

## Chapter #3

### THE LEARNED HELPLESSNESS GENESIS CONCEPT AS THE BASIS FOR MEDICO-PSYCHOLOGICAL FACILITATION AT THE UNIVERSITY

Olesya Volkova, Irina Loginova, Ivan Artyukhov, Marina Petrova, & Darya Kaskaeva  
*Krasnoyarsk State Medical University, Russia*

#### ABSTRACT

In the course of the learned helplessness genesis concept development we discovered new opportunities for finding emergency features in the cross point of the learned helplessness theory by M. Seligman, concept of cultural and historical development of a person by L.S. Vygotskij and method of transpective analysis by V.E. Klochko. The combination of three theories allowed creating The Technology of the Learned Helplessness Genesis Study which was widely tested on different samples of respondents, including representatives of the educational process participants at the Krasnoyarsk state medical university (Russia).

Large variety of supportive, correctional and preventive actions, short and long-time programs aimed to decrease the learned helplessness manifestations were implemented in the system of medico-psychological facilitation of the medical university. Students and teaching staff of the university, patients of university clinic, healthcare family centre and psychological centre were suggested different tools to overcome learned helplessness.

The learned helplessness genesis concept as the basis for medico-psychological facilitation at the university allows assimilation of new experience in a context of psychological consultation and the non-drug therapy directed to maintenance of self-actualization process, personality development, strengthening of psychological wellbeing and, as a result, opening of new life resources and potentialities of the personality.

*Keywords:* the learned helplessness genesis concept, medico-psychological facilitation, university.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The learned helplessness as form of human life organization is the catalyst of psychological instability and somatic illness, it determines decrease in resilience of personality to harmful influences of the external environment, contributes to the development and exacerbation of psychological damages and somatic diseases of various etiologies. The helplessness is formed and “taught” gradually, under the influence of a factor of social response to failures in life events or features of somatic health rather than level of stress factor or disease nature and their objective influence on personality.

Studying the problem of the learned helplessness as a phenomenon being formed in ontogenesis, under the influence of external and internal determinants of development, such as social environment and physical condition of a human body, is important to consider conceptual provisions of the cultural and historical concept of person’s mentality origin in which an attempt of solving the problem of person’s consciousness origin and development is made.

Studying the formation mechanisms and correction ways of “the learned helplessness” phenomenon demands considering an environmental factor, on the basis of studying patterns of behavior mastered by means of interaction with the environment, mechanisms of fixing and maintenance of these patterns, and also their combinations to the specific physiological state caused by somatic factors.

## 2. BACKGROUND

Martin Seligman (Seligman, 1975, 1993), the founder of Positive Psychology and the learned helplessness theory, considers that the optimistic or pessimistic attitude to reality is directly interconnected with perception of parental behavior models. Dr. M. Seligman specifies that this style is not only appropriated as behavior model, it “is improved” and becomes stronger in consciousness by means of such methods as criticism from parents, teachers and other representatives of an adult environment. The learned helplessness stems from pessimistic perception of life, has foundations in situations of life crises, such as stress provoked by death of the relatives, divorce in a family, recurrence of violence cases in a family, illness of relatives, low level of own health etc.

Whatever occurred in life of the child in the close intra family and external social environment it affects directly the formation of experience picture of the child, as certain integrity of perception of the whole world picture. It is important that in relationships with children there not be neutral emotional reactions. Cases of frequent, systematic negative experience steadily form the pessimism, being characterized by generalization. And, if the help in overcoming the negative attitude to a series of situations doesn't happen in due time, negative attitude, expectation of negative result, feeling of futility of any efforts to receive significant, good, valuable, desirable result (that is group of the learned helplessness markers) predetermines all reactions of the child to situations in the future. The similar relation is rather steadily fixed, including, and concerning education process that is a serious problem of an educational system and training at all stages of ontogenesis (M. Seligman, 1975, 1993).

