

# IDENTIFICATION OF PECULIARITIES OF REACTIVE ANXIETY EXPERIENCED BY PROFESSIONALS OF SOCIOEDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES, EMPLOYING QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE METHODS

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## **Abstract**

The article deals with peculiarities of the reactive anxiety state of professionals of socioeducational activities (social pedagogues and social workers). Spielberger's and Chanin's personal anxiety scale, illustrating anxiety peculiarities experienced by these professionals, is given. Evaluating peculiarities of these professionals' reactive anxiety, methods of descriptive mathematical statistics, multidimensional statistics (factor analysis) were used, the method of qualitative research semi-structured interview, content analysis were also applied. It was found that the majority of socioeducational activity professionals experienced mild reactive anxiety, about one third of respondents felt moderate reactive anxiety and a small part, severe reactive anxiety. Such state of respondents enables to avoid big anxiety and psychosomatic disorders.

**Key words:** *anxiety, state of anxiety, reactive anxiety, professionals of socioeducational activities.*

## **Introduction**

Many people quite often experience states of stress and anxiety. It is impossible to avoid them fully. According to the Dictionary of Psychology (1993), there exists basic anxiety, which is determined by negative childhood experience in the first family; it manifests itself by an intensive feeling of insecurity, which can influence specialists' professional activities. Interpersonal and internal anxiety of the group are interrelated and can make harmful pressure on professionals' individual and team achievements. According to these authors, there are two types of anxiety: as a reactive state and as a personality's constant feature; thus, there is reactive and personal anxiety, which expressed at a high level also influences the specialist's professional activity. Thus, in spite of the fact what kind of anxiety the person experiences, if it is of higher than moderate level, the specialist's professional activities will inevitably suffer in terms of quality.

Based on the emotions differentiation theory, anxiety is a combination of several emotions (fear, interest-excitement, guilt, sadness-pain, shame, anger, etc. (The Dictionary of Psychology, 1993). Beck (2008) states that mild restlessness mobilises the person's powers for activity. Continuous anxiety can turn into the feature of a personality – restlessness (Изард, 2000, Beck, 2008). Severely experienced anxiety distorts the perception of reality: flexibility of thinking, will, conscious behaviour control weaken. Therefore, severely experienced anxiety can also perform the destroying function of the person's interaction with the environment.

The analysis and evaluation of the anxiety state is not a frequent research subject among Lithuanian researchers. School related anxiety of learners is slightly more often analysed (Aramavičiūtė, 2004; Martišauskienė, 2004; Tulickas, Zambacevičienė, 2004; Dagienė, 2006; Nasvytienė, Balnionytė, 2006; Starkuvienė, 2006; Milušauskienė, Zambacevičienė, Dapkevičienė, 2008; Kepalaitė, 2011 et al.) as well as its reasons, compared to anxiety experienced by other social groups. There are also searches for links between anxiety and depression (Germanavičius, 2006; Stanionytė, 2008; Gelumbauskienė, 2009) or researches on episodic anxiety related to life quality (Balevičiūtė, 2007; Balsevičius, 2010). Researches on experiencing anxiety in professional activities are also quite rare and solitary (Alifanovienė, Vaitkevičienė, 2007; Alifanovienė, Vaitkevičienė, Lučinskaitė 2011, Kepalaitė, 2011; Loikienė, 2007; Žydžiūnaitė, Bubnys, Mažuolytė, Mikelskienė, 2009).

**Research subject:** peculiarities of reactive anxiety experienced by professionals of socioeducational activities (social pedagogues and social workers) in their professional activities.

**Research aim:** to identify peculiarities of reactive anxiety experienced by professionals of socioeducational activities (social pedagogues and social workers).

**Research objectives:**

- To establish the internal consistency coefficient of Spielberger's, Chanin's reactive anxiety scale.
- To identify levels of reactive anxiety experienced by professionals of socioeducational activities.
- To identify professional situations when reactive anxiety is experienced by surveyed professionals.

