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AmurCon 2021: International Scientific Conference**EARLY MALADAPTIVE SCHEMA AND COPING STRATEGIES  
OF WOMEN PURSUING WEIGHT LOSS**Aleksander K. Samoylichenko (a)\*, Irina I. Cheremiskina (b)  
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Gogolya St., Vladivostok, Russia, irina-cheremiski@mail.ru**Abstract**

The article sums up the results of an empirical study of restrictive eating behaviour, which is relevant to both medical and psychological practice. The practical application of this data lies primarily within the young women to whom this problem is the most common. The main idea of the study, which is presented in this article, was to assess the extent to which certain types of different types of maladaptive schemes and strategies were able to influence the behaviour of women who practised different methods of weight correction, in particular: restrictive eating behaviour and physical exercise. The data obtained can become the basis for the development of more conscious strategies of assistance to people within the framework of a new integrative approach - «scheme-therapy». As a result, significant differences between the comparison groups over the parameters studied have been identified and significant relationships between them have been found that are specific to each group. In women practising physical exercise as a method of weight correction, a scheme of «rigid standards» is expressed in connection with the strategies of «self-control» and «taking responsibility», which can manifest in constant dissatisfaction with themselves and excessive tension. For women practising diets as a method of weight correction, there is a «punitiveness» associated with the «lack of self-control», which can induce impulsive behaviour and reduce the probability of achieving the goals set within the framework of restrictive food behaviour.

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## 1. Introduction

In Russia increasingly popular movements, the main idea of which is to protect women from rigid social standards of beauty, such as body-positive, bodysuit neutral, are designed to prevent body shaming. Despite the rapid spread of these ideas, traditionally women's attention has been focused on caring for their bodies. The basis for such behaviour can be seen as information stereotyping, which is accepted as the norm by different generations of women. It is fashionable to care for one's own body, its physical form, which can have positive consequences in terms of health, but excessive exercise, total control of nutrition can also have opposite effects, addictions, eating disorders and health problems. The search for causes and the description of mechanisms of excessive interest in caring for one's own body, connected primarily with the desire for control and weight reduction, is a topical problem of psychology. Since the frequency of eating disorders is constantly increasing abroad, similar statistics are not yet available in Russia, but psychologists note increasing requests on this problem. Empirical evidence will help build more informed strategies to help people who seek help from psychologists, including in the modern integrative approach of circuit therapy.

## 2. Problem Statement

Early Maladaptive Schemes (EMS) are a psychological construct that includes a person's conception of himself, the world and others, a stable set of memories, emotions, beliefs and bodily experiences that were formed in childhood and evolved throughout life. Early childhood experiences play an important role in shaping individuals, making decisions about the world around and for themselves, and interpreting life experiences (Kabanova et al., 2018). Over-satisfaction and under-responsiveness also influence the formation of EMS. At the same time, if in childhood this complex of psychological constructions contributes to the adaptation and even survival of the child, in adult life the person suffers an adaptation defect due to distorted adaptation mechanisms. Maladaptive schemes become an obstacle to satisfying needs, hamper harmonious relations with oneself and with others, and affect other areas of human life, professional, sexual and social. The activation of the disadaptive scheme of an adult is accompanied by negative emotions that are difficult or even impossible to control, such condition is called the mode of operation of early children's circuits (Arntz, 2016). The direction of psychotherapy aimed at correcting the early disadaptive circuits has received the name «Scheme-therapy».

J. Yang, the author of the treatment scheme concept, based on his professional psychotherapeutic experience, argues that all individuals, including children, have early, maladaptive patterns. J. Young, A. Arntz, J. Farrell, J. Klosko, A. Shaw worked on the concept of early, inappropriate circuits and identified 18 EMSs that were divided into groups related to needs that were not met in childhood (as cited in Kadyrov & Mironenko, 2017).

Russian psychology studies early non-adaptive schemes of P.M. Kasyanik, M.V. Galimzyanov and E.V. Romanov (as cited in Tikhomirova, 2015). The data obtained by these authors suggest that when RDS is activated, individuals develop states called modes - these are emotional behavioural responses. These reactions are directly related to dysfunctional coping strategies. The authors have shown

that persons seeking help for life-related difficulties show a high degree of early dissatisfaction patterns, that is why research into the relationship between psychological well-being and early maladaptive patterns is currently relevant.

The correlation of early maladaptive schemes with various factors of their origin, such as standard of living, family scenarios, activities, and the presence of siblings are the basis of many scientific works.

