Section:
PSYCHOLOGY OF PERSONALITY

INDIVIDUAL CRISIS: THE DYNAMICS OF THE BASIC EXPERIENCES

LARYSA ZAHRAI

Abstract. The article deals with the problem of finding common mechanisms of coping with an individual crisis, the mechanism that would be independent of individual characteristics. Basic beliefs, which usually serve as motives of human behavior and determine our attitude to various spheres of reality, are often considered to be the most stable formations of consciousness; they form a part of the worldview of the individual and make a significant in overcoming individual crisis. The purpose of this article is to employ theoretical analysis in order to reveal of the role of basic beliefs in the process of experiencing an individual crisis, to determine the semantic specificity of attitudes in the integrative or disintegrative vector of the crisis situation.

An individual crisis is defined both as a state of the person experiencing it and what determines their behavior; it is also understood as an expression of deep personal senses, which are manifested at different levels of the psyche: the unconscious, conscious and super-conscious. Experiencing a crisis is understood as a form of human activity aimed at overcoming a critical situation and finding a positive vector while reaching a new level of personality development. Experiencing of mental disintegration / integration occurs on emotional, cognitive and behavioral levels. The article points out that experiencing an individual crisis at the cognitive level causes changes on the beliefs level, which are cognitive structures and schemes that in their turn structure experiences and determine human behavior. The article also relies on the content analysis to outline integrative and disintegrative beliefs. The content of beliefs determines both disintegrative and integrative vectors of personality development during the crisis; it also reflects the system of how the individual sees the world, other people and himself. The actualization of the feeling of trust put in the world, in other people, in oneself, together with optimism and sense of self-worth are the most stable, basic characteristics of personal beliefs, seen as a resource while overcoming the crisis.

The results of theoretical analysis help to identify the following basic beliefs: optimism, trust in the world, in other people, confidence, faith in justice, self-esteem, and they determine the integrative vector of personality development as well as the way out of personal crisis while performing an adaptive function.

Keywords: crisis, individual crisis, basic beliefs, cognitive schemes, disintegrative and integrative experiences of crisis.

1. INTRODUCTION

The issues related to the study of crisis, instability, adaptation and personal development in such conditions have always been relevant, in particular when it comes to determining general mechanisms set in motion a person is experiencing an individual crisis, regardless of their personal character traits and peculiarities. Different life situations that lead to a person's individual crisis complicate the process of adequate, holistic perception of reality, and that encourages people to seek a source of mental balance in the collective experience of mankind - traditions, beliefs, religions, spiritual practices and things alike. Why do we find an appeal to the collective experience but not our own so relevant in such periods? A question put like this shifts the emphasis in the study of the peculiarities of an individual crisis experiencing from individual mechanisms to general ones, universal, the ones responsible for the adaptive processes of an individual.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE, METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The most stable structure of personality in psychological research (J. Bruner, S. Epstein, R. Yanoff-Bullman) is comprised of basic beliefs, which act the motives of human behavior and determine our attitude to different areas of reality, and which form the worldview of an individual.

Therefore, the hypothesis of this study sounds as follows: basic beliefs are the most stable component of human consciousness, which ensure the adaptation of personality and are the main resource for overcoming the crisis. The purpose of the article is to reveal the role of basic beliefs in the process of experiencing an individual crisis.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Individual crisis is usually interpreted as the lack of personal resources necessary for implementation of a life plan that has already been developed, and this state is caused by a specific event or situation in a person's life that causes the aggravation of existing (or formed) personal contradictions (Vasilyuk, 1995); it is also defined as an imbalance of constructive and destructive tendencies and forms of mental activity (Abrumova, 1985), or as a long-term internal conflict over the meaning of life, its main goals and ways to achieve them (Tytarenko, 2018); one more interpretation has it as a collision of two realities: mental (worldview, patterns of behavior) and a part of the objective reality that contradicts previous experiences (Malkina-Pykh, 2004). In the framework of our research, it is relevant to interpret the crisis as both a state of the person experiencing it, and what determines their behavior; it is also understood as an expression of deep personal senses, which are manifested at different levels of the psyche: the unconscious, conscious and super-conscious. The ultimate goal of this state is to overcome the critical situation and reach a new level of development, which includes the availability of new resources, knowledge, experience, skills, and new personal qualities. In addition, the crisis correlates with the personal level of understanding of the critical situation. The factors pointing at the presence of a critical situation include the internal state of disorganization, contradictions, uncertainty that arises due to the feeling of inability to live and fulfill internal needs.