According to the main concepts of cultural historical approach by Russian scientist L.S. Vygotskij (Vygotskij, 2003) the development of a person is based on interiorization, which is transformation process of inter psychological relations into intra psychological. In ontogenesis at first the adult affects the child with the word, inducing him to do something. Then the child adopts a way of communication and learns to influence the adult with the word. After that the child starts influencing the word himself. In the families, having child with weak somatic health, the psychological system is broken: deficiency of relationship revealed in problems of relations with mother, replacement of the father from psychological life of a family, posing child as weak and unable, which results violation of normal child identity formation. Connecting the ideas of Positive Psychology and cultural historical approach it is possible to claim that people having weak health “learn” helplessness gradually, under not the influence of somatic state, but under the determination of the factor of social response to features of somatic health (Volkova, 2013a, 2013b, 2014a, 2014b, 2015, 2016a, 2016b).

In development of a complex research technology aimed at revealing the process of the learned helplessness formation in the course of human life, the transpective analysis is one of the significant tools, “performed through the analysis of human activities products which are kept in culture” (Klochko, Galajinsky, Krasnoryadtseva, & Lukyanov, 2014, p. 145) and opening for the researcher space for reconstruction of “the world image of a human and way of human life in a historical transpection” (Klochko, Galajinsky, Krasnoryadtseva, & Lukyanov, 2014, p. 146). Considering that everything is unpredictable and nothing repeats in the history, as it is obviously impossible to determine and predict the future of the person by his past, as well as the future of society relying on its historic facts, the transpective analysis opens certain opportunities in this direction.

A number of the contradictions arising by consideration of psychological phenomena, characterizing the complete person meaning existence continuity in space and time are removed when “it is only about the present which, however, undertakes with its tendency. Both the past and the future “contact” the present setting a perspective (context) of the analysis. However, a sheaf “past-present” and “future-present” aren't full from space-time position, designating a cut became in the first case, or a cut predicted, which still not became (and it is unknown whether it will be or what), in the second.

### **3. OBJECTIVES**

The theoretical and empirical analysis of contemporary psychology confirms the importance of integrated system approach in diagnostics of the learned helplessness formation mechanisms in the course of personality development. Creation of the specific unique tools directed not only on a research of the factors which have made negative impact in the course of ontogenesis and acted as the catalyst of the helpless identity development but also on aim points for psychological correction within psychological consultation and non-drug therapy for the purpose of achieving the psychological wellbeing of the person seems extremely important. Psychological wellbeing in itself as a conscious state can't be followed by feeling of helplessness priori, but, on the contrary, is a resource state, basic in the course of self-actualization of the personality (Volkova, 2013a, 2013b, 2014a, 2014b, 2015, 2016a, 2016b).

The offered psycho correctional, psychotherapeutic and psycho preventive programs which are logging in psychological assistance can be used in the course of medico-psychological facilitation of medical staff, teachers, and patients having somatic diseases of a different etiology.

### **4. METHODOLOGY**

The general provisions of the learned helplessness theory developed by M. Seligman, the concept of cultural and historical development of personality designed by L.S. Vygotsky and the basic principles of the transpective analysis highlighted by V.E. Klochko have been defined as the methodological bases of the learned helplessness genesis concept.

The methodology of this research was developed in the cross points of above-mentioned concepts for finding new emergency features of new concept – concept of the learned helplessness genesis - which combines specific ideas of contemporary studies and allow to develop new scientific point of view on the learned helplessness phenomena and its genesis.

In our concept the genesis of the learned helplessness is a result of ineffective influence of social environment (family members, relatives, educators, tutors, doctors etc.) of the person on his activity, which has specific way of organization in situation of stress, burn out and somatic disease. The state of the learned helplessness has its roots in the past experience of the person, negatively effects its present life frustrating the process of self-implementation and self-actualization, and also can become the base for negative consequences of possible variants of future life.

So, the system of medico-psychological facilitation against the learned helplessness genesis at the university should be aimed at all the groups of educational process members and be oriented on the past, present and the future experience of the facilitation system participants.

The system of learned helplessness prevention based on the concept of the learned helplessness genesis developed by Volkova O.V. was applied on the basis of the Krasnoyarsk state medical university within educational programs, medical and psychological support of the participants of educational and healing process (Volkova, 2016b).

