

An Empirical Study of Maladaptive Relationships between a Mother and a Senior Child in a Family after Divorce

Емпіричне дослідження дезадаптивних
взаємостосунків матері і дитини старшого
шкільного віку в сім'ї після розлучення

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DOI (article): <https://doi.org/10.32626/2227-6246.2025-66.132-152>

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ABSTRACT

The aim of our research is to show the results of empirical study of maladaptive relationships between a mother and a senior child in a family after divorce.

Methods of the research. The following theoretical methods of the research were used to solve the tasks formulated in the article: a categorical method, structural and functional methods, the methods of the analysis, systematization, modeling and generalization. The experimental method was the method of organizing empirical research.

The results of the research. According to the results of our experimental research, we have defined the concept of "adaptive situation" as a system of external preconditions for the subject, who motivates, facilitates and mediates the person's attitude to life, his/her vital energy, activity, under which the main conditions of the external adaptive situation for the subject means: 1. The external adaptive position in relations to the subject is perceived in spatial and temporal terms as some external location in accordance with the paradigm of space and temporal boundaries. 2. Purely in temporal terms as a warning of maladaptive, destructive and aggressive actions of the subject. 3. In functional and paradigmatic terms we have a significant independence from the space of the corresponding prerequisites or conditions of the individual at the time of manifestation of actions and different types of the activities.

Conclusions. We proved that the reality of what is happening in the world around them is completely denied by the child. Usually, the mother spends a lot of time, energy, emotions and feelings on establishing close relationships with the child, so it is quite difficult for a child and a mother to immediately come to terms with the divorce of their parents. At this stage, the activity of protective mechanisms in the child's psyche is actualized: rationalization ("finally everything happened", "sooner or later it would have happened anyway"), devaluation of family relationships ("actually the marriage was terrible", "my husband

is absolute worthlessness”), denial of positive relationships (“nothing happened, so what, a divorce”, “everything will be fine anyway”).

Key words: *maladaptive relationships, divorce, adaptive position, destructive actions, aggressive actions, rationalization, devaluation of family relationships, denial of positive relationships.*

Introduction

The problem of maladaptive situations in the family and their impact on the development of the child's personality after the divorce of parents is one of the key ones in modern family Psychology and Psychotherapy, in family counseling, etc. (Chan, Ng, & Chan, 2003). The family is, in our opinion, the most important psychological phenomenon that accompanies a person throughout his/her life. The significance of its impact on the child's personality, the complexity, multifacetedness and problematic nature of this psychological problem determine a large number of different approaches to studying the features and conditions for the development of adaptive relationships between a mother and a child in the family after divorce (Brodsky, Oquendo, Ellis, Haas, Malone & Mann, 2001). Therefore, the topic of our article is quite relevant for the development of psychological science as a whole (Mykhalchuk, & Onufrieva, 2020).

The family is the basis for the development of the child's personality, especially while the child is not an adult yet, he/she is small, and not formed in the terms of the personality yet. The family has a significant impact on what the child will become in the future, on his/her place in a broad and narrow society (Chen, Zhou, & Dong, 2020). However, a change in the social situation of the child's development, when he/she was raised by both parents, and then the centering occurred on one of the parents, the degradation of the development of the family or even one of its members can cause a change in the entire system of intra-family relationships, and create psychological conditions that often lead to the emergence of severe family crises (Corbitt, Malone, Haas, & Mann, 1996). It should also be noted that most family

crises after the divorce of parents have their own patterns of the development, their own phenomenology. Thus, the divorce of parents occupies special attention among maladaptive situations in great number of families (Mykhalchuk, Pelekh, Kharchenko, Ivashkevych Ed., Ivashkevych Er., Prymachok, Hupavtseva, & Zukow, 2020).

Divorce of parents is always the result of a crisis in the relationships between spouses. Divorce is always a stressful situation that threatens a mental balance of one or two family members (as a rule, the mother of the child remains to live with the child, although it happens that the child remains with the father) (Choi, Chau, Tsang, Tso, Chiu, Tong, Lee Po, Ng Tak, Wai Fu, Lee Kam, Lam, Yu Wai, Lai Jak, & Sik, 2003). According to statistics, approximately two million marriages are officially dissolved in Ukraine every year, which is about 36-40% % of marriages, that is, hundreds of thousands of children experience the dissolution of parental relations in the family. Thus, in Ukraine, divorce of parents with each passing year becomes an increasingly likely event in the life of a child (or children, if there are several of them in the family) (Tabachnikov, Mishyiev, Drevitskaya, Kharchenko, Osukhovskaya, Mykhalchuk, Salden, & Aymedov, 2021).

