ukraine,
Kyiv, Ukraine

Introduction. There is evidence that a small group may be a microcosm of larger social environment and as such may have both negative and positive impacts on the mental health of any individual participant in the group. In the processes of interaction in the group there are processes that affect the mental health of a member of the group, and with the flow of group dynamics are converted into certain group phenomena that are directly observed in the group's activities.

The purpose of the study: the approximation of concepts reflecting the complex life situations with which an individual cope and which are reflected in mental health, to the context of the functioning of a small group. In the process of group interaction the tension and stress experienced by an individual, the conflict situation, the crisis and the trauma person meet, are becoming a certain group phenomena. These phenomena should be identified depending on the increasing complexity of the socio-psychological situation in the group.

Objects of observation: psychotherapeutic, educational-therapeutic; the total number of groups is 14, 175 осіб. Educational-therapeutic groups combine educational process and therapeutic relationships. Duration of the included observation (as a group coach) was from 200 to 300 hours in each group.

Research method: included observation of group dynamics in complex life (social) situations, analysis and classification of group phenomena in accordance with the increasing complexity of situations.

In the process of group work, at least 10% of the working time for the group was devoted to special work with group dynamics (discussion, game, role modeling, work with transfers in the group). The mode of work of one group was 18 hours (2 days) once a month, during 2 years. The participants were presented in the following roles: students, clients of psychotherapy, psychologists-consultants, participants in group processes. The following research questions were studied: how does group and other group identity affect group dynamics and integrity of the group? How does the group behave, if there is not enough resources to solve the current group tasks? What is the relationship between conscious and unconscious factors in group processes, depending on the complexity of group tasks? What protective mechanisms does the group use to overcome the negative states? How does a group behave in case of a group injury (serious conflict, split group, party death, traumatic events in society)?

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The social and practical significance consists in determining the group phenomena of interaction as markers of the unhealthy group and its members, as well as strategies for overcoming the consequences of the actions of these negative phenomena.

Approach. Group phenomena are social and psychological phenomena that are directly observed in the activities of the group, but some members of the group are not sufficiently aware of their integral, without division into cognitive and connotative components of the psyche, manifestations in the process of interaction between them. Overcoming strategies are tools for regulating interaction in a group aimed at solving the challenges of its activities; in the strategies presented above all the cognitive component of the regulation of interaction.

Similar to a number of concepts reflecting complex life situations with which an individual cope (tension, stress, conflict, crisis, trauma) (Vasilyuk,1990), we approximate these concepts to the context of her immediate social environment, that is, a small group.

In the process of observation, a partial recording of individual parts of the group (10-20 hours per group) was conducted with the decipherment and analysis of interaction transactions, as well as the retroflexive notes of the trainer after the sessions of the group work.

Results. Group tension is reflected in group differentiation, the emergence of micro-groups, group resistance (sabotage by the group performing certain activities, rejecting new forms of interaction). The tension is caused by external and internal factors related to the group: conflict with another group, role imbalance within the group, inconsistency of group norms of interaction of the social situation that has changed. Inter-group favoritism and intersectional discrimination temporarily reduce the sense of tension.

Group conflicts also lead to the emergence of specific phenomena: in the external field of interaction – to group polarization, deprivation, etc., and in the internal – to parallel group processes that arise when the group becomes unable to handle everyday tasks and new problems, to which it is not ready for. The reasons for this are: in order to avoid "dangerous" topics by the members of the group; the impossibility for them to take a meta-position and see the real problem, having risen above personal interests, which come into confrontation with the interests of the group; the impossibility to accept certain realities (own erroneous decisions, values that have ceased to be progressive, new conditions for the existence of the group).

In the future, another crisis occurs in the group – a socio-psychological state characterized by a deficiency of internal resources to solve their problems. In group dynamics, static equilibrium begins to predominate over dynamic equilibrium. To maintain equilibrium, the group increases the intensity of the interaction. Information and emotional exchange between the conscious and unconscious spheres of the group psyche is broken, much of the information and emotions are not recognized and processed. The beliefs of its members are growing uncritically, the metaphorical positioning of their group in social space and symbolism in interaction (for example, the "Russian spring" for supporters of the "Russian

world"), the "ideology" of the group is fixed. Sensual perception of reality is filtered by the ideological instructions of the group. The protective mechanism of rationalization is updated.

