

SOCIAL NEUROTICISM AND DEFERRED LIFE SYNDROME

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the concept of social neuroticism in the context of the deferred life syndrome. The phenomenon of social neuroticism is presented through socio-psychological characteristics that describe the individual's attitude to reality, as well as the degree of idealization of the future. It is noted that a characteristic feature of the phenomenon of social neuroticism is the deferred life syndrome and a low level of life satisfaction. An analysis of theoretical approaches that reveal the essence of social neuroticism is carried out. The severity of personality neuroticism and its correlation with the deferred life syndrome are analyzed empirically. The results of the study are presented for different age and gender groups of respondents. The study emphasizes the relevance of studying the phenomenon of social neuroticism and focuses the attention of psychologists on the social side of the phenomenon under study.

Keywords: social neuroticism, deferred life syndrome, life expectations, life satisfaction, psychological health.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of "social neuroticism" in modern psychological science is becoming increasingly important and meaningful. The relevance of the study of this phenomenon is expressed in modern transformational socio-psychological processes, covering the most diverse aspects of social life. In the era of globalization changes, it is difficult for a person to adapt and cope with changing social processes in society, identify themselves in a social group and develop certain scenarios of life strategy. In scientific publications, studies of neuroticism are increasingly common, which acquire not only psychological significance, but also social weight and importance. It is no secret that at present, psychological research in the field of studying personality neuroticism has begun to pay increasing attention to the social component of this phenomenon. The relevance of the study of this phenomenon is expressed in modern transformational socio-psychological processes covering various aspects of social life. In this article, the phenomenon of neuroticism is presented in the socio-psychological aspect, such factors of this phenomenon as the syndrome of deferred life and low level of life satisfaction are revealed. The results of the study open up new opportunities for further study of the phenomenon of neuroticism and identification of socially induced factors of its manifestation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Various theorists and practitioners of psychological discipline have addressed the issues of socially induced neurotic phenomena. Freud made a great contribution to the study of the problems of social neuroticism, who studied socially conditioned manifestations of neuroticism from the point of view of psychoanalytic theory. Gradually, the concept of social neuroticism was supplemented by phenomenological characteristics that consider neurotic manifestations in the behavior of an individual from the standpoint of frustration in the search for the meaning of life and destructive social influences on a person's psychological health (Turiano et al., 2020; Widiger, Oltmanns, 2017; Wiebe et al., 2018). Some authors (Weiss, Deary, 2019; Quan et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2021) noted the relationship between social phenomena and disorders of the body's autonomic regulation, and the concept of neurosis or neuroticism itself was explained by a psychogenic reaction of the individual to social conflicts. The social component of neuroticism is closely related to unjustified social expectations and unrealized life goals. The psychosocial structure of neuroticism has been studied by psychologists, sociologists, and cultural scientists (Devereux, 1939; Lazarus, Folkman, 1984; Kostromina, et al, 2018; Skleinis, 2021). Horney's theoretical views were of particular importance for the development of the psychology of social neuroticism. Karen Horney understood neuroticism in the context of socially induced psychological processes. Therefore, Horney defined the neurotic personality in socio-cultural terms as changes in the personality structure under the influence of destructive social changes, such as wars, economic crises, and value transformations. As Horney notes, the state of social neuroticism occurs not because of the socio-economic and other transformations themselves, but because certain contradictions in society are exacerbated during these periods. Horney sees the main reason for the inconsistency in the preservation of previous social foundations and the parallel formation of new, often qualitatively different social norms and behavior patterns. An example of such contradiction is given, on the one hand, the Christian ideal of sacrifice and patience, and on the other, social expectations, consisting of the formation of a competitive personality striving for achievements and success. In essence, at the root of social neuroticism lies the discrepancy between the ideals and norms of behavior declared by society and reality, as well as with the needs of the individual and expectations of the future (Horney, 1937).

The problem of unfulfilled needs and unachieved goals leads researchers to the question of the subjective distinction between reality and life "postponed" for the future, projecting reality into the area of expectation of the future (Lapshov, 2014). In other words, the present and the future "change places" - the present is perceived as an indefinite series of expectations of the future, and the future takes on the meaning of reality, only not yet arrived (Cole, Berntsen, 2016). The present is perceived rather vaguely and indefinitely, and the future, on the contrary, is more clearly planned, presented in detail and emotionally colored. From this point of view, it becomes relevant to study the phenomenon of social neuroticism in the context of the syndrome of deferred life. The syndrome of deferred life is a poorly studied phenomenon. It is associated not only with the self-esteem of the individual, but also with the

