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Psychology and psychopathology of overvalue hobby schoolshooting ideas. The case of Katerina and Yakov

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the analysis of the phenomenon of extremely valuable passion for the ideas of school shooting (mass shootings in educational institutions). The case of 16-year-old Katerina and her 18-year-old friend Yakov, who were referred to psychiatrists after discovering preparations to commit a crime and activity in searching for information on the Internet about school shooting, is described. Since childhood, Katerina has been under the care of psychiatrists for mental, intellectual and speech development delays. She has been on disability since the age of 18 and has a history of playing games simulating murder and violence. The article examines the psychopathological and psychological factors that contributed to the formation of an extremely valuable passion for the ideas of school shooting among the surveyed. The article highlights the lack of seriousness and lack of concern displayed by Katerina and Yakov towards the issue of school shootings. Their tendency to joke about this topic and express sympathy for the perpetrators is also highlighted. The emphasis is placed on the careless, frivolous attitude of Katerina and Yakov to the problem of mass murders in schools, their tendency to joke about these topics and show sympathy for the killers. It is concluded that “understanding” the feelings of school shooters, the infantile desire to make something “cool” out of any life event, create a meme, laugh at something that is not customary to laugh at (“ethical inversion”) should be recognized as fertile ground for the formation extremely valuable passion for the ideas of school shooting, without the destruction of which it is impossible to cope with future tragedies in educational institutions.

Keywords: school shooting; overvalued hobbies; xenophobia; psychology of deviant behavior; infantilism.

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Психология и психопатология сверхценного увлечения идеями скулшутинга. Случай Катерины и Якова

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АННОТАЦИЯ

Статья посвящена анализу феномена сверхценного увлечения идеями скулшутинга (массовых расстрелов в учебных заведениях). Описан случай 16-летней Катерины и её 18-летнего друга Якова, направленных к психиатрам после обнаружения признаков подготовки к совершению преступления и активности в поиске информации в интернете о скулшутинге. Катерина с детских лет находилась под наблюдением психиатров с отставанием в умственном, психическом и речевом развитии, имела инвалидность, увлекалась играми, имитирующими убийства и насилие. В статье представлен анализ психопатологических и психологических факторов, способствовавших формированию у обследованных сверхценного увлечения идеями скулшутинга. Сделан акцент на беспечное, легкомысленное отношение Катерины и Якова к проблеме массовых убийств в школах, склонность шутить на данные темы и проявлять симпатию к убийцам. Сделан вывод о том, что «понимание» чувств скулшутеров, инфантильное стремление из любого жизненного события сделать что-то «прикольное», создать мем, посмеяться над тем, над чем смеяться не принято («этическая инверсия»), следует признать плодотворной почвой для формирования сверхценного увлечения идеями скулшутинга, без разрушения которых невозможно справиться с будущими трагедиями в образовательных учреждениях.

Ключевые слова: скулшутинг; сверхценные увлечения; ксенофобия; психология девиантного поведения; инфантилизм.

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Скулшутинг идеяләре белән саташулы мавыгуның психологиясе һәм психопатологиясе. Катерина һәм Яков очрагы

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АННОТАЦИЯ

Мәкалә скулшутинг (уку йортларында массакүләм кораллы атышлар) идеяләре белән саташулы мавыгу феноменын анализлауга багышланган. 16 яшьлек Катерина һәм аның 18 яшьлек дуслы Яковның жинаятькә әзерләнү һәм Интернетта скулшутинг турында мәгълүмат эзләүдә активлык билгеләре табылгач, психиатрларга жиһәрелгән очрагы тасвирлана. Инвалидлык документы булган Катерина балачактан ук психиатрлар күзәтүе астында була, анда акыл, психик һәм сөйләм үсеше ягыннан артта калуы күзәтелә, үтерү һәм көч куллануны имитацияләгән уеннар белән мавыга. Мәкаләдә тикшерүчеләрдә скулшутинг идеяләре белән саташулы мавыгуны формалаштыруга этәргән психопатологик һәм психологик факторлар анализлана. Катерина һәм Яковның мәктәпләрдә күпләп үтерү проблемасына саксыз, жиһәлчә карашына, бу темаларга шаяртуга һәм үтерүчеләргә карата симпатия күрсәтүләренә басым ясала. Скулшутерларның хисләрен «аңлау», һәр тормыш вакыйгасыннан «күңелле» нәрсә эшләргә, мем булдырырга, көләргә ярамый торган нәрсәләрдән көләргә омтылу (этик инверсия) скулшутинг идеяләре белән саташулы мавыгу формалашуга нигез булып торучы ачык аңлау мөһим — аларны жимермичә, мәгариф учреждениеләрендә киләчәктә килеп чыгарга мөмкин фәжигаләрне булдырмый калу жиһәл булмаячак.

