

Department of Clinical Psychology, Medical University of Lublin

MARIOLA ŻUK, JOLANTA ZAWORA, ALICJA NASIŁOWSKA-BARUD

*An attempt at characterizing personality traits of girls with scoliosis*

Scoliosis (lateral curvature of the spine) is a defect which constitutes around 90% of all abnormal spinal curvatures. In most cases, its causes are unknown. Scoliosis mostly concerns girls and may occur already right after birth or in early childhood. The development of curvature is proportionate to the intensity of a child's growth. The faster the growth the greater the defect; and so it is most frequent in the stage of pubescence. Spinal curvature is not only a cosmetic defect. Curvature results in abnormal functioning of internal organs, the heart, lungs, kidneys, and the liver (1). That is why the curvature is often surgically treated in order to improve the performance of the whole organism.

The medical problem of young patients coincides with an important stage of their psychological development – the passage from childhood to adulthood. At adolescence, people pay particular attention to the appearance of their bodies. The image of one's own body is an important element of self-concept—one of the elements of the structure of personality (2, 3, 6).

The research aimed at describing the characteristic personality traits and psychological needs in the real and ideal self-concept of girls with lateral spinal curvature.

#### MATERIAL AND METHODS

The group of subjects consisted of twenty girls, aged 13–16 with the mean age of 15, with lateral curvature of the spine and awaiting surgical treatment. During the research, the following methods were used: R.B. Cattell's High School Personality Questionnaire and H.B. Gough and A.B. Heilbrun's The Adjectives Check List ACL, both translated by Z. Płużek and approved by the author.

#### RESULTS

Mean results scored by girls with scoliosis in the tests are presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

I. Girls with scoliosis are characterised by a low level of personality integration, which is why they experience continuous anxiety and fear. They have difficulties in establishing social relations, and are careful when expressing their feelings; their relations with other people are characterised by coldness. They adopt an egocentric attitude. They aggressively and stubbornly defend their stand in all circumstances. They are inflexible in thinking and behaviour and tend to stick to their views regardless of the situation they are in.

II. Girls with scoliosis scored low in the commonality (Com) scale both in the real and the ideal self-concept. This suggests a sense of otherness, of being different from the social environment. This score probably results from the body defect. In the real and the ideal self-concept, control of oneself and one's actions (S-Cn) remains at a moderate level, while self-confidence (S-Cf) remains high. Girls tend to withdraw from social situations. The adopted psychological attitude may lead the patients to a belief that they will not be able to handle everyday obligations; that is why they avoid accepting responsible tasks.

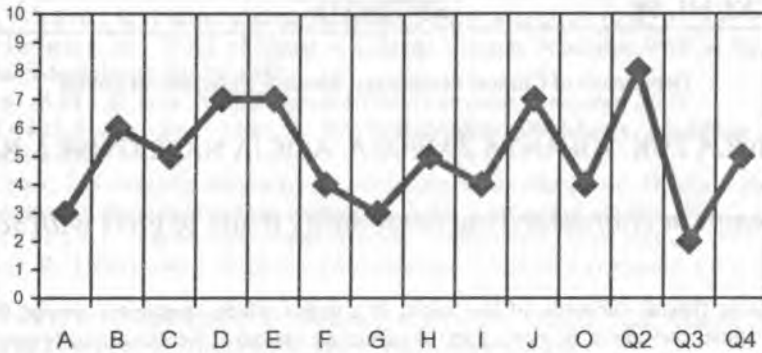


Fig. 1. Mean results scored by girls with scoliosis in the R. B. Cattell's HSPQ test, N=20

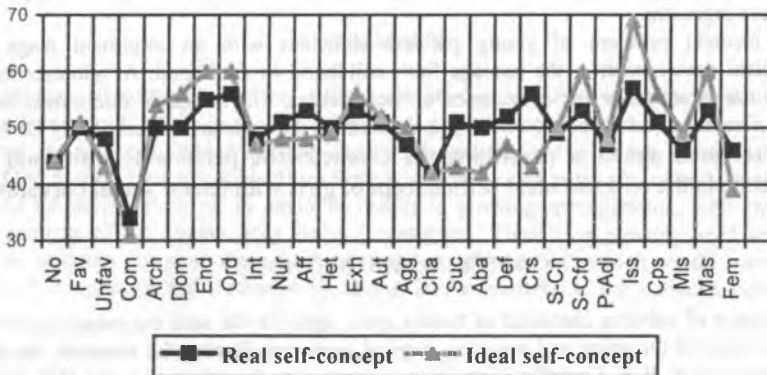


Fig. 2. Mean results scored by girls with scoliosis in the H. G. Gough's and A. B. Heilbrun's ACL test, real and ideal self-concept, N=20

