Psychological factors of theft in children with delay development disabilities

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Currently in Russia are increasing the negative effects associated with teenage deviation. Larceny, theft, robbery, drug abuse et al prevail among them. In this regard, the relevance of preventive measures asocial actions in the school and the family are of great importance. Parents and teachers seek the help of psychologists with the issues of detection predisposition and correction of theft in children and adolescents, including those with intellectual disabilities (developmental disabilities, further DD, and mental retardation, further MR).

The importance of studying the causes of child stealing is due to the fact that according to some researchers (1, 4, 6, 8), already to 10-11 years of age, a third of the pupils have the dominant possible asocial activity, that are manifested persistent deviations in behavior. It is known, that the intellect of most children with behavior disorders corresponds to the norm, but among those who have the reduced one, the probability of occurrence of aggressive tends to be higher, including antisocial behavior and criminal tendencies. Increased susceptibility, suggestibility of children in primary school, combined with close attention to the world of adults in adverse conditions can form the basis for a stable deviant behavior. On the other hand, in early adolescence, the formation of arbitrariness is particularly active in children; the internal plan of action begins to develop, as well as the ability to reflect. That is why in this age, the child can successfully master the means and methods of analysis of his/her and other people behavior, that helps to prevent possible risk factors of theft at this age (5, 8).

According to the available literature data (1, 6, 9), there is a tendency that grows with age for the formation of the dominant deviant behavior, so in the present work we set two objectives:

1) Examine the changes in the concept of stealing in the age of 10-12 years old children both with and without developmental disabilities;

2) Identify among the children with developmental disabilities at the age of 10-12 years a group of «risk» on the tendency to steal.

Subject and methods of research

101 children of primary school age were examined. They were divided into 4 groups. Experimental group №1 and №2 were represented by students of 1-3 classes with developmental disabilities at the age of 7-9 (first group) and 10-12 years (second group) to 30 persons each, respectively. Control groups (№3 and №4) amounted to students with a normal development of appropriate age (27 people in the third and 14 people - in the fourth groups, respectively).

The experimental group №1 (WIA) contained children from 1-2 forms: 21 boy and 9 girls. The cases of theft or unintentional misappropriation of other people's things or toys children were not noted among them by the adults. Their progress in core subjects teachers estimated as good and satisfactory. The family characteristics according to class teachers’ notes were: 47% of students lived in complete families with both parents, 14% of students were brought up in the patronized families, 39% lived with divorced parents.
The experimental group №2 (WIA) contained children of 3-4 forms: 23 boys and 7 girls. Among these children 57% lived in complete families, 39.8% in single-parent families and 3.3% in the orphanage. Academic progress of 43% was good, satisfactory in the core subjects; for 57% satisfactory grades prevailed, and some subjects were graded unsatisfactorily.

Control group №3 (children with normal mental development) contained 27 students of the 1-2 form, 13 boys and 14 girls. The age ranges of 7-9 years. Progress in core subjects was good for 72% and satisfactory for 28%. Family characteristics from class teachers were: 15% of students lived in complete families with both parents, 35% of children lived with one parent, 50% were educated in patronized families. In some families parents mentioned that their children stole or unintentional acquisition of things or toys they liked; the father of one child in the anamnesis was diagnosed with kleptomania. Many of these children have problems in families, related to the relationship between parents or persons substituting them.

A control group №4 (children with normal development) amounted to students of 3-4 form, 10 boys and 4 girls; 35.5% lived in complete families, 49.7% lived in single-parent families and 14.2% lived in the orphanage.

The study used the following methods:

- Conversation on a story by Leo. Tolstoy's «The free-stone», which allowed to investigate the reasons of formation of the concept «Theft»;
- The method «The semantic differential» (verbal option), which evaluated the subjective attitude of the child to the concept of «Theft»;
- Colour test of relations (CTR), which studied the setup component to such notions as «good», «bad», «thief», «honest», «stealing», «gift», i.e. evaluating theft as asocial phenomena.

Statistical analysis was performed using the software package SPSS 12.0. and STATISTIKA 6.0. The content analysis and cluster analysis were used, with a t-criteria of Student for independent sampling.

**Research results**

To assess the child's relationship to the concept of «theft» was used the content analysis of answers of children regarding the content of the story L.N. Tolstoy «The free-stone».

This story describes the dishonest act committed by the boy Vanya. In the story «The free-stone» it is described in accessible and understandable language to children of primary school age how Vanya had stolen the plums. The story is useful to provoke mixed feelings in children in relation to the researched phenomenon and thereby helps to estimate the verbal child's attitude to the notion of «theft» and explore their basic patterns of it.