The research of Tikhomirova (2015) showed the interrelationship of individual schemes with psychological well-being, vitality and level of existential filling among participants from Russia and France. It has also been found that certain maladaptive schemes have a negative impact on a person's well-being, the patterns are most pronounced at a young age and become less pronounced over the years, indicating that they can be controlled and compensated.

Romanova (2013) has studied the peculiarities of adult behaviour in conflict situations in the family in connection with subjective experiences of childhood. As a result, it was found that the more well-off adults perceive the relationship with their parents, the less pronounced their EMS and that individual-specific protective behaviour in conflict are associated with several EMS, formed as a result of subjective experiences regarding the relationship with parents.

Mikhalskiy (2016) identified the relationship between a person's personal experience, accumulated experience and behavioural strategies, as well as the fact that building the future is directly dependent on cognitive patterns that influence behaviour prediction and decision-making.

The analysis of scientific data shows that interest in the topic of early maladaptive schemes is quite high in modern psychology. This may be due to a general interest in a laugh-oriented approach as a promising method for identifying and correcting personality disorders. Each scheme has at its core one of the basic needs for healthy personal development. When activated, the scheme causes extremely negative feelings and emotions, distorting behaviour patterns. The work of the approach is to identify the most pronounced patterns that cause human disadaptation and correct them by improving adaptation. The approach is short-term and aims to develop specific mechanisms. It is worth noting that studies of the relationship between early maladaptive patterns and behavioural relationships are rare, one such study is the relationship between early maladaptive and eating disorders.

A.Y. Kovtunenکو, A.I. Erzin, in a study of dietary respondents, found the predominance of the schemes «rigid standards», «search for approval», «insufficient self-control», «abandonment», «grandiosity», also they suggested that the socially acceptable image of the «thin body» Is an extremely high standard for girls, an ideal they seek to achieve to avoid internal criticism, acceptance and acceptance of others at the cost of their genuine food needs (as cited in Smyshlyaeva & Galimzyanova, 2016).

Tendencies towards food addiction have been associated with such schemes as «social exclusion», «defectiveness/modesty», «search for approval», «abandonment/instability», «rigid standards/pickiness», «insufficiency of self-control» by such authors as D. Blisset, S. Farrow, G. Rietmayer and P. Tremley (as cited in Sicilia et al., 2021).

## **2.1. Stress in young women's lives and coping strategies**

Stress and the resulting sense of well-being constitute a significant challenge to modern society. Some authors consider adherence to social standards of beauty to be a significant cause of stress in young women. Perfect body images in young people «are constructed» and «cultivated» using popular culture (music, films, books), mass media, medical or political ideologies, social networks (Eldén & Anving, 2019; Thomas et al., 2021; Wright et al., 2006). Young women of the 21st century, as indicated (Carrie, 2019) «make themselves», and create themselves on the ideal models of what it means to be a woman (Thomas et al., 2021). Similarly, A. Petersen and D. Lutton (as cited in Carrie, 2019; Lupton, 2020) define the ideal images of women as «responsible» and «caring» about their health, physical attractiveness, slender, and keeping young.

The cooperative behaviour of Folkman and Lazarus (1988) is the effort of an individual to control the internal and external demands he faces. In their work, the authors described eight coping strategies, which can be divided into problem-oriented and emotionally oriented coping. An important characteristic of coping strategies is their effectiveness, which is linked to the success of copying tasks. R. Lazarus and F. Cohen emphasize the following main tasks of copying: to reduce the negative impact of circumstances; to adapt or restructure a life situation; to maintain a positive I-concept; to maintain an emotional balance; Maintaining relationships with others (as cited in Folkman & Lazarus, 1991). In turn, taking into account the reasons of stress experienced by young women, it is possible to say that the search for social approval and social support that women can get largely due to the formation of their own body «on a model» of social norms, which are cultivated in the media and social media, may themselves be major factors in food-restrictive behaviour is.

## **2.2. Food restrictive behaviour as a form of stress management**

Food behaviour refers to the value of food, which forms a food stereotype that includes attitudes, habits and emotions associated with food (Eating disorders., 2021). Restrictive eating behaviour is the result of an independent desire to get rid of excess weight. It can manifest itself in excessive self-restraint associated with food and a desire to follow overly strict diets. In the context of a diet based on rigid diets, there is an emotional instability called dietary depression. Dietary depression leads to a brief withdrawal from the diet and a further bout of overeating. Such an episode is often accompanied by subsequent guilt and diminished self-esteem (Malkina-Pykh, 2020). Malkina-Pykh (2020) writes that dieting has become more popular over the last 30 years, especially in Western society among young women. A recent study by Russian authors Kovtunencko and Erzin (2003) showed that psychological problems lie at the heart of the desire to lose weight. Such dysfunctional behaviour begins to develop in childhood and the most disadaptive form as a result of stress is already evident in the adult. The tendency to sacrifice oneself to others, created by self-doubt, over time causes young girls to express negative emotions that lead to increased emotional stress, are difficult to control and in turn, they affect their body satisfaction.