To reduce tension and release accumulated negative energy, a parallel process is formed in the group, in which the actual group problems are "solved", but in fact the subject of the solution lies in a completely different perspective. Such a process is a pseudo-solution, because not problems are discussed and worked out, but their consequences or other related issues important during the crisis. However, the members of the group have a complete illusion that there is progress in the development of group relations. The group deals with small problems that are considered to be the cause of discontent; looks for "guilty" (both inside the group and outside) creates a mythology that replaces the undesirable (unacceptable, dangerous, hostile) reality; actualizes powerful group defense mechanisms, translates problematic information into a group unconscious (Bion, 1961).

These processes not only are indicators of the group's ill social health, but also cause violations of the psychological health of the members of the group caught in the focus of group conflict. The problems of neurotic and psychosomatic varieties predominate. With the increasing complexity of the situation in the group, the number of non-rational strategies to overcome them grows: avoidance and focusing on emotions.

Group trauma occurs when the whole group as a subject receives the traumatic experience, and not just each of its representatives as a separate person. There is a need in the group to cope with this experience. Constructive means of overcoming it are: collective experience of trauma in any form (group rituals dedicated to traumatic events, collective emotional discussion, collective creativity) (Kellermann, 2007). A good form of overcoming is the creation of group stories and group mythology (or a combination of them), if traumatic experience is transformed into a non-traumatic narrative, it is acceptable not only for discussion in the group, but also for translation into the external social environment. The incomplete (insufficient) means of overcoming group trauma include the actions of group defense mechanisms (displacement, negation, regression, compensation) that weaken or level the symptoms, however – they do not solve the problem, but rather "preserve" it.

Unconstructive means of overcoming include group transfers and countertransferences, bullying and other aggressive group overcoming scenarios developed by the group during previous trauma (it is both an aggression against individual members and external social actors). They turn the process of trauma treatment into the plane of conflict problems, in which other protective mechanisms (projections and projective identifications) are involved than with its compensation. In general, depending on the prevailing methods of overcoming group trauma, considered in the "active-passive" and "aggressive-peaceful" dimensions, four strategies for overcoming them can be distinguished: 1) progressive (active and peaceful); 2) active aggressive; 3) passive aggressive; 4) regressive (passive or depressive).

Groups that are injured and have conflicting, hard-articulated, complex emotions (injustice, disgust, shame, guilt), become psychologically closed and do not allow "strangers" into their inner world. As a consequence, the distance between the members of the group decreases, the collective identity absorbs the individual. Members of the group use group identity as compensation for the lack of a mature identity and deindividualization and social laziness in the group is growing.

There is a group illusion: "The group can do everything, but its individual member can do nothing". An illusory group reality is formed that incorrectly reflects and interprets the surrounding world (for example, "bright future", "ideal world"). These groups delegate secrets to successors. Their history is incomplete, it is full of accusations and insults.

The consequence of group trauma can be group depression, which is the stagnation of group processes. The group does not solve the problems, turning them into "frozen" conflicts, loses the prospect of its development. Group depression should be understood not as a decline in the emotional atmosphere of the group, but primarily as a lack of dynamic processes, as the cause of the degradation of the group.

With the increasing difficulty of the situation in the group (from tension to trauma), the group phenomena that were presented at its earlier stages do not disappear, but continue to manifest.

Conclusions. Thus, the group in the process of functioning reflects complex social situations. At the same time, being in such situations, the group can produce them themselves. As a result of the action of group phenomena, which played a protective role at certain stages of its development, the group ceases to adequately perceive the social reality that has changed, and loses its adaptive potential. This is brightly manifested in group egoism, competitive-conflict stereotypes and barriers of interaction.

In contrast to the above, a number of other group phenomena reflect group interaction mechanisms that promote adaptation processes, relieve tension, resolve conflicts, work on traumatic experience and exit from crisis: group facilitation, social support and affiliation, the group's conscious identity (as opposed to group identity), synergetic team interaction, social responsibility. The latter reflects the willingness of the members of the group to make decisions based on the realization of how certain actions will help them, the group and society as a whole.

Keywords: mental health, mental stress, small group, social conflict, social situation, trauma.

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