Psychological projections of modern researchers see the crisis in two directions - the crisis viewed as a critical situation that requires intervention and solution, and the crisis as a source of personal development (S. Muddy, 2005; E. Erickson, 1968; T. Titarenko, 2018, etc.). Numerous studies prove that it is always a certain critical situation or event in the heart the mechanism of crisis development (R. Akhmerov, 1994; F. Vasilyuk, 1995; J. Kaplan, 2001; T. Tytarenko, 2010, etc.). A critical situation is treated as a life circumstance that is a person experiences emotionally, while at the level of perception it is a complex psychological problem that needs to be addressed [5]. Such a critical situation, or event, causes a disbalance, congruence between the personality and the outside world, the lack of a ready-made programme of behavior. Contrary to the situation of a short-term action, which has a stressful nature, such as stress because of a thing lost, a conflict with a friend, etc., a critical situation actualizes

long-term experiences that are connected with significant psychological problems; therefore, it is perceived as critical.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The individual crisis leads to the internal disintegration of the individual with its binary vectors - positive and negative. The positive vector includes personality integration, integrity acquisition, congruence of various aspects of "I", while the negative vector involves fragmentation and destructive changes that reduce individual resilience [4]. The experiencing of mental disintegration occurs on emotional, cognitive and behavioral levels.

At the emotional level, crisis experience is manifested in the mental state changes through frustration, anxiety, fear, hopelessness, helplessness, vulnerability, apathy, etc. (Perry, 1995; Zimovin, 2020). At the cognitive level, crisis experiences affect the productivity of cognitive processes, causing decreased concentration and loss of an ability to quickly switch attention, lower productivity of mental operations, critical thinking, and memory [1], as well as to leading to changes in self-awareness, personal world picture, in particular, self-perception and world-perception; they also cause destruction of the system of ideas and value orientations (L. Burlachuk, O. Korzhova, 1998; Zhedunova L., 2008, S. Epstein, 1990). Such changes at the cognitive level can cause deviations in the behavioral patterns, such as the inability to set goals and solve problems independently, or manage their lives, the destruction of habitual patterns of behavior, skills, and abilities. Thus, psychological crisis is closely connected to acute emotional experiences that cause changes in the cognitive sphere, self-awareness, the picture of the world, and these changes can be traced in the personal behavior mainly through the inability to cope with such a state. Since the course of a crisis like that affects mental and social activity on its various levels (emotional, cognitive, behavioral) and subjective experience, one can call it an individual crisis, irrespective of its narrower name, be it a normative, age, biographical or life crisis.

Since the purpose of the study is to highlight the role of basic beliefs in experiencing an individual crisis, my focus is on the cognitive level of experiencing a crisis. In its broad meaning, cognitive processes are associated with perception, cognition, processing and interpretation of information, all of which accounts for the purposeful interaction with the outside world. These processes rely not only on mental operations, but also emotional and motivational ones. The subject forms their system of beliefs as a result of an active interaction with the objective world. This system determines the content of thinking, emotions and behavior, performs the function of a scheme, of cognition, or a cognitive structure, which classifies and structures the experience and determines the respective human behavior. We can assume the existence of integrative and disintegrative beliefs, which can determine the vector of recovery from the individual crisis, be it a positive or negative vector. In order to understand how this works one should analyze the concept of " a scheme".

In psychology there exist two ways of interpreting cognitive schemes: according to the first one, schemes are considered to be cognitive structures that determine perception and cognition of reality by the subject; second on sees schemes as cognitive-affective complexes, formed from the individual's experiences of events and their personal history. The cognitive scheme is used as an explanatory construct that determines the cognition process of the subject getting around the surrounding reality. To explain human behavior J. Piaget used concepts of assimilation and accommodation, both of which are relevant in explaining the impact of a critical situation on cognitive schemes. Assimilation relies on the inclusion of a new object in the already existing cognitive patterns of action. The assimilation process reduces new experience to the already existing sensorimotor and conceptual structures. Accommodation takes place when the necessary experience schemes are absent; it works restructuring old ones and adapting them to new conditions. The alternation of assimilation and accommodation makes the main mechanism of development [6]. When in crisis, a person acquires an experience that is difficult to assimilate, but it is also difficult to accommodate the existing schemes to such an experience.