## **3. Research Questions**

A theoretical review of the problem allows for the identification of solutions through empirical research. One of the assumptions that we wanted to test was the relationship between early maladaptive

patterns and coping strategies. This issue has not yet been sufficiently explored and the data obtained may expand theoretical insights into early disruptive patterns and their significance in disruptive behaviour. We have also addressed the issue of differences in the types of early maladaptive schemes and coping strategies for women who have different weight adjustment practices. As shown above, food-restrictive behaviours often have a negative impact on women's health, the early dysfunctional patterns identified will help to make the work of the general practitioner more targeted at the practical level.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the work was to study and describe early, inappropriate patterns and strategies of coping behaviour in women who practice different ways of correcting weight. As already indicated, the focus of the study was on early, maladaptive patterns and coping strategies. A total of 118 people took part in the study, a so-called one-stop study was conducted among the participants of the women's forum, a group in which the problems of excess weight were discussed, the survey was conducted remotely, using Google forms. The empirical sample was 80 people, all women between 22 and 35 years of age, of whom 39 practise diet-related weight reduction and 41 practise physical exercise as a method of weight reduction. A simple randomized selection was used as a sampling method, the main criteria being the age of the participants and their method of weight correction. The remaining 38 people were not included in the empirical group, as they said they were satisfied with their weight, while others used surgical methods, physiotherapeutic methods and medicinal methods to reduce weight, which prevented them from being assigned to the control group due to individual data diversity.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The empirical study was organized by us on the type of comparative, that is, the results allow us to compare two or more samples on the parameters of interest, the comparative study allows us to see the specific characteristics of these groups. For an objective organization of a comparative study, it is necessary to choose the right criterion, so that the compared groups differ exactly on it and other, additional factors are also taken into account. In our study, we compare early maladaptive patterns and coping strategies of two independent samples of women practising different weight-adjusting techniques, namely diet and physical exercise. The comparative method also makes it possible to establish relationships between psychic research. We are interested in the relationship between early maladaptive patterns and coping strategies for women who practice different ways of correcting weight.

The main empirical method by which data were collected was psychodiagnostic. The main important feature of this method is its estimation, this method allows to give a quantitative and qualitative characterization of the subject matter studied.

The questionnaire used in the study provided information on the age of the respondents, as we had the task of forming a homogeneous sample of women. Other questions in the questionnaire related to the satisfaction of the respondents with their own body and weight and how they use weight correction. The data obtained were also used by us to monitor the homogeneity of the sample and to identify additional factors that could supplement the data.

In the study were used: A questionnaire of Young J. Yang YSQS3 (Young scheme questionnaire) Disadaptive schemes in the adaptation of P.M. Kasyanik and E.V. Romanova (as cited in Romanova, 2013). The questionnaire consists of 90 statements describing the various manifestations of the disabling schemes. As well as the method «Ways of controlling behaviour» R. Lazarus, S. Folkman in adaptation L.I. Wasserman (as cited in Bityutskaya, 2015). The methodology is intended to define the leading strategies of the leading behaviour of the individual. U Mann-Whitney and C. Spearman rank correlation were used for statistical data processing.

## 6. Findings

A statistical analysis of the results of the expression of early maladaptive patterns in the groups studied shows that at the level of statistical significance 0.01 there are significant differences between women using physical exercise as a means of weight correction and women, using Punitivity and Rigid Standards diets for these purposes, and Lack of self-control and Social Exclusion at the level of 0.05 on scales.

For women using physical exercise as a method of weight correction, a significantly higher level of severity of such early disruptive schemes as rigid standards and social exclusion has been identified. Note that these schemes are formed based on frustration with the need for secure attachment, spontaneity and play. These women are more inclined to maintain distance in social groups, they are often convinced that they are not like others and they simply have difficulty finding similar people, they have very high goals, so-called perfectionism, The negative aspect in the behaviour of women with this scheme is their constant dissatisfaction with themselves, they rarely experience positive emotions, but negative, including guilt, on the contrary often. Generally speaking, if these personality traits are related to the sports of these women, it can be said that they correspond, indeed it is possible to engage in physical exercise and sports is a compensatory action that gives support to the idea of moving towards an ideal, to the perfect weight and body in particular.

