

## Regulative Function of a Subject with Personal Helplessness: a Theoretical Model of Research

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### ABSTRACT

The research urgency is caused by the rapid changes and accelerating pace of life on the one hand, and a person's ability to regulate their behavior, solve problems and overcome difficulties on the other. In this regard, this article is aimed at disclosure of the category of "regulation" in various scientific approaches of psychological science and psychological description of the phenomenon of helplessness, the ratio data of structural formations of the subject. A leading approach to the study of this problem is the subjective approach, allowing considering the control of behavior regulation of the subject that determines the possibility of using mental resources for solving vital problems and personal helplessness as a system of personal education together with a low level of subjectivity. The article presents the theoretical background, indicates a correlation between behavior control and personal helplessness as structures of the subject and personality were discovered in the course of the study. Personal helplessness is associated with the level of development of the construct of control of behavior and its individual characteristics. Personal helplessness is representing a systematic quality that unites the characteristics of the cognitive, motivational, emotional and volitional spheres of the individual, and it implements the characteristics of individual resources on the base of regulation of the subject's behavior including behavioral control. The materials of the article are of practical value to the organization and conduct of empirical research of psychological features of the regulatory function in subjects with different types of personal helplessness.

**Keywords:** subject's psychology, subject's regulative function, personal helplessness, behavior control

### INTRODUCTION

State programs for the modernization of the economy and the social sphere require not only financial investments, but also psychological readiness of people for changes and inclusion into the innovation process. Promising projects are losing their effect due to psychological reasons: there is a category of people who prefer to remain passive, avoid any risks, give up when they face the difficulties, show indifference instead of initiative, easily become dispirited and even depressed. Pessimistic expectations of people regarding innovations are an obstacle for the development in the economic, social and political fields, while optimism is the most important psychological component of innovation activity.

Rapid changes, accelerating pace of life make it urgent to investigate the ability of a person to regulate own behavior, to solve life problems and to overcome difficulties.

The lack of self-control causes the problems of human behavior appears in a great variety of life areas: from basic human functions (for example eating disorders) to interacting with others, professional activities and economic behavior (inability to distribute financial resources). That is why "self-regulation" becomes one of the central concepts of psychology.

The problem of regulation of life is one of the most essential, the most developed, but also one of the most controversial topics in modern psychology. Self-regulation is a necessary factor for the interaction of the organism and the environment. Constantly changing environmental conditions require the mechanisms that allow us to analyze these conditions and adjust our actions in accordance with new circumstances.

An important place in the context of the analysis of the problem of subject is the question of the correlation of personal and subject characteristics, the relationship of personal characteristics and the implementation of subjective functions.

The purpose of this article is an attempt to find out the nature of the relationships between behavioral control and personal helplessness. Achievement of the desired goal will allow discovering the correlation between internal content of the phenomenon of personal helplessness and the implementation of the individual's regulative function, to create a theoretical base for solving experimental problems of prevention and correction of personal helplessness and development of behavior control.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **The Concept of Subject's Regulation in Psychological Research**

There are many approaches for understanding the mechanisms of regulation of behavior and activities of the individual. Some of the authors focus on certain mechanisms of regulating behavior, while others approach the analysis of the problem more broadly, describing a complete system of self-regulation built on the principle of hierarchy.

In the frame of one of the approaches regulation is shown as a perceived and purposeful process. The key role in this process is played by cognitive mechanisms of goal setting, analysis of conditions and performance results. Within the framework of this approach the authors propose various functional structures that provide a mechanism of self-regulation.

The system-functional model of self-regulation was developed by O. Konopkin [1]. O. Konopkin notes that a person's conscious regulation of own purposeful activity is particularly important in the framework of a subjective approach. In this approach the ability of a person to consciously organize the activities of achieving the goals is one of the key characteristics of a man [2].

According to the ideas of A. Osnitsky [3], the process of self-regulation of activity is an implementation of a set of regulative skills which are formed according to the basic regulative functions described by O. Konopkin [1]. A. Osnitsky introduces the concept of regulative experience which is an element of more general subject experience [4]. Due to regulative experience a person is able to independently set the tasks and act consistently to accomplish them.