According to statistics from recent years, as a result of parental divorce, a large number of children are not only left without one of their parents, but in 23-29% % one or more children are transferred to a children's home. In the best case, these children fall under guardianship or adoption, and in the worst case, they acquire assertive behavior in the near future (starting, conditionally, from 15-16 years old). Therefore, psychologists record a considerable number of asocial disorders: for example, adopted children run away from home, commit various minor or even serious crimes. It is among this group of children that psychologists most often diagnose as addicted to alcoholism, substance abuse, drug addiction, who in 65-80% % try to commit suicide.

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DOI (article): <https://doi.org/10.32626/2227-6246.2025-66.132-152>

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135

Many studies, of both domestic and foreign psychologists (Максименко, Ткач, Литвинчук, & Онуфрієва, 2019) deal with the study of the psychological consequences of divorce in the existence of a family. In modern studies by foreign psychologists, special attention has been paid to the feelings that a child's experiences after the divorce of parents (anger, aggression, guilt, intolerant attitude towards it, sadness, fear), its consequences on the mental development of the child, and the experience of the divorce event as personally significant one. In Foreign Psychology, the main, dominant attention was also paid to the psychological features of the impact of divorce on the attitude of spouses towards each other and towards the child(ren), their behavior in a divorce situation, as well as the study of the deep causes of divorce in modern society (Crookes, 1989).

However, scientists and scholars have paid little or no attention to the Psychology of the impact of divorce on the psychological state of both parents and the child, on the mental and personal development of the child, on his/her behavior and social attitudes, relationships, etc. This topic is covered only in Psychotherapy, where it is analyzed as individual cases of diseases of adults, parents or (and) the child, more often in the paradigm of neurotic and psychosomatic personality disorders. Although most practicing psychologists consider the divorce of parents as the main negative event in the life of a child, the source of his/her insecurity, aggressiveness, substitution of the child's mental states and his/her painful experiences (Brédart, 1991).

The scientific literature also studied situations of parental divorce as a crisis situation in the family, which actualizes various personal qualities of the child, who becomes most sensitive to the influence of family adversity (Mykhalchuk, & Ivashkevych, 2019). In this case, the emotional sphere of the child often suffers and the core qualities of the child become distorted, such as the child's Self-image, the child's Self-attitude, Self-esteem and Self-Image, which, in turn, is dominant in the creation of the child's Self-Concept.

The aim of our research is to show the results of empirical study of maladaptive relationships between a mother and a senior child in a family after divorce.

Methods of the research

The following theoretical methods of the research were used to solve the tasks formulated in the article: a categorical method, structural and functional methods, the methods of the analysis, systematization, modeling and generalization. The experimental method was the method of organizing empirical research.

In our research we used “Diagnostic Methods for Operational Assessment of Well-being, Activity and Mood (WAM)” (2023).

Results and their discussion

The family is the oldest institution of human society. The family has gone through a complex path of its development in psychological and social terms. Starting from tribal forms of dormitories and to the creation of a “large” family as a social macro-group, including several generations living in close contact, to a nuclear, small “nuclear” family, consisting only of parents and children. The following definition of the family is given in the psychological literature: the family is a kind of a center (an insignificant, small social group or a micro-group) of our society, the most important form of organization of personally significant life, based on the marital union and the family ties, that is, on multilateral relations between a husband and a wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters and other relatives who live together and run a common household.

Following this definition, we can conclude that *the family* is a complex multifaceted formation, in which there are four dominant characteristics:

1. The family is a cell (a small social group, a micro-group) of our society.
2. The family is the most important form of organization of personal life.
3. The family is a marital union.

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DOI (article): <https://doi.org/10.32626/2227-6246.2025-66.132-152>

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4. The family is a multilateral relationship between spouses and relatives: parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents, who live together and run a common household.