The interview is conducted with a child in private. Child listens to the text of the story: «Mother bought plums and wanted to give them to the kids after the meal. They laid on the plate. Vanya had never eaten the plums and smelled them all the time. And he liked them very much. He was eager to eat them. He repeatedly
passed by the table. When no one else was in the upper room, he could not resist, grabbed one plum and ate. Before lunch, the mother counted plums and saw one missing. She told father about it.

At the dinner father said:

- What, children, did anyone eat one a plum?

All said “No”.

Ivan blushed to the roots of his hair and said the same:

-No, I did not eat.

Then the father said:

-That someone of you ate, it’s wrong, but not a disaster. The trouble is that plums have free-stones inside, and if someone does not know how to eat and swallow it, he will die in a day. I’m afraid of it.

Vanya turned pale, and said:

-No, I threw the free-stone through the window.

They all laughed, and Vanya began to cry.

Next, the child is asked whether everything was clear in the text, whether he was familiar with it earlier. After then they offer to answer the following questions:

1. As you have understood from the story that made the boy Vanya?

2. Why he ate the plum?

3. How you consider, whether Vanya right or wrong?

4. How would you act if you was near that boy?

5. How do you think is it good or bad to take things without permission?

6. Do you think what Vanya felt when the parents found that one of the plum was missing?

7. How would you do, if you want to eat a plum very much?

8. What would you say to adults, if you eat a plum without permission?
9. Did the dad act correctly?

10. Why did Vanya cry?

All statements obtained in an interview with children were analysed using content analysis. To do this, the children's responses in each group were sorted out into 6 criteria, the first three of which reflected the most common causes of child stealing.

According to several authors (3, 7, 9) the analysis of actions of children most often we come across to three reasons of theft:

- **Impulsivity** - a strong desire to own an attractive thing. The child may steal because it is very easy, and to resist the temptation, on the contrary, is difficult.

- **Psychological dissatisfaction** – it includes a variety of different motives: disordered maternal or paternal affection, difficulties in communicating with parents, lack of their attention, theft as revenge and punishment of parents for not paying attention to a child. Unconsciously to himself a child restores the justice. Motivating it with the assertion that parents had stolen his/her love, consideration, adoption, care, he steals what is significant for them, for example, money. It also may be a revenge for the insults, the pain (2, 7).

- **Underdevelopment of moral views and will**, i.e. the desire to assert themselves, to experience the thrill. When a family has a child who lacks independence, then he/she begins to steal, not to feel the inferiority and to convince himself/herself and others in his slyness, skill, courage, «toughness» (2).

The following three criteria were aimed at determining the pattern of the child concerning theft, i.e. the realization of the misconduct:

- **Attempt to avoid punishment** includes such components of child’s behaviour as to ask for a permission, to have patience, to ask, to confess the crime, apologize, stop himself/herself, do not act unlawfully.

*Fear of punishment* includes fear, fear, anxiety, deceit, lies.

- **The experience of the punishment** includes shame, embarrassment, frustration, sadness, guilt.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons of theft</th>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Non-disordered children</th>
<th>Children with developmental disorders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7-9 years</td>
<td>10-12 лет</td>
<td>7-9 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impetuosity, wish to possess the desired thing</td>
<td>29,6</td>
<td>19,7</td>
<td>37,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological dissatisfaction</td>
<td>37,0</td>
<td>50,0</td>
<td>33,2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As follows from the results of the content analysis (table. 1) when discussing the situation with the theft in a conversation on the story «The Free-stone», the desire to have a favorite thing in the greater degree were characterized for younger children with DD. This desire children with DD expressed in statements like «wish», «ate without permission» and «simply took it» (every second child gave this answer), while children with normal development replied «I just wanted to taste».

The number of situations of impulsive theft for older children in both groups decreases (p<0.05), but remains higher for children with DD (26,2% against 19.7% in the norm).

Therefore, children with the DD in the primary school age (7-9 years) replied mostly spontaneously, impulsively, it was hard for them to control their desires, which only the fear could stop. In contrast to them the children with normal development gave arbitrary replies, which usually begin to dominate in 6-7 years. These children of primary school age are already able to control better their desires, deeds and actions, which reduces the impulsiveness of their behavior. Getting older, children with DD approach on this criterion to the younger group with normal development, i.e. apparently, there is a delay in the development of arbitrariness in behavior.