Representations of the model of conscious self-regulation by O. Konopkin [1, 2] formed the basis of the concept of individual style of self-regulation of voluntary activity by V. Morosanova [5]. She understands style features of self-regulation as individual features of the system of self-regulation of a person that are permanently appear in various types of voluntary activity, in behavior and in practical activity of a person [6]. This approach allows including an element of personal identity into the system of self-regulation, and to reflect the relationships of the style of self-regulation with various personal characteristics.

The unique human ability to carry out complex purposeful activities and to control own behavior is an object of study in foreign psychology. Considerable amount of research has been accumulated in the field of cognitive psychology by the present time. It is reflecting the processes of controlling the subject's own behavior (under normal [7], and in various pathological conditions [8]). The most common concept in the context of cognitive regulation of behavior is the concept of "executive functions" [9, p. 98]. According to the opinion of many authors the specificity of the executive functions in comparison with other mental functions is that executive functions are high-level processes which task is to organize other basic processes [10, 11].

The list of executive functions providing cognitive regulation of behavior varies at different authors [7, 12].

The most often mentioned are the following: goal setting [9, 10, 13] planning [10, 13, 14,]; anticipation [10]; the ability to flexible change of cognitive settings [10, 14, 15] inhibition and impulse control [9, 10] sustentation of activities and suppression of the effect of interfering influences [10, 14, 16] error correction [10, 16] distribution of attention resources [10, 15]. A number of researchers also classify working memory as executive function [9, 13].

Thus cognitive psychology shows the system of behavioral regulation as a set of cognitive processes of processing information which is necessary for the organization of the activity, for setting and keeping the goal of activity and adjusting it in accordance with external conditions. In our opinion this understanding of the process of self-regulation of behavior has common ideas with the system-functional model proposed by O. Konopkin [1].

Within the framework of personal approach, the authors study the personal mechanisms of regulation of behavior, carried out with reliance on motivational formations, value and meaning constructs. The motivational trend towards the problem of self-regulation was reflected in many psychological concepts of will, where the producing of new motivational formations is considered as a key mechanism of will behavior. Reflection of the personal approach in the psychology of regulation is also the theory of value-sense regulation of life.

Sense regulation of life activity is a psychological level of regulation based on the totality of sense structures and connections between them [17]. The interaction between a person and the world around is connected to the problem of choosing the ways and directions of activity, depending on set goals, the existing conditions and relations and the whole context of the situation.

The concept of the sense regulation of psychic states of A. Prokhorov is based on the assumption that situations of life and their content can exert a different influence on the subject, including his mental state, depending on the sense organization of consciousness [18].

The mechanism of value regulation of behavior is also reflected in the dispositional concept of V. Yadov [19]. The regulation of human behavior in various social situations is implemented on the basis of disposition formations organized as a hierarchy. On the lowest level of this hierarchy the behavior is regulated by elementary fixed attitudes which are unconscious and related to the satisfaction of vital needs. The highest level is represented by a system of value orientations that regulate a person's behavior in relation to higher social needs and determine the person's relationships to life goals and ways of achieving them.

Despite the variety of theories and approaches to the problem of the regulation of behavior, many of them are concentrated on certain aspects of this process. One of the modern attempts to integrate the resources of individuality within the framework of a single construct is the concept of control of behavior [20, 21, 22].

Behavioral control is shown as "the psychological level of regulation that implements the individual resources of a person's mental organization, ensuring a correlation between internal opportunities and external goals. Behavioral control is the basis of self-control [21].

### **The Phenomenon of Personal Helplessness**

Currently in European psychology there are hundreds of studies about learned helplessness, its psychological, physiological, medical aspects, pharmacological treatment, links to human diseases and so on [23, 24, 25, 26, 27].

In modern psychological studies of Russian scientists, the result of a scientific interest to the phenomenon of helplessness is a great number of private studies of the phenomenon itself and neighboring events. One of the directions of studying helplessness is its medical aspects and the study of psychology of human's helplessness [28].