In place of a scheme J. Kelly employs the concept of "a personal construct", which is understood as an idea, a thought that a person uses to interpret their experience. Based on constructs, people predict, control, and interpret reality. A construct is a special subjective tool created (constructed) by a person themselves, tested (validated) by them in practice; it helps to perceive and understand (construct) the surrounding reality, to predict and evaluate events [3]. The construct is an essential feature, not a verbal label. We should remember that pointing to the individual system of constructs we mean the attitude of a man to the world, their position in the world and perception of it. Describing the concept of a construct, J.Kelly notes that "a construct can be seen as a reference axis, the main parameter of evaluation, often non-verbalized and not reflected in a symbol, and sometimes not defined at all except for the spontaneous processes controlled by it. At the behavioral level, it is a way of behavior opened by a person; the system of constructs provides each person with their own network of behavioral paths, which do not only limit their actions, but also grant them freedom otherwise psychologically non-existent for him" [3, p.31].

According to J. Kelly's rightful remark we search for a meaning in the universe, in ourselves, and in the situations we find ourselves in. This is why we constantly create and restructure various implicit theories, perfect or not, and make up our system of personal constructs. According to this system, we live, anticipate events, plan our behavior, ask ourselves various questions and address them to others. It's the very same system we use to evaluate the results of our actions and adjust our methods of interpretation [3].

Using the metaphor of "a theory", J. Kelly does not claim them to be clearly formed and structured: they can be verbalized, nonverbal or preverbal, with a rigid or flexible structure, easy or difficult to verify, and, finally, they can be idiosyncratic or common. However, they are theories in the sense that they are a network of values which help people to perceive reality, control events and act according to the situation. In this aspect, personal theories of individuals, i.e. their system of personal constructs, can correlate with other ones that go under names of "attitudes", "habits", "reinforcement system", "information coding system", "concepts", and "life philosophy" in different psychological approaches .

Individual models or implicit theories (terms by J. Bruner, R. Tagiuri) contribute to the development of a unique value system for each person. The value system itself accounts for the uniqueness and peculiarities of goal-setting, perceptual and behavioral strategies of an individual, it lies at the basis of a complex system of self-regulation, determines personal successes and failures, personal self-esteem and evaluation of others. People can roughly belong to two groups: it's either they rely on the inflexible attributive interpretation of events or contextual (flexible) interpretation of events. The invariable scheme of interpretation of events is rather rigid because of unambiguous causal connections. The contextual scheme of interpretation goes for a wide repertoire of interpretations taking into account different contexts [2].

Another variant of the scheme is the basic life attitude with a complex hierarchical structure; it includes two components: the actual basic life attitude i.e. a person's direct attitude to themselves, their life, personal characteristics for the time being, and resource basic life attitude i.e. a person's attitude to their life, personal characteristics, behavior, life results, mediated by their attitude to the surrounding and world in general. It affects the actual state, being endowed with background properties, in other words, it can be latent and manifest itself under the appropriate circumstances [10].

According to cognitive-experimental theory (S. Epstein, 1990), an individual automatically creates an implicit "theory of reality", which includes the theory of their "I" and the theory of the world around them, as well as representations in between the "I" and the world. Therefore, one can define two ways of learning reality - empirical and rational. When knowledge is obtained empirically, through experience, it is more stable and emotionally coloured, in contrast to the rational knowledge resulting from intellectual actions [5]. Unconscious processes also play an important role in experiencing the crisis. Accordingly, S. Epstein differentiates between two adaptive systems of a personality - empirical and rational. Constructs created on a basis of a rational system are beliefs by their nature, and those formed empirically are called implicit beliefs (schemes). Implicit beliefs appear in the individual's

process of generalization of the emotionally significant experience in interaction with the outside world; they seem inherent in behavior as they are faster than arbitrary rational processes.