assessment of the quality of life, both one's own and the lives of others (Volchenkova, Molchanova, 2019; Sharapova, Kutbiddinova, 2018; Alekhina, Kashirenkova, 2017; Windecker et all, 2016). Subjective comparison of the level of well-being and life comfort, as a rule, leads to an underestimation of the individual's self-esteem and dissatisfaction with the quality of life. Social ideals and standards of a prosperous life seem unattainable in the present, and a high level of life comfort is perceived as something that people around you have already achieved, but the person himself is not able to achieve at this period of life. Possible ways to achieve the desired social ideals are “postponed” for the future, while the current period of life becomes something secondary and less significant in relation to upcoming future events. It should be noted that the phenomenon of the “deferred” life syndrome is currently poorly studied both in the field of social psychology and in clinical psychology and psychotherapy (Ma et al., 2018; Khodayarifard, Fatemi, 2013; Sarkisyan, Vlasov, 2020). An important contribution to the study of the problem of deferred life was made by Serkin, who studied the above-mentioned psychological state of the individual and defined it as “deferred life neurosis”. The author studied the behavior of residents of northern regions who perceived time and place of residence as something uncertain and less important than a planned move to warmer climes in the future. All needs and requirements of people were associated with a desired goal planned for the future. And vice versa, the course of life in the present tense was characterized by a lack of desire to achieve short-term goals, a weak expression of responsibility for actions that matter “here and now” (Serkin, 2001; Serkin, 2012). Any thoughts or actions that pointed to current responsibilities led to irritability and unwillingness to follow the rules of everyday life. Life in the present tense was imagined in a certain “frozen” state, the only purpose of which was to prepare the individual for a move in the future, with which the beginning of a new, “real” life was identified. It should be emphasized that Serkin (1997), using the example of deferred life scenarios of northerners, characterized this psychological state as neurosis. The neurotic nature of the deferred life syndrome was also noted by Sharapova and Kutbiddinova (2018), who studied neurotic tendencies in primary school children in the process of forming deferred life scenarios. Ma, Siu and Shing Tse (2018) especially noted the manifestations of depression and neuroticism against the background of pronounced parental expectations of the future. Rohmalimna, Yeau and Sie (2022), in turn, identified the factor of destructive change in the self-concept due to excessive accentuation of the “real” life expected in the future and, accordingly, an inadequate assessment of reality.

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

The empirical study of the phenomenon of social neuroticism involved respondents (N=500) aged 18-50. The empirical study was conducted at the Psychological Observatory of the International Scientific-Educational Center of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia. All

respondents participated in the study in accordance with the verbal consent. All participants were divided into the following age groups:

- Group 1 (N=100) aged 18-20 years,
- Group 2 (N=100) aged 21-30 years,
- Group 3 (N=100) aged 31-40 years,
- Group 4 (N=100) aged 41-50 years,
- Group 5 (N=100) aged 51-60 years.

The empirical study was aimed at confirming the hypotheses that the syndrome of deferred life is one of the characteristics of social neuroticism and positively correlates with the level of neuroticism. The severity of the syndrome of deferred life as a characteristic of social neuroticism is most pronounced in the age group of 21-40 years.

The following methods were used to measure the phenomenon under study:

- "The big five factors and personality traits" questionnaire (Zhou, 2018), presented by low (scores: 0-12), medium (scores: 13-25), and high (scores: 26-48) levels of neuroticism,
- "The satisfaction with life" scale (Diener et al., 1985), presented by slightly satisfied (21-25), satisfied (26-30), and extreme satisfied (31-35) scores,
- "Diagnostics of deferred life syndrome" author's questionnaire, presented by low (scores: 0-10), medium (scores: 11-20), and high (scores: 21-30) levels of syndrome.

The author's questionnaire was composed of questions theoretically based on the research of Serkin, .,. The questionnaire consists of 30 questions. The degree of internal consistency of the questions was determined using the Cronbach's coefficient ($\alpha=0.811$). The highest Cronbach's alpha values were recorded for the following questions:

- "Please name the 5 most important goals in your life. In what period of time do you intend to achieve them?",
- "Can you call your life fulfilling at the moment?",
- "Please name the most important event in life on which your happiness depends",
- "Evaluate, please, your past, present and future".

The empirical study was conducted from January to June 2025. The obtained data were analyzed and correlated with the data using two other methods. Statistical analysis was performed using JASP 0.17.03.0 software using the Spearman method. Normal distribution analysis using the Shapiro-Wilk method ($p<0.05$) showed abnormal distribution of variables. The results of the empirical study are presented below.

RESULT

Let us present the results of the empirical study (Diagrams 1-3).