The allocation of the second main cause of theft, based on the content analysis, reflects a greater psychological dissatisfaction and difficulties in communicating with parents for children with normal mental development and DD. With age, children with DD compared with the norm suffer less from neglect of parents or attach no importance to this. Children with normal development feel significant increase of psychological dissatisfaction in interaction with parents and other adults to adolescence; it may be the cause of behavior disorder, including theft, in 50% of cases.

We identified in our previous paper (9, that the underdevelopment of moral views and will is the main cause of the risk of theft, mainly in the group of mentally retarded pupils. Statements like «deceived», «did not confess», «stole» also occur in about one third of children with normal development and DD, regardless of age and may suppose the biological causes of the risk of theft.

Probably, this is connected with the fact that it is difficult for these children to control their desires, and the only thing that can stop the child, is the fear of punishment. For confirmation of this opinion, we have analyzed group of criterion for statements of children in determining attitudes to theft, i.e. evaluation of the offence committed by the child (table 2). It is obvious, that in all the surveyed groups prevail statements describing the attempt to avoid punishment for a perfect indecent action, especially among 7-9 year children with DD, not to experience a sense of awe and fear. On this basis, children are using the tactics of avoiding of possible punishment.
As the group of children 10-12 year old with DD showed considerable disparities in regard to behavioural reactions, academic progress and risk of predisposition of children to theft, it was interesting to identify reasons of this predisposition for theft and its relation to realizing of this misconduct in this category of children. For this purpose we formed from the whole group DD 10-12 years, according to evaluations of teachers, parents and our own observations another group #5 - a group of «risk» on the tendency to steal. It included 9 persons, 8 boys and 1 girl at the age of 10-12 years, 6 of them (66,7%) were raised in single-parent families, all of them demonstrated the deviant behavior and difficulties in school, their academic performance, mainly, is «satisfactory», and some have very low grades in basic subjects (reading, writing and mathematics).

The table shows the results of the content analysis of the statements of children with DD in «risk» groups compared with their normal and DD peers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion of attitude to committed theft</th>
<th>Groups of children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-disordered children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7-9 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt to avoid punishment</td>
<td>49,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of punishment</td>
<td>14,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing of the punishment itself</td>
<td>36,0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2
Норма
Fig. 1 Results of the content-analyses of the statements of children with DD (the group of risk)

It was revealed that in children with DD group of «risk» 10-12 years the main causes of the predisposition for theft are psychological dissatisfaction (44.4%), and impulsivity (39.0%). They exceed the values of these indicators in children with DD without predisposition for theft. Apparently, the presence of behavioral disorders and aggression influences the development of a more pronounced impulsiveness in children. It is supported by more than 2 times reduced underdevelopment of moral views and will (16.6% in the group of «risk» in comparison with the group of children with DD without propensity to theft. Attitudes to a committed misconduct (theft) in all three groups showed the predominance of the criteria of «an attempt to avoid punishment» (54.3; 54.7 and 51.0%, respectively).

The number of definitions of this criterion in all groups is comparatively equal. Children claim they should not take anything without permission, they asked or waited for the permission of the adult. Some point out that the boy must be reprimanded and punished. We can assume that the fear of punishment for children is the most important factor, increasing for more senior age in both groups of school children.

As the analysis shows, in general, the certain evaluation of the particular situation is available for children with DD, they have an orientation in practical issues. However, the assessment of criterion «experience of the punishment», attention is drawn to the fact that children of 7-9 years with normal mental development give more statements, and their responses have both negative and positive or neutral determination. In the groups of children with DD, on the contrary, the number of replies on this criterion is increased 2 times according to growing age (table 2).

It is important to note that as children with DDP, and with normal mental development identify correctly the emotional state of the boy, they say that the child was scared, «afraid» to die, was upset by what he did. This suggests that children are clearly oriented in the situation and are able to proper assess of the consequences.

Children with normal development and WIA note that boy did «badly», that «to take without permission is impossible», «they would never have done that and tried to cope somehow with themselves and their feelings», i.e. demonstrate negative attitude to such an antisocial act as «theft».

It was interesting to establish the unique content that every child see in the concept of «theft» on the basis of his/her individual experience and compare their attitude to this phenomenon.
In our previous study (9) we found that children with DD and normal mental development of 7-9 years old appreciate the concept of «theft» as a bad, negative, dishonest act. They believe that stealing is «not good» and that it is wrong to do it. Consider the theft as a serious act which requires energy, because it is difficult to steal (average score on a scale of activity corresponds to the estimates of -1 to 0, on a scale of assessment from -2 to -1, and the scale of strength from 0 to +1). From the point of view of the moral values, children of both groups consider the concept of «theft» as negative and demeaning.