During the crisis, functioning of personal schemes is disrupted or both rational and empirical types are lacking. Such cases disrupt processes of self-image presentation and the surrounding world presentation, and it is reflected on the cognitive, emotional and behavioral levels. Processes are caused by the main groups of needs deprivation, in particular the desire to satisfy and avoid pain (S. Freud); to create a stable and coherent concept of the world and the "I" in it (K. Rogers); to feel presence of an object of affection/attachment (Bowlby); to increase the level of self-esteem (G. Allport). According to the individual basic needs S. Epstein identifies four basic beliefs: belief in the benevolence of the world and people; belief in justice; trust in people; belief in self-importance [8].

The difference in how people experience crisis is due, "cognitive vulnerability", as A. Beck puts it [9]. In other words, each person has a unique configuration of basic beliefs. For example, "the world is bad, it has a lot of evil, and injustice, I mistrust people, they can bring me pain and frustration, I cannot change anything, I feel insignificant." At the behavioral level this kind of a belief causes avoidance, escapism from a rational solution to the problem, as well as displacement or replacement of reality. Beliefs like that can be defined as disintegrative as they which determine the negative vector in an individual crisis course. On the contrary, beliefs with a positive attitude towards the world, other people, with a sense of self-worth, add confidence, provide with feelings resourcefulness and readiness to constructively overcome the individual crisis.

People experiencing a crisis and those ones who have already coped with it have different content specificity of basic beliefs. The first important factor that determines the process of crisis experiencing is the belief in the benevolence of the world around, in the ability to control it. Depending on whether a person believes in a basic good or evil core of a human nature they get either feelings of trust in other people, hope for their support, resistance to critical situations or feelings of loneliness, distrust, and alienation. Hence, this is the source of personal feelings of fairness or injustice of a fate, circumstances, etc. aimed at the subject of experience. People experiencing an acute period of their crisis allocate special attention to objective factors affecting their life, coincidences leading to the crisis, and its negative consequences. Another important factor in dealing with an individual crisis is how much one believes in luck. People who deem themselves lucky are less anxious, they find it to choose ways out of a crisis situation, they are not afraid of mistakes, but feel more confident, resourceful and active. On the contrary, those feeling unlike, like losers, do not dare to act scared by the prospect of mistakes and failure. It's the second category of people who have trouble coming out of crisis for a long time.

The feeling of self-importance and self-esteem are equally important in the process of experiencing a life crisis, especially during its second and third stages, when a person is becoming aware of the situation and looks for the ways out mobilizing external and internal resources, that is relying on both the support of the loved ones and their own potential (character traits, knowledge, skills, abilities, consciously evaluated experience). Self-depreciation, self-doubt, and undermining one's potential make a person to search for outside resources, disregarding their own capabilities. In such cases, an individual often shifts all responsibility for overcoming the crisis to the environment and other people.

The positive dynamics of an individual crisis experiencing reinforces the belief in the ability to control crisis. During the third stage of crisis experiencing, a person analyzes and tests the already chosen alternative ways of overcoming the crisis, they recognize newly-acquired competencies and abilities, integrate new experiences into the structure of identity, feel integrity and congruence. The emergence of such characteristics marks a way out of the crisis. The negative dynamics of an individual crisis experiencing makes the belief in the inability to control the crisis situation stronger. The individual tests strategies for overcoming the crisis, but as long as they are borrowed without awareness, analysis, or correlation with their own capabilities, taken from the outside and other people, they are unlikely to be integrated in their own experience. Such a person experiences identity diffusion and uncertainty that are markers of the negative vector of the personal crisis overcoming.

The belief structure of people who have already experienced an individual crisis is significantly different from the "crisis" structure itself. For such individuals the feelings of trust to the outside world

and other people, self-reliance or its absence, if the crisis has ended with the disintegration of the individual, are of paramount importance. Trust actualizes friendly perception and attitude to the world, other people and themselves. Similar beliefs encourage people to believe in natural coincidences and justice. Therefore, regarding their content, people who are experiencing an individual crisis and those who have already coped with it share are similar beliefs. Content interpretation of these beliefs enables us to identify the attitudes underlying them. They include attitude towards life e.g. positive / negative, optimistic / pessimistic, ability to control life situations, confidence / inability to control, insecurity; attitude towards other people e.g. positive / negative, trust / distrust; attitude towards oneself e.g. negative / positive , acceptance, self-worth / non-acceptance, depreciation, congruence / diffusion.

