

THE CONTRIBUTION OF HOME ATTACHMENT TO MENTAL HEALTH¹

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Abstract

Based on the environmental psychology researches (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006; Korpela et al., 2002; Pretty, et al., 2003) we have assumed that home attachment, being a reflection of subjective satisfaction with home environment and evaluation of home in terms of emotional closeness and place identity, contributes to dwellers' mental health. To measure home attachment we have modified and adapted Place Attachment Scale developed by J. Inglis (Inglis, 2008). Mental health was measured using Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (Tennant et al., 2007) and A. Antonovsky's Sense of Coherence Scale (Osin, 2007). Participants were 178 young adults ($M_{age}=24.1$, 38 males, 140 females). The results have shown that home attachment is a reliable predictor of psychological well-being and sense of coherence; relationships between these variables are reciprocal. Men's mental health is more dependent on home attachment than women's one. The lower the level of home attachment is, the more sensitive to it the psychological well-being and sense of coherence are. In discussion, the high importance of instrumental study of home attachment as the predictor of mental health is argued.

Keywords: *home attachment, questionnaire, well-being, sense of coherence.*

1. Introduction

The home environment is a powerful ecosocial resource that contributes to mental health and helps preventing certain forms of deviant behavior (vagrancy, runaways, etc.). Therefore, it seems to be essential for modern psychologists to keep in his methodical arsenal a tool to measure the man's attachment/alienation to his home level. There are no such techniques in our country by now. We tried to validate the questionnaire by J. Inglis, originally developed to study ecological attitudes of Australians toward a specific geographical areas (the park or district area, lake).

2. Objectives and method

The phenomenon of place attachment is understood as an experience of deep emotional closeness to the community, culture, nature factors and also as the perceivable signification of a certain place as significant, fateful, and saturated with personal meanings (Inglis, 2008, Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006, Reznichenko, 2014).

Place attachment is formed by place dependence and place identity. Place dependence – a sort of functional place attachment – is one's «knowing» of functional environment possibilities and evaluation the conformity degree between environment functionality and multilevel needs of a man (of certain activities, recreation, development). The more functions providing relevant activity and actualizing the individual's aspirations and values in the environment are, the higher satisfaction with the quality of living there it is (Korpela et al., 2002).

The other component, place identity, is associated with symbolic significance of the image of a place; it affects more the cognitive level of motivational basis of place attachment. The place and memories of childhood connection, the image of a place as a reflection of a family or personal life history, the maintaining of cultural identity and historical succession are only a few examples of the place identity functions (Pretty, et al., 2003).

The original tool for measuring the place attachment level is the Place Attachment questionnaire developed by J. Inglis, which consists of 17 statements (14 direct and 3 inverse ones) related to a particular place in the categories "native / alien", "close / causing alienation"; the 5-point scale is used to estimate the degree of agreement with each statement (Inglis, 2008).

¹ Supported by Russian Science Foundation, project № 14-18-02163.

According to this conceptual framework and statistical analysis of empirical data the questionnaire has five-factor structure: 1) the place identity scale; 2) the place dependency scale; 3) the place alienation or detachment scale; 4) the place exclusivity scale (describes the functionality of the space in the dichotomy of universal/unique); 5) the scale of social attachment to a place (describes the group identity role as motivational basis of place attachment).

We have adapted the method to the Russian population and have modified it (See paragraph 3.1.). Furthermore, to investigate relations between home attachment and mental well-being, we used two scales – The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) (Tennant et al., 2007) and Sense of Coherence Scale (SOC) developed by A. Antonovsky.

We understand mental well-being in terms of positive functioning and satisfaction with real self-image in the context of the living circumstances (Nartova-Bochaver et al., 2015).

Sense of Coherence (SOC) as conceived by A. Antonovsky is a counterpart of stress resistance and a predictor of physical and psychological health. Sense of coherence is defined as a personal disposition to active searching for environmental factors (including physical environment) that contribute to the maintenance of psychological well-being and health and helps people coping with difficult life situations, relationships and other stress factors. This is essentially a mediator between 1) stressful life events; 2) psychological and physical health; 3) psychological well-being. (Antonovskiy, 1981). The concept consists of three interrelated components: Comprehensibility (the cognitive component), Manageability (the instrumental component) and Meaningfulness (the motivational component) (Forsberg-Warleby et al., 2002). However, during validation on Russian population, the only single-factor model was identified as fitting one, so there is one scale – the general Sense of Coherence level (Osina, 2007).