In 1975 M. Seligman suggested people are different in tolerance for depression and anxiety. It is something "more than a state, it is a feature of the individual" for those people who have depression after tiny failures [29]. Detailed studying the phenomenon of learned helplessness by D. Tsiring [28] earlier described by M. Seligman [29], led to the theory of a new phenomenon in psychology and the creation of a concept addressed to personal helplessness. The Tsiring's concept of personal helplessness is a different level of understanding the phenomenon of helplessness, but it does not contradict the traditional meaning of learned helplessness. The study shows learned helplessness as a possible demonstration of personal helplessness.

The study of helplessness as stable personal characteristics was made by modern researchers such as D. Tsiring [28]. These studies interpret personal helplessness as a stable system characteristic of the subject, learning its psychological content, structure, factors of formation, relationship with the opposite phenomenon which is independence. At the present time personal helplessness as a stable characteristic of the subject is detected when the following indicators are found: pessimistic attributive style, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem. This set of indicators is determined in accordance with the results of the study of the psychology of personal helplessness and empirically confirmed [30]. The personal helplessness is not reduced to the sum of these indicators, but shown as a whole system characteristic of the personality. Above-mentioned authors proved in their studies that personal helplessness has an influence on educational success and professional activity. The authors described the functional significance and verified the typology of personal helplessness [30]. A comprehensive empirical study of personal helplessness and learning the methodology of this phenomenon made it possible to state the main principles of the concept of personal helplessness, to provide a methodological basis for investigating personal helplessness, its functions and psychological types.

### **The Problem of Correlation of Categories of Personality and Subject**

Within the framework of the system-subject [31] approach the subject is thought of as a qualitatively determined way of self-organization, self-regulation of the personality, the center for the coordination of all mental processes, allowing the person to conduct life activities through the coordination of the choice of goals and resources of a

person's individuality. In the subject as a single metasystem, the psyche appears in its unity, while in the subject the individuality is revealed. The subject in the context of the system-subject approach acts as the core of the psychic organization.

The correlation between the notions of individual and subject is understood in different ways by different authors. Thus, some authors use the concepts of "personality", "subject", "human" as synonyms. B. Ananiev on the contrary notes that the personality and the subject show different aspects of the psychological reality, even in those cases when their characteristics are close to each other. In this case the subject shows the integration of human activities, but the personality shows the integration of social relations [32]. Some scholars note that the subject is always a person, but he does not reduce to the individual. K. Abulkhanova [33] writes about the fact that not every person can act as a subject. In her opinion a person becomes a subject only at the higher stages of development. Therefore the concept of personality is broader than the concept of subject, which indicates the peak of its development, but the subject is shown as a new form of the individual at the higher stages of its development. This is an acmeological approach and a lot of Russian studies were made according to it [33]. There is another approach which is called evolutionary. It proves the thesis of the gradual development of human as a subject [31]. Formation of the subject occurs from the early stages of a human being's life; the person can develop along with the subject or discover itself at later stages of development.

V. I. Morosanova and E. A. Aronova [34] based on the results of her many years of research also emphasizes that the concepts of "subject and personality" describes different aspects of the world of human individuality. The interaction of these aspects forms the identity of the inner world of a human and is shown in behavior. At the same time the subjective characteristics define the individuality from the point of view of self-regulation features of subjective activity on the way of achieving the goals, and personal characteristics (the uniqueness) of the contents of these goals, the direction of the personality, and also the features of their achievement.

The relationship between the concepts of "personality" and "subject" according to E. Sergienko [21] appears as follows. The person is the owner of the content of the inner world of human, the subject acts as the executive part, which implements this content in specific life conditions. Personality is the core structure of the subject, which sets the general direction of self-organization and self-development [21].

## METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of the study is to conduct a theoretical study on the correlation between behavior control and personal helplessness as structural formations of the personality.

Objectives of the study:

1. To conduct a theoretical analysis of the phenomenon of regulation and control of behavior in psychological science.
2. Describe the personal helplessness as a subject.
3. To detect the theoretical background, indicates the ratio of the regulatory function of the subject and personal helplessness as structures of the subject and the individual.

Research stages:

1. Statement of the problem.
2. The analysis of scientific concepts and theories on the research problem.
3. Analysis and generalization of results.
4. Summary and presentation of the results of the theoretical study.