The technology of the learned helplessness genesis research which has been developed and approved within the concept and also the system of psychological prevention allows optimizing and increasing the efficiency of medico-psychological and pedagogical facilitation and its implementation within different groups of the population having signs of the learned helplessness genesis or being in the conditions promoting his emergence.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

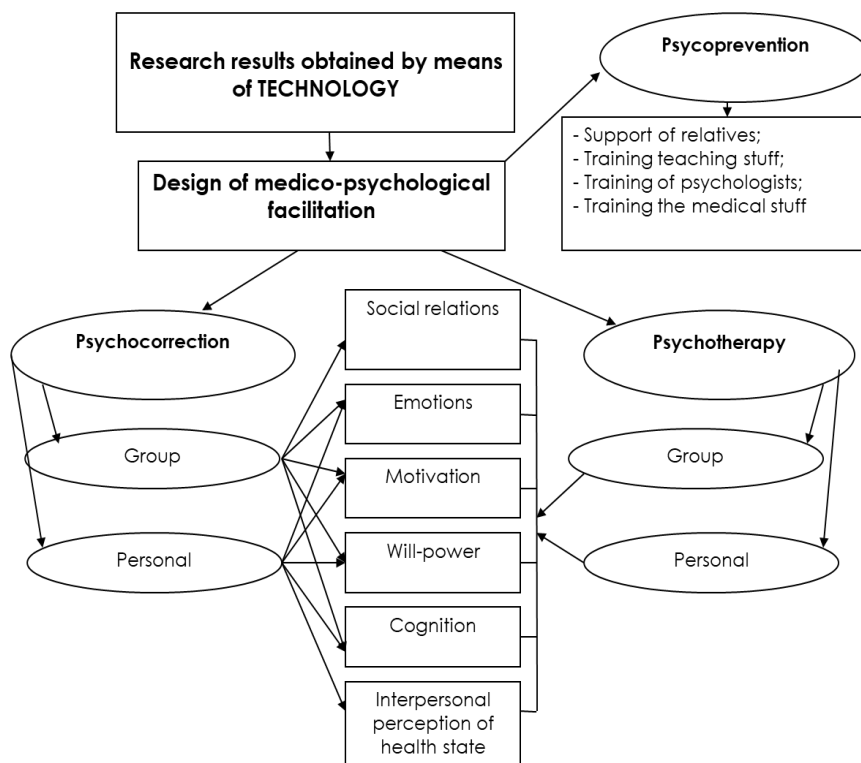
The learned helplessness becomes a real problem destructing the whole human generation in the role of active future creators, life investigators, who are responsible for their own life, physically mature and stable, strong in defending their life position and perspectives. This problem becomes more urgent in the situation of medical university. Future doctors, patients of university clinic and their relatives, teaching staff of the university sometimes demonstrate signs of the learned helplessness which manifestoes with depression, personal and professional out burn, high level of stress, lack of motivation, low interest to life issues, and general decrease of learning and living activity, absence of involvement in life as a process.

The medico-psychological facilitation based on the learned helplessness genesis concept was aimed at different categories of medico-educational process at the Krasnoyarsk state medical university (Krasnoyarsk, Russia).

Large variety of supportive, correctional and preventive actions, short-time and long-time programs aimed to decrease the learned helplessness manifestations were implemented in the system of medico-psychological facilitation of Krasnoyarsk state medical university. Students and teaching staff of the university, patients of university clinic and healthcare family center, and clients of psychological center were suggested different tools to overcome learned helplessness.

As an illustration for the efficiency estimation of the psychological programs aimed at prevention of the learned helplessness state we can offer the results of the long-time preventive program organized for the students of Clinical Psychology specialty (Krasnoyarsk state medical university), which lasted for 4 years (2014-2017), the total amount of participants is 136 people. Elements of the program have been realized in a format of a practical training, pedagogical, psychological and supervision practicing, individual consultations on the basis of the psychological center and also group trainings within the volunteer movement.

*Figure 1.*  
*The system of medico-psychological facilitation against the learned helplessness at the medical university.*



Among criteria for prevention system effectiveness evaluation two major groups of indicators were generalized:

1st group: indicators of professional competences formation in relation of overcoming the learned helplessness state in groups of people having different characteristics of somatic health;

2nd group: indicators of personal changes such as decrease in expressiveness of prerequisites to emergence of the learned helplessness state demonstrated by participants of the prevention program - students of Clinical Psychology specialty.