3. Results

3.1. Pilot study: questionnaire validation

Since the original Place Attachment questionnaire (Inglis, 2008) is based on integrated ideas of anthropocentrism, biocentrism, egocentrism and psychology environment, it involves the study of attachment to large territorial units – districts, local nature, public places of recreation. In our study, we have emphasized the home environment: in each of the statements, the territorial unit has been replaced by residential environment one (e.g.: "I feel that my home is a part of me") (Reznichenko et al., 2015).

The pilot study involved 287 participants (30% male, 70% female) aged from 14 to 40 ($M_{age}=21.5$, $SD=7.2$). The factor solution was found by exploratory factor analysis building on Kaiser's criterion, scree plot test, Multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) (See Table 1). It has been shown that the single-factor model represents the questionnaire's structure most appropriately. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) allowed rejecting 4-factor solution that represented a poor fit to empirical data ($CMIN/DF>3$; CFI and IFI indices <0.90 ; $RMSEA>0.08$) (Arbucke et al., 1999). The goodness-of-fit testing (Akaike Information Criterion, AIC) results confirmed the single-factor model as the most preferred.

Table 1. The results of confirmatory factor analysis: fit indices for 2 factor models

| <i>Model</i> | χ^2 | <i>df</i> | <i>CMIN / DF</i> | <i>RMSEA</i> | <i>IFI</i> | <i>CFI</i> | <i>AIC</i> |
|----------------------------|----------|-----------|------------------|--------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Model 1 (4 factors) | 572.0* | 10 | 52.2 | .443 | -3.55 | .000 | 572.0 |
| Model 2 (1 factor) | 387.5* | 118 | 3.26 | .089 | .872 | .871 | 454.5 |

Note: * $p < .001$

Thus, the factor analysis results allows us identifying a single-factor structure of the questionnaire - the home attachment scale which had a high coefficient of Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .77$). In addition, we decided to remove the three inverse questions to increase a content validity of the questionnaire to $\alpha = .89$. The Home attachment questionnaire, validated to the Russian population, has 14 direct questions and is described by one scale reflecting the general level of individual's attachment to his home. We assume that the factor structure reduction of the questionnaire is primarily associated with the choice of home environment as the subject of study instead of public urban territorial units, as well as with the sample specificity.

3.2. Main study

Since we suggest that home attachment and satisfaction with quality of life are significant contributors to mental health, we carried out a regression analysis of Home Attachment Scale data and data of two other scales – the Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) and Sense of Coherence Scale (SOC).

Correlation analysis ($N=178$, $M_{age}=24.0$, $SD=7.4$) has confirmed a significant positive relation between home attachment and psychological well-being ($r_s = .147$, $p < .05$), as well as a strong positive relationship between home attachment and sense of coherence ($r_s = .256$, $p < .001$).

The results of regression analysis show that home attachment appears to be a significant predictor of psychological well-being ($\beta = 0,205$, $p < .01$) and sense of coherence ($\beta = 0,276$, $p < .01$).

4. Discussion

The results of our study show that home attachment is an important predictor of individual's mental well-being. But an even stronger relationship has been found between home attachment and sense of coherence.

We assume that this is because of too broad phenomenological field of psychological well-being, that depends on a larger number of interfering factors compared to sense of coherence meaning. Sense of coherence seems to be more specific construct than well-being is, and linear relationship between this variable and other factors can be more obvious.

The study results are consistent with other outcomes that place attachment has a positive impact on life satisfaction and social relations, continuity and self-efficacy (Tartaglia, 2012). It can be assumed that people with a lack of home attachment have fewer resources to cope with difficult life events and have higher stress levels (Stokols&Shumaker, 1982).

5. Conclusion

Instrumental study of home attachment has fundamental importance not only in assessment of home environment friendliness level and satisfaction with environmental conditions, but also it may be one of the indirect indicators defining the mental well-being level and sense of coherence.

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