Research methods: theoretical analysis and synthesis, the study of scientific theories on the research problem.

The period of performance of the study is April-August 2017.

The methodological principle which forms the base of the study is the principle of determinism. The environment determines human's mental phenomena indirectly by refracting through the personality characteristics of the subject. The refraction of the external through the internal determines the mediation of external influences by the entire history of the development of the personality. To talk about the influence of external factors, the internal factors should be learned first. So, the state of helplessness arises under the influence of traumatic events if people have internal factors (pessimistic attributive style, high anxiety, low self-esteem, external locus of control, etc. It is a set of stable characteristics which in determined in this study as personal helplessness) which are driven by the whole history of human life, his experience of interaction with the world around. These internal prerequisites at the earlier stages were formed during the interaction with the family and the presence or absence of traumatic experience. The principle of determinism is a main principle of scientific knowledge and it is connected with the principles of development and principle of system.

The principle of development appears as a general scientific and a psychological scientific principle, according to which the nature and essence of any phenomena of objective reality should be studied in their origin and formation and in their development. Thesis of the formation of types of personal helplessness as a result of the development of human subjectivity is based on the theory of principle of development.

The principle of system suggests that complex objects (as it is psyche in psychology) should be studied as systems. The system of mental phenomena is considered as a multi-level and hierarchical one. In psychology the researchers speak of the psyche as an integral system and subsystems within it, which is higher level for simpler systems (the motivational system of the personality, the system of values, etc.). The principle of system sets the outline of this research, consisting in showing the unity of subjective and personal entities, which are the control of behavior and personal helplessness.

The study of the phenomena of personal helplessness and behavior control is based on system and subjective approaches, and it is described within the framework of the system-subject approach [21]. Personal helplessness is shown here as a systemic characteristic of the subject, it sets a special implementation of subjectness, which is determined in interaction with the world. Personal helplessness is the characteristic of the subject, which is the unity of certain personal features that arise as a result of the interaction of internal and external conditions, which determines the low level of subjectivity. This means the low ability of a person to transform reality, manage the events of own life, set and achieve goals, overcome various kinds of difficulties [35, 36]. Personal helplessness comes out in activities causing a decline of the success, and in the behavior of the subject. Behavioral control as a regulative function of the subject according to E. Sergienko [21] is based on the resources of individuality, creating an individual pattern of self-regulation. The level of development of behavior control is determined by the level of development of a person as a subject, including personal helplessness as a system characteristic of the subject.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Behavioral control is the basis on which human regulative activity is built and it involves the participation of both conscious and unconscious mechanisms of mental regulation. According to the authors behavior control is a system which combines three subsystems of regulation (cognitive control, emotional regulation, and willing control) that are based on individual resources. They integrate together creating an individual pattern of self-regulation. [31]. The level of development of control of behavior is determined by the level of development of a person as a subject, which reflects the degree of integration of all psychic characteristics [31]. It has been noted that the subjectivity of a person develops gradually during the whole life and can be represented as levels of development of the subject. E. Sergienko identifies several levels of the formation of the subject based on the principle of continuity of development: from the proto-level in early ontogeny to the levels of the agent, the naive subject, the subject of development, the subject of activity, the subject of life [20].

Understanding the control of behavior [31] relies on individual human resources integrated by the subject as a system-forming factor of the entire regulative system. Individual resources combine the individual characteristics and lie in the three spheres of the psyche. First of all it includes the features of cognitive abilities to analyze and regulate the external and internal environment, to create mental models of situations and events, to mentally operate with internal models and representations, to prepare solutions, and the ability for flexible cognitive control [31]. This subsystem of behavioral control is called cognitive control. The subject uses his intellectual resources for controlling own behavior. Despite the fact that this subsystem is extremely important for the processes of self-regulation, it does not cover all the regulatory possibilities of the subject. In particular, when a high cognitive resource is discovered, a person can face emotional and willing problems, such as the inability to overcome anxiety, the inconsistency of purposed actions that reduce the level of achievements and self-actualization in general. That is why the other subsystems of behavior control were distinguished. Such as emotional control and arbitrary (strong-willed) control, which also rely on the subject's individual resources. Emotional control is based on emotional stability, intensity of emotions, and the ability to understand own emotions and distinguish emotions of other people (emotional intelligence). Willing control comes out in the ability to organize own behavior and to achieve the set goals and overcome obstacles which appears on this way. The degree of these resources is individual, since the correlation of cognitive, emotional and willing resources varies from person to person. Regarding to it, it is assumed that the identity of behavior control and the identity of the preferred styles of self-regulation are individual [20].