*Table 1.*  
*The results of learned helplessness preventive program among students - clinical psychologists, %.*

Feature	Before preventive program	After preventive program
<b>Signs of changes in professional competences</b>		
High level of theoretical competence in the field of the features and signs of the learned helplessness as a state	21	62
High level of motivation on conducting the scheduled psychological support directed to prevention of the learned helplessness state	18	89
High level of predictive ability to identification of prerequisites and conditions of the learned helplessness state emergence	3	37
High level of ability to develop variations of psychological prevention programs for satisfaction of specific preventive needs of target group participants	0	59
Experience in development, organization and implementation of the preventive programs directed to overcoming the learned helplessness state	0	99
High level of empathy, initiative, inclusiveness in scheduled preventive psychological programs against the learned helplessness	36	83
<b>Signs of personal changes</b>		
High level of motivation on searching and overcoming of own psychological difficulties	12	76
High level of emotional intelligence development	18	71
High level of autonomy, independence	27	68
High level of somatic and psychological wellbeing (value judgment)	27	72
High level of search activity	23	63

The results presented in Table 1 (obtained by self-assessment questionnaire) clearly demonstrate the importance of the organization and implementation of the preventive actions directed to overcoming the learned helplessness state in groups of representatives of the helping professions as parallel increase in professional competence and prevention of a the learned helplessness signs of future specialist psychologist allows to assume its big efficiency in temporary prospect concerning potential professional activity: irradiating the condition of own autonomy, independence and search activity as well as mastering own psychological tools aimed at decrease in risk of the learned helplessness state emergence the representative of the helping profession becomes an invaluable element of preventive measures system.

Medico-psychological facilitation organized in groups of students- future doctors was aimed at overcoming signs of the learned helplessness in specially designed training programs, psycho correctional programs and by means of personal psychotherapy. The general idea of this facilitation is educating future doctors in the question of potential danger of the learned helplessness as doctors so their patients, mastering skills of defining the signs of the learned helplessness and formation of competence in decreasing this state.

The training and correctional programs aimed at teaching staff of the university were oriented at decrease of professional out burn as well as understanding the potential negative effects of the learned helplessness state. One of the directions of facilitation was aimed at teaching the university staff to overcome the helpless state and to transit these skills to their students by demonstration of initiative, support, and active life position.

The directions of medico-psychological facilitation oriented at patients of university clinics and medical family centers suggest complex support for patients and their relatives on overcoming the state of the learned helplessness in the situation of disease. Psychocorrection and psychotherapy have such objectives as increase of motivation to recovery, decrease of anxiety, will-power development and design of new effective life strategies in situation of somatic disease.

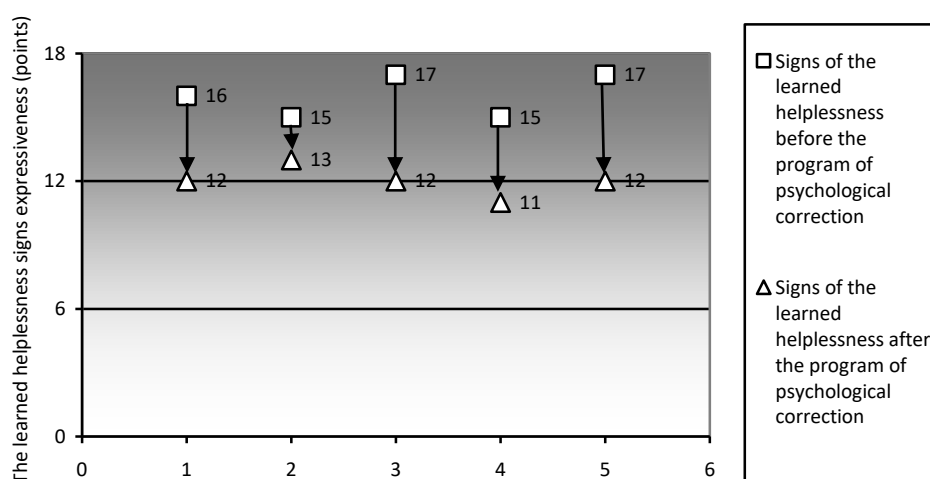
The general line for implementation of the system of medico-psychological facilitation is based on the major idea of The Technology of the Learned Helplessness Genesis study: psychotherapy of the problems of the past life, psychocorrection of the present helpless state and psycho prevention of the negative effects of possible or diagnosed learned helplessness.