For women practising diet as a method of weight correction, higher rates are noticeable in such early, unsuitable patterns as lack of self-control and punctuality. Therefore, it is difficult for them to control their feelings and desires, the expression of this scheme is often connected with various abuses of food, alcohol. This pattern is evolving based on frustration with the need for realistic boundaries and self-control. However, these women are also more likely to be punctual, meaning that they are constantly self-incriminating and feel guilty, which is not a very favourable background for strict observance of diets.

The obtained data on the method of «Methods of controlling behaviour» R. Lazarus, S. Folkman in the adaptation of L.I. Wasserman (as cited in Bityutskaya, 2015) in two groups of respondents were also analysed for differences, the results allow to say that there are significant differences between women, practising physical exercise as a method of weight correction and women practising diets as a way of adjusting the weight on the «self-control» scale at the level of 0.01 and on the scales of «distancing», «search for social support» and «running-avoiding» at the level of statistical significance 0.05. An analysis of the differences found shows that women who use sports as a means of weight reduction are less likely to seek social support in times of stress, I mean, they're less stressed about interacting with other people, avoiding asking for advice and sharing their experiences with others. They are more likely

to reduce the emotional significance of the problem, distance themselves from it, devalue it, and use humour and rationalisation as ways of distancing and devaluing it. They seek to control their emotions and behaviour with high restraint.

Women who practice diet as a means of weight correction are less able to control their experiences in situations of stress, tend to deny and ignore the problem, and avoid actions to resolve the difficulties.

We then made a correlation analysis between the indicators of early, inappropriate patterns and coping strategies for women from different groups studied.

The obtained data show that in the group of women practising physical exercise as a method of weight correction, a positive correlation of average force at a value of 0.01 was found between the early disadaptive scheme of «rigid standards» and the strategy of co-acting behaviour «self-control», as well as a weak positive relationship at the level of statistical significance 0.01 between the early disadaptive scheme of «rigid standards» and the strategy of co-acting behaviour «taking responsibility».

So, it can be assumed that the frustration-driven scheme of spontaneity and gameplay implies a marked perfectionism, The high expectations of these women in adulthood are expressed in a situation of stress as total control over their feelings and emotions, taking responsibility for what is happening to them. In general, women in this group appear to be low-emotional, controlling and guilty of their failures.

In the group of women practising diets as a method of weight correction a negative correlation of average force at a value of 0.05 between the early dis-adaptive scheme «lack of self-control» and the strategy of controlling behaviour «self-control» as well as a weak positive relationship at the level of statistical significance 0.05 between the early disadaptive scheme «punctuality» and the strategy of controlling behaviour «escape-avoidance». Thus, a childhood-based, frustrated need for realistic boundaries and self-control, manifested in the difficulty of controlling one's behaviour in an adult situation of stress, also manifests itself in the vivid experiences of disruptive productive activities. Early dissatisfaction scheme «punctuality» is formed based on the frustration of the need for spontaneity and play, in adulthood it can manifest itself in avoiding problems in a stressful situation, avoiding it.

## 7. Conclusion

For women practising physical exercise as a method of weight correction, such early disadaptive schemes as «rigid standards» and «social exclusion» predominate that is, they prefer not to have close interpersonal contact with other people and follow high standards in their behaviour. Such schemes are likely the reason for improving one's own body through physical exercise, the main negative consequence of the domination of this scheme is constant dissatisfaction, which leads to excessive tension. The connection of «rigid standards» with strategies of «self-control» and «taking responsibility» has been identified. So, these women, under stress, are prone to self-incrimination and emotional control. Practical recommendations include the need for these women to increase their use of copies, as the existing copies may lead to psychosomatic disorders. Women practising diet as a method of weight correction are characterized by the predominance of such early disadaptive schemes as «lack of self-control» and «punitiveness», that is, these women have difficulty controlling their behaviour, which leads to frequent attacks of guilt and self-incrimination. The scheme has been linked to a copy showing that these women, under stress, are losing control and are unable to cope with obstacles. Self-incrimination tendencies result

in these women abandoning their stressful activities, choosing to overlook difficulties and avoid solutions.

The correlations obtained are correlated with the available scientific evidence presented in the theoretical part of our work, and indeed the patterns learned from early childhood experience are reflected in appropriate stress management strategies as adults. It can be noted that the strategists of socialisation can choose consciously, expanding their repertoire thereby increasing adaptive behaviour, therefore, understanding the reasons for choosing sub-optimal strategies of behaviour can be a first step towards changing one's behaviour in situations of stress.

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