Family life is largely determined by the conditions of the development of a particular society. These conditions determine the functions of the family and they are generalized in legal and moral social norms, and this, in turn, affects family positions and roles and it is reflected in the features of family relationships. In terms of general theory of systems developed by scientists, the family is not a simple set of members of this family, but, first of all, a certain network of relationships between all family members. To understand the state of the family, something more is needed than a simple analysis of the state of each individual family member. And therefore, it is necessary to analyze the entire family system as a single whole, which will significantly help to reveal the problem of the development of adaptive relationships between a mother and a child in the family after divorce.

According to the definition of scientists (Комплієнко, 2020), a family is an open system that is largely exposed to *external influences*. We think, that a family should take into account into its structure the entire set of various influences and achieve some internal balance. A family as a small social group, scientists note, has a number of psychological features characteristics, such as:

- the presence of not one, but a number of general family goals that can be changed in the process of family development;
- partial difference in the interests and orientations of family members;
- the presence of a married couple, the relationships of which are largely determined by the nature of different interactions in the family;
- the inclusion of representatives of different generations in the family and a much longer period of close acquaintance between its members than in other social groups;

- the absence in the family of communication between members organized by their joint activities, in some a way, like in other social groups;
- multifacetedness and significance of family relationships, their interconnectedness;
- special openness, vulnerability of family members;
- superficial or interpersonal level of family relationships (it reflects the emotional attraction of family members, their psychological compatibility);
- the level of family relationships between family members regarding its functions, goals and prospects (it represents the value-orientational harmonious unity of the family);
- the level of revealing the essence of family cohesion (it shows the family's resistance to destructive influences that destroys the family).

Scientists indicate that the most important characteristics of the family is its functionality, structure and dynamics. *The functionality of the family* is its life activity, directly related to the satisfaction of certain, including dominant needs of its members. *The fulfillment of the family's functions* is of great importance both for its members and for the society as a whole. *The educational function* of the family consists of satisfying individual needs in fatherhood and motherhood; in contacts with children and their upbringing; in the fact that parents can "realize themselves" in their children. *The economic and household function* of the family consists of satisfying the material needs of family members, contributing to the preservation of their health: during the fulfillment of this function by the family, the restoration of physical forces spent in activity is ensured.

The emotional function of the family is to actualize the mechanism of satisfying its members' needs for sympathy, respect, recognition, emotional support and mental protection. This function provides absolutely complete emotional stabilization of the members of our society, actively contributes to the preservation of their mental health. *The function of spirituality*

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and the ability to intercultural communication with the orientation to the spiritual values of the society and humanity is to satisfy the individual's own needs for joint leisure activities and mutual spiritual enrichment, which plays a significant role in the spiritual development of members not only of the family, but also of the entire society.

The function of primary social control over the person's behavior, actions and activities has the aim at ensuring the implementation of social norms by individual family members, especially those ones, who, due to various circumstances (age, illness, etc.), do not have a sufficiently developed ability to independently build their behavior in full accordance with generally accepted social norms. *The sexual-erotic function* consists in satisfying the sexual-erotic needs of family members. From the point of view of the Ukrainian society, it is important that the family regulates the sexual-erotic behavior of its members, ensuring the biological reproduction and renewal of the society in a whole.

Scientists (Blagovechtchenski, Gnedykh, Kurmakaeva, Mkrtychian, Kostromina, & Shtyrov, 2019) always say that over time, changes occur in the functional characteristics of the family: some individual functions are lost, others appear in accordance with new social conditions. For example, in recent years, the function of primary social control over the behavior, actions and activities of the individual has changed qualitatively. The level of tolerance for violations of behavioral norms in the sphere of marital and family relations has also increased significantly (the birth of children out of wedlock, the number and extreme openness of marital infidelity, etc.). In recent years, divorce, for certain reasons, has ceased to be considered as a punishment for dishonest, secretive behavior in the family.