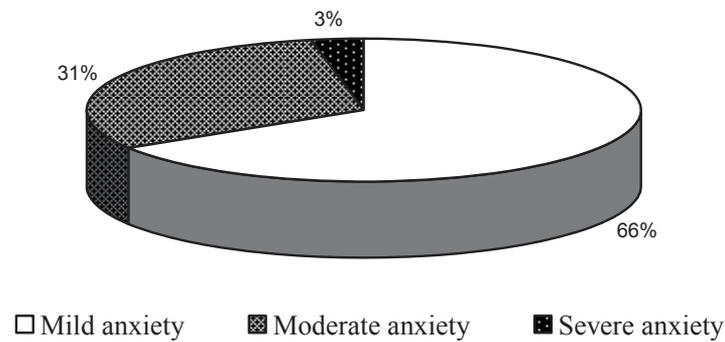
**Research methods:** a questionnaire survey, using a two-part instrument – a questionnaire: the first part contains seven questions to find out demographic data and the second, Spielberger's, Chanin's self-assessment scales with questions representing reactive anxiety. To analyse quantitative research data, statistical methods were used (descriptive mathematical statistics: frequencies (N), percentages (%), means (M), multi-dimensional statistics (factor analysis). During the qualitative in-depth semi-structured interview (according to different diagnostic areas) the situations arousing anxiety in professional activities were identified.

**Participants of the research (respondents):** the qualitative research was attended by 6 respondents, the quantitative, by 113 respondents. Respondents of both researches were social pedagogues and social workers working in different Lithuanian educational, treatment and child care institutions. There were 108 women and 5 men, the average age of the respondents was 37,7. The respondents were selected using targeted selection, this was determined by the research aim. The main selection criteria were social pedagogue's, social worker's professional qualification.

**Peculiarities of Reactive Anxiety, Experienced by Professionals of Socioeducational Activities**

The experienced state of reactive anxiety reflects the person's self-feeling at the present moment. Райгородский (1998) states that reactive anxiety manifests itself by tension,

nervousness, restlessness. It is important that severe reactive anxiety causes attention disorders, subtle coordination disorders and psychosomatic disorders.



**Figure 1.** Intensity Peculiarities of Reactive Anxiety Experienced by Surveyed Professionals

The structure of variables of reactive anxiety consists of 17 statements. Factorisation of these statements was sufficiently meaningful; this enabled to discover the structure of the surveyed phenomenon. These 17 empirical manifestations (statements) were generalised by two factor models (other variables of reactive anxiety were rejected due to too low weight of test items (L) (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Factor Analysis Data of the Reactive Anxiety Scale of Professionals of Socioeducational Activities (N=113)

Name of the factor	Initial statements	Weight of the test item, L	Item to total correlation, r/itt	KMO	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Descriptive variance of the factor, %
High mental tension at the present moment (M = 1,31)	<i>I am nervous</i>	0,767	0,73	0,85	0,88	24,79
	<i>I am excited</i>	0,746	0,71			
	<i>I am tense</i>	0,709	0,65			
	<i>I feel sore</i>	0,698	0,69			
	<i>I am very excited</i>	0,698	0,65			
	<i>I can't find a place for myself</i>	0,695	0,61			
	<i>I am too excited and feel bad</i>	0,679	0,63			
	<i>I am worried</i>	0,568	0,59			
Experiencing positive emotional state at the present moment (M = 2,40)	<i>I am pleased</i>	0,791	0,77		0,87	24,04
	<i>It is fun for me</i>	0,765	0,73			
	<i>I feel internal satisfaction</i>	0,763	0,69			
	<i>I am satisfied</i>	0,747	0,73			
	<i>I am self-confident</i>	0,731	0,68			
	<i>I feel at ease</i>	0,577	0,58			
	<i>I am calm</i>	0,507	0,51			
	<i>I don't feel tension, I am not inhibited</i>	0,462	0,43			
	<i>I fell having had a rest</i>	0,448	0,40			

The obtained data show that two factors showed up: *high mental tension at the present moment* and *experiencing the positive emotional state at the present moment*.

The statistical link of statements with factors and grouping inside them from the interpretation standpoint is theoretically meaningful. It should be noted that the obtained correlations of scores of empirical manifestations (variables/statements) with extracted factors were quite high. Descriptive power (variance) of factors fluctuates between 24,04 and 24,79 per cent. Suitability of the matrix for factor analysis is proved by *Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin* (KMO) coefficient which is quite high in this case (0,85). Internal consistency of solitary factors, evaluated using *Cronbach's alpha* coefficient, fluctuates from 0,87 to 0,88; therefore, all factors are sufficiently homogenous.