Diagram 1. Distribution of neuroticism variables among 5 groups, (%)

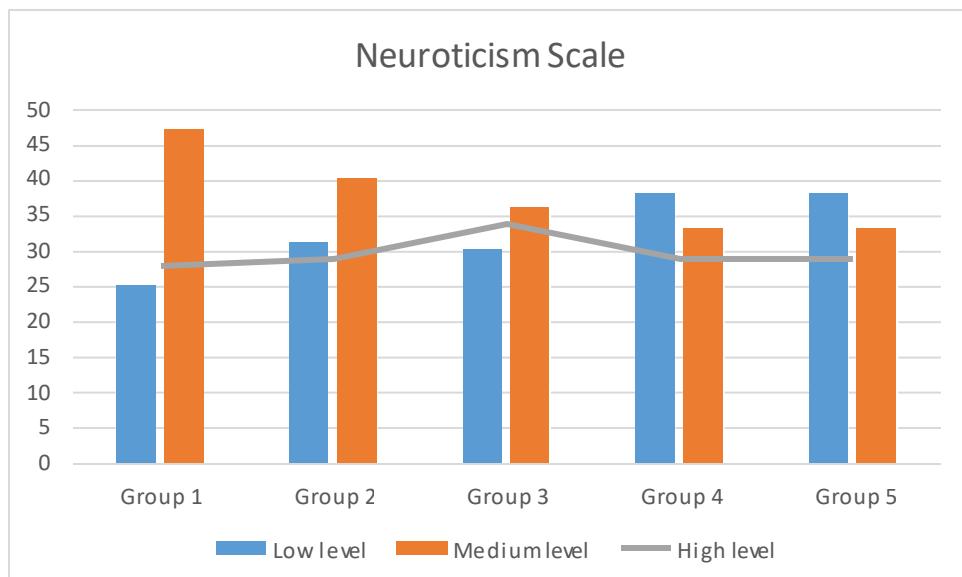


Diagram 2. Distribution of life satisfaction variables among 5 groups, (%)

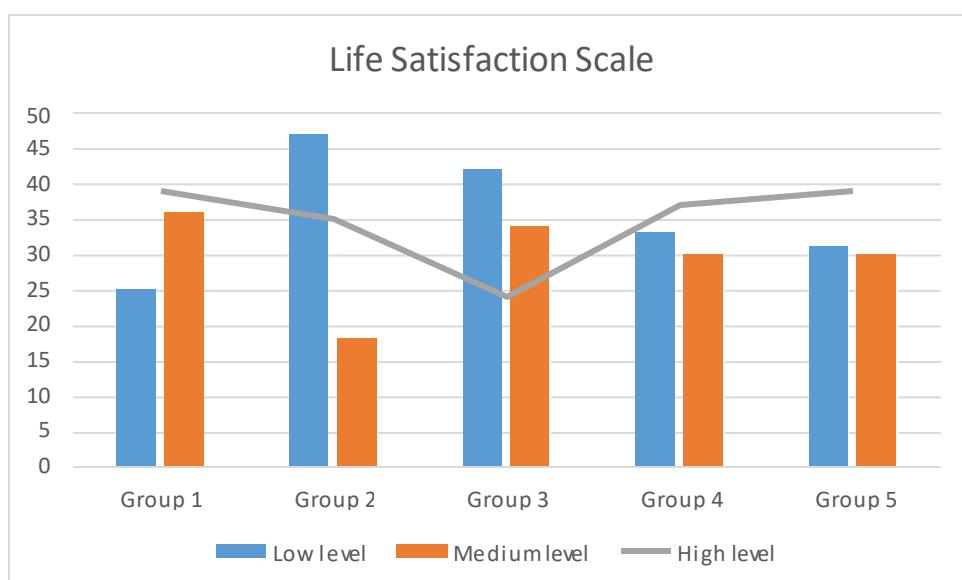
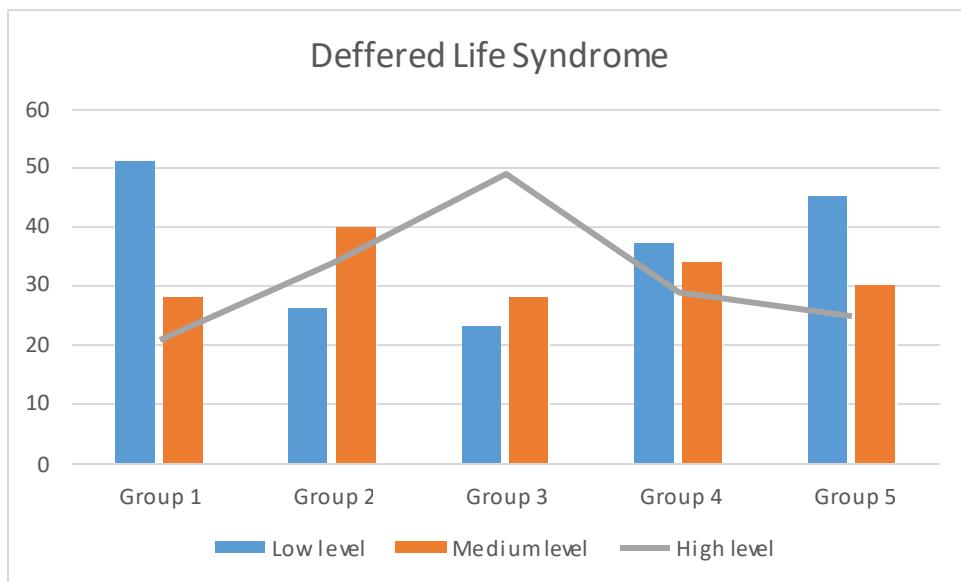