Scientists (Комплієнко, 2020) also claim that family dysfunctions are such features of its functioning and life activities that significantly complicate or prevent the family from performing its direct functions. According to many authors, a

fairly wide range of factors can contribute to family dysfunctions: the characteristics of its members and the characteristics of the relationships between them, certain living conditions of the family. The structure of the family includes its members, and even the totality of their relationships. The analysis of the family structure makes it possible to answer the question of how the functional aspect of the family is implemented: who exactly in the family directly exercises leadership and who is the executor of certain individual assignments, how exactly rights and obligations are distributed between family members, who is responsible for what it is in the family life and for what, with what purpose. From the point of view of the family structure we can name such families where leadership is concentrated on one of the members of this family, and families where there is a clear explication of the participation of all its members under the management of one or more persons. In the first case, we will talk about a purely authoritarian system of family relations; in the second one, about a democratic system. The structure of a family can also varies depending on how the main responsibilities are distributed among its members: if the distribution even in some a case or it is the majority of such responsibilities concentrated in the hands of one family member.

The most widespread family structure in the Ukrainian society is of the type consisting of adults and children, and in our country the most typical is a family with one or maximum with two children. Most often, such families are personally oriented towards an equal distribution of family responsibilities, and even more or less equal participation in solving all family problems is the rarest phenomenon. In sociological surveys, only 25.43-38.08% % of respondents indicate the advantage of such a structure of relationships. Violations of the structural components of the family, according to scientists, there are such permanent features that complicate or prevent the family members from performing their direct functions. For example, the uneven distribution of household responsibilities in the family

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between spouses is a violation of the structure of relationships in the family, between its members, since this prevents the satisfaction of a number of needs of the person who has taken on or shifted his/her main burden to another (or other) family member.

The question of what is the norm and what is a violation in a given family is one of the most difficult issues in modern science about the family as a social set of functions and features, and characteristics. Some family psychotherapists have a certain idea of what a family should like to be, for example, what relationships between spouses can and should be and what relationships between parents and children should be. Other scientists more clearly define the requirements for the family, for example, the need to create positive prerequisites for the development of the personality traits of family members. These are such issues that has the “Experimental Family Psychotherapy” as a direction of Psychotherapy deals with.

The functions and the structure of the family can vary significantly depending on the calculation of the stages of its life activity, such as taking into account the dynamics of the family. There are various systems for distinguishing the main stages of life activity or the life cycle. The most famous it is the system of “life stages”, in the structure of which the main feature of the distinction between life stages is explicated. In this case, scientists used the unique fact of the presence or absence of children in the family and their age. These are, for example, eight stages related to the development, identified by scientists (Tabachnikov, Mishyiev, Kharchenko, Osukhovskaya, Mykhalchuk, Zdoryk, Komplienko, & Salden, 2021), or seven stages (Vovk, Emishyants, Zelenko, Drobot, & Onufriieva, 2020).

Modern researchers pay a great attention to the nature of intra-family relationships. In this regard, for example, they often talk about a full-fledged, harmonious family that functions normally and adequately. This is a family that performs its functional aspects quite responsibly and differentiatedly, as a result

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DOI (article): <https://doi.org/10.32626/2227-6246.2025-66.132-152>

of which the considerable need for growth and measurement of family values in general, as well as each of its members in particular is largely satisfied. According to foreign scientists, an adequate marriage is considered to be one that is characterized by the following features: tolerant attitude of family members towards each other, respect for each other, honesty, desire to be together, similarity of interests and approval of value orientations. Scientists believe that a stable marriage is determined by a certain coincidence of interests and spiritual values of spouses and the contrast of their personal qualities and characteristics. It can also be added that family stability is also facilitated by the ability of family members to conduct harmonious, tolerant negotiations regarding all functional aspects and aspects of family members' joint life.

In human culture is fixed what a family should be in terms of the peculiarities of the moral values of our Ukrainian society. We think, that the concept of a "normal, adequate family" is very conditional. A normal, adequate family is considered to be one that provides the necessary minimum of well-being, social protection and personal development, the formation of its members, which creates positive prerequisites for the socialization of children until they reach a state of psychological and physical maturity. From the point of view of scientists, a harmonious family is one where a father or a mother is responsible for it as a harmonious whole, but other families are not quite inferior. According to scientists, there are three types of families: a traditional family, a child-centric family and a married (democratic) family. In a *traditional family*, respect for the authority of elders is cultivated; pedagogical influence is exercised, as it is correct, from the mother or (and) the father to the child. The result of the child's socialization in such a family is the formation of the child's ability to quite easily fit into a social structure organized vertically. Children from such families quite easily assimilate traditional norms, but experience difficulties in creating their own families; they are usually uninitiative, inflexible in

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the process of communication, and always this family acts based only on the idea of their immediate duties.