The first factor discloses that the respondents do not experience reactive anxiety at the present moment ( $M = 1,31$ ). They quite unanimously answered the statements that indicate that specialists do not experience high mental tension at the present moment. The second factor indicates that they are characterised by experiencing positive emotional state at the present moment ( $M = 2,40$ ). It is important to note here that reactive anxiety leads to personal anxiety, which indicates the personality's inclination to perceive the majority of situations as potentially threatening, which in the perspective can determine psychosomatic sicknesses or diseases, emotional instability and neurotic "explosions". Therefore, the obtained data enable to assume that experiencing positive emotions carries out the function of prevention of personal anxiety whilst the respondents experiencing these emotions should not be threatened by formation of severe personal anxiety.

### **Professional Situations of Specialists of Socioeducational Activities, which Cause Anxiety**

During the research it was sought to identify situations, occurring in social pedagogues' and social workers' ( $N=6$ ) professional activities, which cause anxiety. To do this, qualitative in-depth research, employing semi-structured interview was applied. Analysing situations of specialists' professional activities and events that can cause anxiety, six qualitative categories showed up (See Table 2):

- 1) Non-productive dialogue with pupils' parents and teachers
- 2) Exploitation of teachers (colleagues), poor flexibility
- 3) Anxiety due to inability to solve a problem and lack of time
- 4) Lack of professional experience and adaptation difficulties in the new working place
- 5) Naming of the social pedagogue's profession as of one that arouses anxiety
- 6) Anxiety due to the necessity to fill a large amount of documentation

**Table 2.** Situations in Professional Activities, Causing Anxiety ( $N=6$ )

Category	Subcategory	Examples of empirical statements	Number of statements
Non-productive dialogue with pupils' parents and teachers	Resistance of children's parents to provided information	"...they say their opinion, justify their version ...", "...you try for the person to give arguments, give your opinion based on facts...", "...this is the same as to speak with a television: you see the view or you hear but you can't make yourself understood....", "...parents do not acknowledge that most often problems come from the family, they think that it is the fault of the school..."	13

Non-productive dialogue with pupils' parents and teachers	Embarrassing communication with colleagues, learners' parents	"...it is even more difficult to say something to a close person about their child..", "...but the conversation is very complicated...", "...when somebody calls from some school, you know that the person calling is the one you find it difficult to communicate with ..."	10
	Lack of good-natured communication of pupils' parents	"...it is difficult to communicate with parents, there are parents with whom you can't speak and whom you can't visit at home,... "..."it is very difficult to say something about their child, you have to select words ...", "...the biggest anxiety is caused by meetings parents...", "...they come being livid..."	8
	Accusations of pupils' parents	"...in the autumn I was blamed by some parents that I talked to their daughter about taking somebody's thing ...", "...having returned home, she told parents that the social pedagogue called her a thief and blamed for theft ..."	3
Exploitation of teachers (colleagues), poor flexibility	Imposing of additional functions	"...teachers load with many functions...", "...teachers wish that the social pedagogue were a "plug", "...some contrive to ask me to do their work..."	6
	Rough colleagues' behaviour	"...also communication with parents is complicated...", "...senior teachers think that they deserve respect only due to their age despite their own rough behaviour ..."	6
	Hastening to perform duties	"...people are outraged, they don't understand how I could be sick for this time...", "...all hope that you will take and solve the problem in two days ..."	4
Anxiety due to inability to solve a problem and lack of time	Anxiety due to inability to help	"...anxiety is caused by perception that I can't help that pupil the way I'd like to...", "...it is difficult to see how the situation isn't improving ...", "...fighting with difficulties or problems seem like fight with windmills..."	8
	Non-performance of work on time	"...I can't do something on time...", "...I start worrying if I feel that I don't manage to do things on time ..."	3
	High occupation	"...I don't have time to sit down and put facts that I have in places and I am already worried...", "...lack of time to spare individual attention to children ..."	3
Lack of professional experience and adaptation difficulties in the new working place	Importance of years of service (experience)	"...the beginning of work, career is the most difficult...", "...this is how it was in the first year and this is how I lived ...", "... you have to get used to ...", "...lack of experience at work ..."	4
	Changing a workplace	"...finding a new job...", "...period of adaptation..."	2