In the 1<sup>st</sup> category of psychological needs concerning achievement, in the real self-concept the needs concerning social achievement (Ach) and domination (Dom) are moderate. In the ideal self-concept, these needs increase considerably. In the real and the ideal self-concept, the need for endurance in undertaken actions (End) and love of order (Ord) are high.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> category of needs facilitating interpersonal contacts, in the real self-concept, the need for understanding oneself and others (Int), the need for helping others (Nur), the need for affiliation and belonging to a social group (Aff) are moderate. The needs of this category slightly decrease in the ideal self-concept. Both in the real and the ideal self-concept, the need for contact with persons of the opposite sex (Het) remains moderate, whereas in the ideal self-concept there increases considerably the need for psychological exhibitionism (Exh), i.e., sharing one's experiences and sensations with persons of the opposite sex. The need for support from others (Suc), which was low in the real self-concept, clearly increases in the ideal concept.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> category of needs connected with attitude to life, both in the real and the ideal self-concept, the need for autonomy (Aut), inducing self-reliance and independent actions, remains moderate. Similarly moderate is the need for aggression (Agg). The need for introducing changes

(Cha) is low, and thus the respondents do not wish to change their situation, and strive after stabilization and maintaining their current position. In the ideal self-concept, there decreases (from a moderate level) the need for self-abasement (Aba). The same tendency can be observed regarding the need for adopting subordinate roles and lowering one's self-esteem (Def) and the need for receiving support from others (CrS).

## DISCUSSION

The results of the conducted research show that patients with scoliosis are characterized by a low level of personality integration, weak behavioural control, and a tendency towards isolating themselves from the surrounding people. The subjects concentrate on themselves and on their own problems. In life, they experience numerous doubts and demand the attention of those around them. They tend to stiffen their stands and stick to their intentions and plans. They exhibit an interest in positions and achievements granting social prestige. They show a need for contacts with persons of the opposite sex. Through trust in their abilities, they aspire to mark their role and position.

Authors have noticed similar psychological traits in girls with scoliosis and stressed their egocentrism as well as lack of persons providing support in their lives (5). Authors point too that the girls have a desire for recognition (4). The obtained results show that girls with scoliosis should be provided with systematic psychological aid, in order to reduce their anxiety, fear, and internal tension. Psychological aid should also be directed at overcoming internal barriers, which seriously hinder the establishment of contacts with others and normal functioning in interpersonal relations.

## REFERENCES

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## SUMMARY

Scoliosis (lateral curvature of the spine) is a defect with unknown causes. It concerns girls mostly. The curvature is often surgically treated at adolescence. The medical problem of young patients coincides with an important stage of their psychological development. This is while the image of one's own body is an important element of self-concept – one of the elements in the structure of personality. The research aimed at describing the characteristic personality traits and psychological needs in the real and ideal self-concept of girls with lateral spinal curvature.

### Próba charakterystyki niektórych cech osobowości dziewcząt ze skoliozą

Skolioza (boczne skrzywienie kręgosłupa) jest wadą postawy nieznanego pochodzenia. Dotyczy przede wszystkim dziewcząt. W wielu wypadkach podejmuje się leczenie operacyjne skrzywienia w okresie dorastania. Problem medyczny młodych pacjentek zbiega się wówczas z ważnym etapem rozwoju psychicznego, gdy obraz własnego ciała jest szczególnie istotnym elementem obrazu siebie – jednego ze składników struktury osobowości. Celem badań było dokonanie opisu charakterystycznych cech osobowości oraz potrzeb psychicznych w realnym i idealnym obrazie siebie u dziewcząt ze skoliozą.