In a child-centered family, the main task of parents is to ensure the happy development of the child. A completely harmonious, happy family exists only for the child, and family interaction is carried out, as a rule, “from the bottom up”. As a result of such a “bottom-up” movement, the child develops a fairly high self-esteem, a sense of self-importance, but often there is a high degree of probability of conflict with the social environment outside the family. Therefore, a child from such a family quite often evaluates the world as essentially hostile, and this child even has a very high risk of social maladjustment.

A married (or completely democratic) family is considered to be the most ideal family, the goal of which is complete mutual trust, acceptance and autonomy of its members. The educational influence in the family is built as “a horizontal one”, as a dialogue of equal subjects of social interaction – parents and a child (or several children). Mutual interests should always be taken into account in a family life, and the older the child is, the more his/her interests should be taken into account. The result of such harmonious family upbringing is the child’s mastery of democratic values, the harmonization of his/her ideas about rights and duties, freedom and responsibility, the development of children’s activity, their independence, benevolence, adaptability, self-confidence and emotional stability. At the same time, these children may develop the habit of subordinating themselves to social requirements, which are also sometimes perceived negatively by us when they are expressed and explained to the greatest extent.

The study of the operational assessment of well-being, activity and mood of children was carried out by us using the methodology “Methodology for Operational Assessment of Well-being, Activity and Mood (WAM)” (2023) and was subjected to the procedure of factor analysis and the method of semantic differential. The results obtained in the research of children of

the experimental group whose parents had recently divorced are given in Tables 1, 2. It should be noted that we used the method of 26-scale semantic differential to study the development of maladaptive mother-child relationships in a family after divorce (Михальчук, Харченко, Івашкевич Ед., & Івашкевич Ер., 2025).

Table 1

Factorization of data of children of the experimental group according to the criterion "Activity" with processing of these data by the method of semantic differential (in points, by the methods of factor analysis and semantic differential)

№	Name of the factorial quantity	Factor weight of the quantity	№	Name of the factorial quantity	Factor weight of the quantity
1	Indecisive	0.7234	14	Unpleasant	0.4986
2	Inactive	0.7002	15	Inanimate	0.4870
3	Inactive	0.6981	16	Shy	0.4782
4	Passive	0.6871	17	Difficult	0.4681
5	Tired	0.6731	18	Eager	0.4569
6	Joyless	0.6549	19	Nice	0.4391
7	Motionless	0.6312	20	Violent	0.3719
8	Unhappy	0.6209	21	Colorless	0.3544
9	Not easy	0.5871	22	Inexpensive	0.3340
10	Heavy	0.5781	23	Loud	0.3218
11	Not warm	0.5677	24	Dirty	0.3155
12	Not fast	0.5591	25	Severe	0.3008
13	Hostile	0.5349	26	Complex	0.2879

We'll present the data we obtained by factorizing the data of children in the experimental group according to the "Well-being" criterion with processing of these data using the semantic differential method (in points, using the methods of factor analysis and semantic differential) (data are given in Table 2).

Table 2

Factorization of data of children of the experimental group according to the criterion “Well-being” with processing of these data by the method of semantic differential (in points, by the methods of factor analysis and semantic differential)

№	Name of the factorial quantity	Factor weight of the quantity	№	Name of the factorial quantity	Factor weight of the quantity
1	Disgusting	0.6894	14	Crooked	0.4918
2	Bad	0.6732	15	Unaccepting	0.4704
3	Unpleasant	0.6650	16	Icy	0.4700
4	Poor quality	0.6410	17	Complex	0.4654
5	Unemotional	0.6134	18	Violent	0.4513
6	Languid	0.5902	19	Idle	0.4312
7	Impolite	0.5832	20	Violent	0.3895
8	Dirty	0.5790	21	The person who does not go to meet others	0.3781
9	Existential	0.5662	22	Untidy	0.3611
10	Cold	0.5514	23	Simple	0.3508
11	Dark	0.5331	24	The person who loves home	0.3201
12	Inexpressive	0.5329	25	Light	0.2891
13	Unnatural	0.5308	26	Warm	0.2768