One of the parts of the general system of psychological facilitation against the learned helplessness was a program directed to decrease in level of helplessness and neurotization through decline in a secondary alexithymia among cardiological profile patients was approved. Specially organized programs of group work testified in favor of their effectiveness including the following achievements. Before correctional programs attending physicians noted such bright signs of the learned helplessness at patients of cardiological ward as suppressed mood, indifference, uneasiness, the reduced motivation to treatment, lack of interest in communication with roommates, untidy appearance, violation of hygienic norms, frequent demonstration of passive and aggressive reactions concerning other patients and medical personnel. Collaborative activity within the correctional actions has made positive impact on a psycho emotional condition of the patients (the emotional background has improved, communicative and physical activity has increased, the anxiety and tension has decreased), patients had found an aspiration to maintenance tidy appearance, become following for hygiene, the nature of communication with medical personnel became more optimized and effective, etc.

From the total number of patients of cardiological ward for the purpose of detection of tendencies to positive results in respect of overcoming the learned helplessness state we have selected 12 people who have shown similar results in respect of the expressed signs of the learned helplessness by the results of the questionnaire "Subjective analysis of the learned helplessness genesis" by O.Volkova, which were transferred to points in compliance with interpretation scale (The full description of the technology of the learned helplessness study is presented in the book "Learned helplessness: the technology of genesis study" by Volkova (2018)). The results were obtained within the specially organized "School for patients" which activity is aimed at psychological support and increasing the medical care efficiency, as well as decrease the signs of the learned helplessness. Before implementation of the correctional program such signs of the learned helplessness as the low level of motivation, pessimistic perception of own state of health, violation in the emotional sphere (aggression, anxiety, irritability, emotional lability, apathy), violations in the sphere of social contacts, an external locus were the brightest.

The results received after performing repeated diagnostics have allowed to find the tendencies reflected in the Figure 2.

Figure 2.  
The schedule of tendency changes of the learned helplessness signs before and after the program of psychological correction (patients of cardiological ward).



Comments: Y axis

1. External locus of control;
2. Negative attitude to own state of health;
3. Violations in emotional sphere;
4. Violations in social communication;
5. Violations in motivation sphere

Tendencies to overcoming the learned helplessness state were shown in increase in motivation on recovery and the general activity, emergence of signs of optimism concerning change of own somatic state, decrease in aggression, anxiety, apathy, emergence of positive emotions, sense of humour, aspiration to keep in touch and enter communication with a social environment, emergence of internal locus of control expressiveness concerning general self-care and care of own somatic health.

The two given examples can just illustrate the opportunities of presented system. The medico-psychological facilitation aimed at solving the problem of the learned helplessness has a lot of opportunities to be effective in the structure of educational process, psychological support and medical services at the medical university.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The system of psychological prevention of the learned helplessness genesis is defined as the perspective direction of the rendering system of psychological facilitation focused on creation of the special conditions for development of the personality identity promoting increase in its resistance concerning genesis of the learned helplessness. The learned helplessness genesis concept as the basis for medico-psychological facilitation at the university allows assimilation of new experience in a context of psychological consultation and the non-drug therapy directed to maintenance of self-actualization process, personality development, strengthening of psychological wellbeing and, as a result, opening of new life resources and potentialities of the personality.



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## AUTHORS INFORMATION

**Full name:** Olesya Volkova

**Institutional affiliation:** Krasnoyarsk State Medical University (Russia)

**Institutional address:** 660022, 1-Partizan Zheleznyak str, Krasnoyarsk, Russian Federation

**Short biographical sketch:** Olesya Volkova completed her PhD in the field of Clinical Psychology from Krasnoyarsk State Pedagogical University (Russia) in 2009. She is an Associate Professor of the Department of Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy at the Krasnoyarsk State Medical University. Olesya Volkova is the author of more than 60 papers in reputed Russian and international journals, book chapters and monographs in Russia and Europe. The main field of scientific interests concerns studying the learnt helplessness genesis in the process of personality formation, psychosomatic medicine, correlations between psychoemotional states, learnt helplessness and somatic status.