Continued Table 2

Naming of the social pedagogue's profession as of one that arouses anxiety	Social pedagogue's speciality as a solution of never-ending problems	<i>"...this is a profession which you can work day and night", "...to think about that, solve these problems...", "...this could be endless work..."</i>	4
	Evaluation of the profession as the one that influences increased anxiety	<i>"...making influence on increased anxiety...", "forcing to be anxious...", "...in my opinion, the social pedagogue's profession is difficult...", "...harmful for psychological and physical health".</i>	4
Anxiety due to the necessity to fill a large amount of documentation	Performance of formal works	<i>"...this doesn't mean that I don't feel anxiety if I have to draw up some plan...", "filling various documents and their expected checking arouses strong anxiety...", "it is scary to miss something..."</i>	3

Analysing categories and their ratings, it shows up that mostly anxiety of specialists of socioeducational activities is caused by the non-productive dialogue between the pupils' parents and teachers. During the interview the respondents used to underline that communication in a broad sense (with colleagues, administration) and especially communication with pupils' parents was a particularly difficult process and aroused anxiety. The still tenacious opinion is that social pedagogues' learners come from asocial families, families which do not look after their children and are inclined to act inappropriately, etc., but specialists' practical experience shows that quite often the social pedagogue educates children who from the first glance seem to be grown in respectable families but maybe due to high parents' occupation and non-observance of fundamental values they have forgotten children and due to that children rebel in schools and sometimes do not know socially acceptable communication and behaviour. For such parents the child's visits to social skills lessons seem to degrade dignity, humiliate. They resist that, do not accept information given about the child's inappropriate behaviour. Quite many of them still do not understand what a social pedagogue is and what his/her functions are. The worst thing in this situation is that it is difficult to invite such parents to communicate and cooperate. In such cases it becomes much more difficult to help the learner and sometimes even impossible. The most complicated thing is that parents look at the specialist as at the enemy and not as an assistant. This way in the presence of the child the specialist's authority is degraded and it is likely that later it will be difficult to communicate and educate the child.

Constant communication is also named among important situations arousing anxiety. The community of the education institution wants to see the social pedagogue kindly disposed, always ready to help, nicely communicating, but learners, colleagues and parents not always come being favourably disposed. It falls to communicate with many different people, empathise with everyone's situation, there are cases when social pedagogues meet aggressive and provocative persons, but it is necessary to maintain business-like well-wishing relationships with them too, that is why such communication really arouses anxiety and tires specialists of socioeducational activities.

Colleagues' professional exploitation, insufficient flexibility, insufficient perception of social pedagogues' or employees' activities are also named as factors causing anxiety. It is likely that some namely do not want to understand this. Quite often in conflict situations between pupils and teachers it happens that in the situation both the learner and the teacher are not right. Then it becomes really complicated for professionals of socioeducational activities to follow professional ethics and solve social problems.

Due to the existing sufficiently liberal content, functions, regulation of professional roles of social pedagogues (Social Pedagogues' Qualification Requirements, 2001, Regulations of Provision of Social Pedagogical Support, 2004, Description of the Order of Provision of Social Pedagogical Support, 2011) in the documents of the Ministry of Science and Education, attribution of additional functions for social pedagogues is a quite frequently encountered problem. The community of educational institutions (subject teachers, form tutors, administration representatives) quite often thinks that the social pedagogue, who has no lessons, can substitute for them any time and solve all social-educational situations.

### Conclusions

1. Factor analysis of the data of anxiety experienced by socioeducational activity specialists disclosed that internal consistency coefficient of Spielberger's, Chanin's reactive anxiety scale was high; therefore, it can be stated that the instrument employed enabled to collect reliable data about social pedagogues' and social workers' emotional state.
2. Research data disclose that during the research the majority of respondents experienced mild reactive anxiety. Therefore, it can be stated that the research procedure did not cause anxiety and tension for the majority of respondents. Severe level of reactive anxiety was experienced by a very small part of respondents; during the research they were nervous, restless.
3. Analysing interview data, it was found that the situations that aroused anxiety to professionals in their professional activities were as follows: non-productive, often adverse dialogue of social pedagogues or social workers and teachers, parents, administration; lack of communication; embarrassing social situations of learners and their families and wideness of social pedagogues' activity content and functions. These are the most often named situations arousing the state of anxiety, which hinder specialists' productive work.

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