So, according to the results of our experimental research, we have defined the concept of “adaptive situation” as a system of external preconditions for the subject, who motivates, facilitates and mediates the person’s attitude to life, his/her vital energy, activity, under which the main conditions of the external adaptive situation for the subject means:

1. The external adaptive position in relations to the subject is perceived in spatial and temporal terms as some external location in accordance with the paradigm of space and temporal boundaries.

2. Purely in temporal terms as a warning of maladaptive, destructive and aggressive actions of the subject.

3. In functional and paradigmatic terms we have a significant independence from the space of the corresponding prerequisites or conditions of the individual at the time of manifestation of actions and different types of the activities.

Conclusions

So, we'd like to make *conclusions* about denial of negative relationships between a mother and a child in the family after divorce. Initially, the reality of what is happening in the world around them is completely denied by the child. Usually, the mother spends a lot of time, energy, emotions and feelings on establishing close relationships with the child, so it is quite difficult for a child and a mother to immediately come to terms with the divorce of their parents. At this stage, the activity of protective mechanisms in the child's psyche is actualized: rationalization ("finally everything happened", "sooner or later it would have happened anyway"), devaluation of family relationships ("actually the marriage was terrible", "my husband is absolute worthlessness"), denial of positive relationships ("nothing happened, so what, a divorce", "everything will be fine anyway").

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Михальчук Наталія, Куриця Денис. Емпіричне дослідження дезадаптивних взаємостосунків матері і дитини старшого шкільного віку в сім'ї після розлучення.

Метою нашого дослідження є отримати результатами емпіричного вивчення дезадаптивних взаємостосунків між матір'ю та дитиною старшого шкільного віку в сім'ї після розлучення.

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Методи дослідження. Для розв'язання поставлених у роботі завдань використовувалися такі теоретичні методи дослідження: категоріальний, структурно-функціональний, аналіз, систематизація, моделювання, узагальнення. Експериментальним методом є метод організації емпіричного дослідження.

Результати дослідження. Ми визначили, що поняття «адаптивна ситуація» означає систему зовнішніх стосовно суб'єкта передумов, що спонукають, фасилітують і опосередковують його ставлення до життя, його життєву енергію, його активність, за умов якого зовнішнє адаптивне становище стосовно суб'єкта означає: 1. Зовнішнє адаптивне становище стосовно суб'єкта сприймається у просторовому та темпоральному відношенні – як деяке зовнішнє розташування відповідно до парадигми простору і темпоральних меж. 2. Суто у часовому відношенні як попередження дезадаптивних, руйнівних та агресивних дій суб'єкта. 3. У функціональному та парадигмальному відношенні – як суттєва незалежність від простору відповідних передумов або умов особистості у момент прояву дій, діяльності та активності.

Висновки. Доведено заперечення негативних взаємостосунків матері і дитини в сім'ї після розлучення. Спочатку реальність того, що відбувається в оточуючому світі, повністю заперечується дитиною. Зазвичай, матір витрачає на встановлення близьких взаємостосунків з дитиною досить багато часу, енергії, емоцій та почуттів, тому дитині та матері дуже важко одразу змиритися із розлученням своїх батьків. На цій стадії актуалізується робота захисних механізмів у психіці дитини: раціоналізація («нарешті все відбулося», «рано чи пізно це все одно б трапилося»), знецінення родинних взаємостосунків («насправді шлюб був жахливим», «мій чоловік є абсолютною нікчемністю»), заперечення позитивних взаємостосунків («нічого не трапилося, ну й що, що розлучення», «все добре буде в будь-якому разі»).

Ключові слова: дезадаптивні взаємостосунки, розлучення, адаптивна позиція, деструктивні дії, агресивні дії, раціоналізація, девальвація сімейних взаємостосунків, заперечення позитивних взаємостосунків.

Date of the first submission of the article for publication 02.06.2025

Date of the article acceptance for publication after peer review 29.10.2025

Date of publication 27.11.2025