The Learned Helplessness Genesis Concept as the Basis for Medico-Psychological Facilitation  
at the University

**Full name:** Irina Loginova

**Institutional affiliation:** Krasnoyarsk State Medical University (Russia)

**Institutional address:** 660022, 1-Partizan Zheleznyak str, Krasnoyarsk, Russian Federation

**Short biographical sketch:** Irina Loginova completed her PhD in the field of Systemic Anthropological Psychology from Tomsk State University (Russia) in 2000. She is a Doctor of Psychology, Professor, Head of Clinical Psychology Department at the Krasnoyarsk State Medical University. She is an author of more than 70 papers in reputed Russian and International journals, book chapters and monographs in Russia and Europe. The major scientific studies reveal the problem of “Life self-fulfillment of a human being from the point of systemic anthropological psychology”. Now the research interest is in the field of studying the human life-world as characteristic of Psychological system: adaptation, self-regulation, self-organization and human life-world stability.

**Full name:** Ivan Artyukhov

**Institutional affiliation:** Krasnoyarsk State Medical University (Russia)

**Institutional address:** 660022, 1-Partizan Zheleznyak str, Krasnoyarsk, Russian Federation

**Short biographical sketch:** Ivan Artyukhov, Doctor of Medicine, Professor, Rector of Krasnoyarsk State Medical University (Russia) in the early nineties, the first in Russia, has begun to develop the new direction of socially important scientific research concerning health of not before registered in the country groups of the population – refugees, displaced persons, the unemployed. In 1996 Ivan Artyukhov defended the doctoral dissertation “Problems of the health state and the organization of medical care to the migrating population”. More than 500 scientific publications in the Russian and international journals, materials of the international congresses, including 27 monographs, manuals for doctors and students are prepared by him personally and under his supervision. Ivan Artyukhov is also the author of more than 20 educational and methodical grants which are testified and recommended by Educational and Methodical Association of the Russian Health Ministry.

**Full name:** Marina Petrova

**Institutional affiliation:** Krasnoyarsk State Medical University (Russia)

**Institutional address:** 660022, 1-Partizan Zheleznyak str, Krasnoyarsk, Russian Federation

**Short biographical sketch:** Marina Petrova, Doctor of Medicine, Professor defended the Doctoral dissertation on a problem of clinical course of myocardial infarction at the Tomsk Scientific Research Institute of Cardiology in 2000. Marina Petrova is an author and co-author of more than 560 scientific, educational and methodical papers, including 5 patents, 8 monographs, 100 journal articles in cited; 13 manuals for students of higher educational institutions and the system of postgraduate education. The major sphere of scientific interests concerns psychosomatic ratios in the case of arterial hypertension, coronary heart disease, stomach ulcer and gout; and also studying the life quality of patients having various psychosomatic diseases, studying of cognitive frustration in the cases of somatic diseases and ways of revealed violations correction.

**Full name:** Darya Kaskaeva

**Institutional affiliation:** Krasnoyarsk State Medical University (Russia)

**Institutional address:** 660022, 1-Partizan Zheleznyak str, Krasnoyarsk, Russian Federation

**Short biographical sketch:** Darya Kaskayeva graduated from the clinical internship at the Department of Polyclinic Therapy and Family Medicine at the Krasnoyarsk State Medical University (Russia) in 2006. In 2009 she graduated from the postgraduate study in the field of optimization the treatment of patients with an arterial hypertension at the Krasnoyarsk state medical university (Russia). Darya Kaskayeva has PhD in Medicine, she is an Associate Professor, Head of General Medical Practice Department at the Krasnoyarsk State Medical University. She is an author of more than 80 papers published in the scientific journals, book chapters and monographs in Russia and Europe. Darya Kaskayeva is a member of the Krasnoyarsk Regional Society of Therapists, the Chief non-staff specialist on General Medical Practice of the Krasnoyarsk Regional Health Ministry.