5. CONCLUSION

In the process of an individual crisis experiencing, beliefs that are associated with optimism, trust, confidence, faith in justice, self-worth, and determine an integrative vector of personal development play the most significant role. In a non-crisis situation, beliefs related to trust, recognition and acceptance of coincidences in life, optimistic vision of the future, belief in the laws of justice, luck and self-control determine our attitudes towards the world, people, and ourselves. It is worth emphasizing that our attitude towards friendly environment and the world as a whole is of a paramount importance in the experience structure of people undergoing crisis, but this attitude loses its relevance in the post-crisis period. However, the latter period beliefs are under significant influence of the attitude of "acceptance of chances and luck". These attitudes can be seen as basic ones as they make up the content basis of personal beliefs and perform an adaptive function.

To conclude, experiencing a crisis is a form of human activity aimed at overcoming a critical situation and reaching a positive or negative vector in order to get to a new level of personality development. The former one provides people with new resources and experience integrated into the identity structure, while the latter one brings on fragmentation and destructive changes that reduce personal resilience. Experiencing an individual crisis at the cognitive level deals with changes, in particular the content of beliefs changes; and beliefs are defined as cognitive structures and schemes that structure experience and determine human behavior. Beliefs can be of an integrative and disintegrative nature, they determine either a positive, constructive way out of the crisis or a negative, destructive one. The conducted theoretical analysis confirms the hypothesis that there exist basic beliefs that determine the way out of an individual crisis and perform an adaptive function. The content of beliefs determines either the disintegrative or integrative vector of personality development during the crisis, as well as reflects the system of individual attitudes towards the world, other people and oneself. The actualization of attitudes of trust in the world, other people, and oneself, optimism and a sense of self-worth are among the most stable, basic characteristics of personal beliefs, which serve as a resource in overcoming the crisis.

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Address: Larysa Zahrai, Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University, 57 Shevchenko St., Ivano-Frankivsk, 76025 Ukraine.
E-mail: larysa.zahrai@pnu.edu.ua

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Заграй Лариса. Особистісна криза: динаміка базових переживань. *Журнал Прикарпатського університету імені Василя Стефаника*, **8** (2) (2021), 100–107.

У статті розкривається проблема пошуку загальних, незалежних від індивідуальних особливостей, механізмів переживання особистісної кризи. Базові переконання розглядаються як найбільш стійкі утворення свідомості, які є мотивами поведінки людини й визначають її ставлення до різних сфер дійсності, є складовими світогляду особистості та є важливим ресурсом у подоланні особистісної кризи. Мета статті полягає у розкритті за допомогою теоретичного аналізу ролі базових переконань у процесі переживання особистісної кризи, визначенні змістової специфіки установок при інтегративному чи дезінтегративному векторі розвитку кризової ситуації.

Особистісна криза трактується як стан, у якому перебуває людина, що її переживає, і який детермінує її поведінку; як вираження глибинних особистісних смислів, які проявляються на різних рівнях психіки: несвідомому, свідомому і надсвідомому. Переживання кризи розглядається як форма активності людини, спрямована на подолання критичної ситуації та вихід при позитивному векторі на новий рівень розвитку особистості. Переживання психічної дезінтеграції/інтеграції відбувається на емоційному, когнітивному та поведінковому рівнях. Визначено, що переживання особистісної кризи на когнітивному рівні торкаються змін змісту переконань, які є когнітивними структурами, схемами,

структуруючими досвід і визначаючими поведінку людини. Окреслено інтегративні та дезінтегративні переконання на основі змістового аналізу. Зміст переконань визначає дезінтегративний чи інтегративний вектор розвитку особистості у період кризи, і відбиває систему установок індивіда щодо світу, інших людей та себе. Актуалізація установок довіри до світу, до інших людей, до себе, оптимізм і відчуття самоцінності є найбільш стійкими, базовими характеристиками переконань особистості, які виконують функцію ресурсу у подоланні кризи.

За результатами теоретичного аналізу визначено базові переконання: оптимізм, довіра до світу, до інших людей, впевненість, віра у справедливість, відчуття самоцінності, які визначають інтегративний вектор розвитку особистості, детермінують вихід із особистісної кризи і виконують адаптаційну функцію.

Ключові слова: криза, особистісна криза, базові переконання, когнітивні схеми, дезінтегративні, інтегративні переживання кризи.