The behavior control is a unified system that includes three subsystems of regulation (cognitive control, emotional regulation, and willing control) that are based on individual resources and they all are integrated. They create an individual pattern of self-regulation [20].

Personal helplessness is a unity of specific personal characteristics, and therefore it describes the personality. Representing a characteristic of this method of self-organization of personality, personal helplessness causes a low level of subjectness [28].

The subject-activity approach is a theoretical and methodological base of studying personal helplessness. It determines the content of this concept. Personal helplessness is the characteristics of the subject which is the unity of certain personal features appearing after the interaction between internal conditions with external ones, which determines the low level of subjectivity, which means the low level of ability of a to transform reality, manage the events of own life, set and achieve goals and overcome difficulties.

Internal conditions are emotional, motivational, cognitive and willing personal characteristics. External conditions are uncontrolled events, violations in the system of family relationships which are crucial for the appearing of personal helplessness.

The features of behavior control depend on the level of human subjectivity, which indicates the conjugation of the structures of personal helplessness and control behavior.

V. Morosanova [6] analyzes the notion of subjectivity. She identifies the process level of subjective activity and the level of personal regulative or subjective qualities. The process level of subjective activity is appeared in the mechanisms of conscious self-regulative activity. The level of personal regulative characteristics shows the degree and originality of subjective activity. The understanding of personal helplessness is consistent with the notion of a given level of subjective characteristics. In this study we understand personal helplessness as a system characteristics of the subject, which is a unity of certain personal features that arise as a result of the interaction of internal conditions with external ones (the system of family relationships, the experience of uncontrolled traumatic events) that determines the person's low ability to transform reality, manage the events of life, set and achieve goals, overcome various kinds of difficulties [28]. Personal helplessness affects the activities of the subject, reducing the success. Personal helplessness appears as the "internal conditions" of the subject. These internal conditions interact with external conditions (the circumstances of a person's life activity) and determine the activity and behavior.

Personal helplessness is a certain system personal characteristic coupled with a low level of subjectivity [28]. As it was mentioned earlier, the personality within the framework of the system-subject approach [20] is understood as a command guiding part in the system of "personality-subject". From this prospective we assume that personal helplessness is related to the level of development of the construct of behavior control and its individual characteristics. Personal helplessness, representing a system characteristics that unites the characteristics of the cognitive, motivational, emotional and willing spheres of the individual, is associated with the peculiarities of individual resources, on the basis of which the behavior of the subject is regulated. In connection with this a number of research questions arise. They are focused on studying the control of behavior when subjects have personal helplessness, the relationship with personal characteristics that determine the different levels of subjectivity, the studying of the individual identity of the system for controlling behavior of subjects with different personal characteristics.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of the most significant theories of regulation as well as helplessness made it possible to discover theoretical prerequisites which indicate the relationship between the subject's regulative function and personal helplessness as structures of the subject and personality that are in close unity and interaction, but at the same time are different. According to the correlation of categories the personality and the subject, personal helplessness sets a special implementation of subjectness, the measure of which is the degree of activity and self-regulation. The level of development of behavior control is determined by the level of development of a person as a subject and his activity. Also the control of behavior as a regulative function of the subject is based on individual resources, creating an individual pattern of self-regulation. The psychological nature of personal helplessness, the effectiveness of monitoring the behavior of a subject can be reduced; the implementation of mental resources to solve life problems will be difficult.

So, the analytical review of modern theories, which was conducted, indicates the fact of the consistency of structural entities: behavioral control and personal helplessness. However, the verification of the theoretical data is necessary. A promising task for empirical research is to establish the level of consistency of these structures and to find out the result of their interaction, which is the realization of the regulative function of the subject.

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