Diagram 3. Distribution of deferred life syndrome variables among 5 groups, (%)



The results of the application of methods for diagnosing one of the personality traits - neuroticism, as well as life satisfaction and the syndrome of deferred life, showed certain trends. In particular, the highest percentage indicators were recorded in the answers of respondents of Group 3 according to the method of diagnosing neuroticism and the syndrome of deferred life. The results of assessing the general level of life satisfaction in age group e3, on the contrary, turned out to be the lowest of the answers of all groups.

After receiving the percentage indicators of all methods, a correlation analysis of the data was carried out for the three methods used.

Table 1. Correlation interconnections of the variables of neuroticism and deferred life

Spearman's Correlations

		Spearman's rho	p
Neuroticism, Group 1	- Deferred Life, Group 1	0.223	0.125
Neuroticism, Group 2	- Deferred Life, Group 2	0.538 ***	< .001
Neuroticism, Group 3	- Deferred Life, Group 3	0.702 ***	< .001
Neuroticism, Group 4	- Deferred Life, Group 4	0.144 *	< .05
Neuroticism, Group 5	- Deferred Life, Group 5	0.153 *	< .05

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Table 2. Correlation interconnections of the variables of life satisfaction and deferred life

Spearman's Correlations

		Spearman's rho	p
Life Satisfaction, Group 1	- Deferred Life, Group 1	-0.342 *	< .05
Life Satisfaction, Group 2	- Deferred Life, Group 2	0.461 ***	< .01
Life Satisfaction, Group 3	- Deferred Life, Group 3	-0.522 ***	< .001
Life Satisfaction, Group 4	- Deferred Life, Group 4	-0.364 **	< .01
Life Satisfaction, Group 5	- Deferred Life, Group 5	-0.147 *	< .05

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

DISCUSSION

The results of the empirical study provided interesting data on the factors of manifestation of the phenomenon of social neuroticism. In particular, the hypothesis was proven that the phenomenon of social neuroticism is most strongly expressed in the age groups of 21-40 years. According to the correlation analysis, negative relationships were also revealed between the variables of life satisfaction and the deferred life syndrome. Within the framework of the empirical study of this sample, it can be concluded that the higher the degree of life satisfaction, the weaker the deferred life syndrome is expressed, and, accordingly, the phenomenon of social neuroticism.

On the other hand, positive correlations were observed between the variables of neuroticism and the syndrome of deferred life. The results of the study can be further compared with a sample of respondents by gender, social status and education.

The results of the empirical study lead us to the idea that those who are prone to the syndrome of deferred life are characterized by:

- overestimation of the future,
- creation of a "starting point" in the future from which a happy life should begin,
- procrastination,
- low self-esteem,
- emphasis on the achievements of others as opposed to one's own failures,
- severity of neurotic tendencies,
- subjective installation of a certain condition before the onset of "real" life in the future,
- subjective installation of a certain condition that limits everyday life scenarios (Naidenova, 2022; Kostyleva, Serkin, 2022; Goroshko, Shubina, 2017; Li et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

As we can conclude, studying the signs of the syndrome or neurosis of deferred life can shed light on the characteristics of the phenomenon of social neuroticism. Consideration of this problem in the

context of the individual's attitude to social realities and expectations of the future contains great theoretical and practical potential for studying the phenomenon of social neuroticism, as well as psychological counseling. Further research in this area will allow psychologists to conduct not only a socio-psychological assessment of social neuroticism, but also to develop a competent strategy for preventing the psychological state of deferred life.

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