Between the groups, statistically significant differences in the level of the «assessment», «force» and «activity» between the children in the group with DD, and a control group of 7-9 years in the analysis of the term «theft» is not revealed. However, the individual data suggested the possibility of using these indicators in diagnostic and remedial work.

Table 3 shows the averaged data on the results of the «Semantic potential» in the groups of children of 10-11 years. Obvious, that the change of indicators «evaluation», «force» and «activity» have a unidirectional character in all 3 groups of children. However, these groups «at risk» authentically more often evaluate «theft» less seriously and responsibly, not believing it is a very bad deed, yet for its implementation it is required to spend enough physical strength, because not easy to steal (a scale of «activity» to 0.72).

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups/Factors</th>
<th>Children without DD</th>
<th>Children with DD</th>
<th>Children with DD (risk group)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>-0.91*</td>
<td>-0.77*</td>
<td>-1.44*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>0.86*</td>
<td>0.88*</td>
<td>1016*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>-0.77*</td>
<td>0.72*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* the differences are significant, \( p<0.05 \)

Consequently, children with retardation, and with normal mental development, despite the fact that they show mostly negative attitude to the notion of «theft», subjectively can relate to it positively. These children may be referred to the group of risk of the occurrence of such phenomena as «theft» and require greater attention from teachers and parents.

To study the relationship of the psychological and emotional status of children with DD for the evaluation component of the attitudes to the important concepts we have used the methodology of the Color Distribution. It helped to determine a dependence of the color choice due to important concepts from the mental and emotional state.

Examination of the data presented in table 4 may support that children with DD and normal mental development in the age of 10-12 in the majority use for the designation of such concepts as «theft», «thief» and «bad», black colour and, less often, grey. For the designation of such concepts as a «gift»,
“honest», «good» kids use red, yellow and purple. Thus, children with DD use black, when referring to the concept of «theft» in 32.9% of cases, and children with normal mental development - in 50% of cases. Children of the risk group denote ambiguously the concept of «theft», a variation on 22,2% for black, green and red. To denote «a thief», 47.8% of children with DD and 71.4% of children of 10-12 years with normal mental development choose black color. Children of the risk group also used in this case black (33,4%) and grey (22,2%) colors.

Such concept as «bad», the largest number of children in all three groups indicated by black and grey colors. That is the concept of «thief», «bad» and «theft» are mostly unattractive, negative and unpleasant for them.

When referring to the concepts of «honest», «the gift» and «good» majority of children of all groups at the age of 11-12 years use red, yellow, and purple, i.e. for children both with DD and with normal mental development these concepts are relevant, attractive, positive.

There is a tendency of the influence of psychoemotional status of children on the evaluative component of attitudes to the important concepts. Long non-satisfaction of basic needs of the child leads to the activation of protective behavior, and makes such notions as «theft», «thief» and «bad» more attractive. This phenomenon is observed in children «at risk» by the emergence of theft, which is confirmed by the results of cluster analysis, according to which children with significant deviations from the color standard preferences, significantly more often choose the notion of «theft», «thief» and «bad» as attractive and more significant.

Therefore, the reasons for the theft of children with mental retardation have similar mechanisms with children of normal development, depending largely on the social factors (unfavourable family, environment, learning difficulties and others), that is confirmed by revealing among them of «risk» groups prone to theft.

Literature
3. Kravtsova M.M. If the child is taking other people’s things. - M, 2002
Table 4

Distribution of preferred color choice on important concepts in the groups of children 10-12 years with DD on a par, %

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant notion</th>
<th>Theft</th>
<th>DD</th>
<th>DD with risk</th>
<th>Thief</th>
<th>DD</th>
<th>DD with risk</th>
<th>Bad</th>
<th>DD</th>
<th>DD with risk</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>DD</th>
<th>DD with risk</th>
<th>Honest</th>
<th>DD</th>
<th>DD with risk</th>
<th>Gift</th>
<th>DD</th>
<th>D with risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grey</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>9.6</td>
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<td>14.2</td>
<td>14.4</td>
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<td>21.5</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>7.1</td>
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<td>28.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>71.4</td>
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<td>37.6</td>
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<td>Purple</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>55.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>22.2</td>
<td>71.4</td>
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<td>64.3</td>
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<td>14.4</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>11.1</td>
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