Төп төшенчәләр: скулшутинг; саташулы мавыгулар; ксенофобия; девиант тәртип психологиясе; инфантилизм.

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The phenomenon of mass shootings committed by students in educational institutions (school shooting) has become relevant not only for modern society but also for specialists involved in the psychology of deviant behavior and psychiatry [1–5].

In the Russian Federation, since a number of high-profile murders in schools and gymnasiums, law enforcement officials have increasingly turned to psychiatrists to examine individuals preparing to commit such illegal acts. This has occurred in cases when the police became aware of a young person's passion for Internet sites devoted to the issue of school shooting or weapons used for these purposes. It was assumed that such behavior might be the manifestation of latent psychopathology.

In addition to studying the personality and characterological features of the “shooters”, the problem of studying the psychology and psychopathology of teenagers fascinated with the school shooters themselves has become significant [6, 7]. It was noted that every time a mass school murder was committed, groups of followers of school shooters (Columbine community) appeared on the Internet, supporting them and distributing thematic memes [8]. The subject of school murders has turned from tragic to comic (“cool”) for some young people. Among youth, it has become customary to joke about this topic, laugh, and not condemn it. It should be recognized that school shooting, as a rule, is the lot of loners, and those who sympathize with them usually identify themselves as pertaining to this group.

Whether or not there are data that support a direct connection between the exaggerated preoccupation with school shooters and real illegal activity, there is no reason to believe that a teenager who is fascinated by this topic is ready to murder their peers. For most of them, it is an abnormal hobby, a “game”, an opportunity to try on different roles.

This article presents a psychological and psychiatric analysis of the heightened preoccupation with school shooting. Below is the case of 16-year-old Katerina G. and her 18-year-old friend Yakov S.¹, who were sent by law enforcement agencies to a psychiatric hospital for examination because their activity on websites related to school shooting was noticed.

The leader in the pair was Katerina, who was actively studying school shooting. It became known that she not only spent much time studying websites devoted to this topic but also tried to buy a gun with her friend. The referral to psychiatrists was also because Katerina had been under the supervision of psychiatrists since childhood, had been hospitalized several times, and had a disability due to mental illness. Before her last hospitalization, she signed an informed consent.

Katerina is 16 years old. She was born in 2007 in the regional center in a dysfunctional family. She weighed 2140 g

and was 48 cm long at birth. She was the third child of a mother who led an asocial lifestyle, neglected her children, engaged in prostitution, abused alcoholic, and died of tuberculosis when Katerina was 9 years old. Her father, who is an alcoholic and was deprived of parental rights, works as a security guard. The girl maintains a relationship with her father, calling it “good”. Katerina's parents divorced immediately after she was born.

From the maternity hospital, Katerina was transferred to the neonatal pathology department with a diagnosis of central nervous system pathology and mental retardation. She was raised by her mother until she was 4 months old and then abandoned without parental care. She was transferred to the abandoned babies department of the district hospital, where she stayed until she was 1 year and 9 months old. Then, at the insistence of her aunt (who is currently her guardian), she was transferred to the infant orphanage so that her aunt could visit her and formalize guardianship. The girl was not immediately placed in a foster family with the justification that her disease and disability should be identified first. The girl's psychomotor and physical development was retarded. She spoke her first words at the age of 2 years old.

Katerina was first referred to psychiatrists at the age of 3. She was admitted to the hospital with a referral diagnosis of psychomotor retardation. A report about her from one of her teachers stated, “... [she] has been attending Montessori classes for a year, loves the classes, studies with desire, has fine motor skills, knows how to manipulate objects, but does not achieve positive results; if she cannot do this, she can switch to actions with other objects; she can do only what she likes for a long time and with enthusiasm. The girl is restless, her attention is scattered, and her speech is unarticulated. She develops slowly. Her perception is at the developmental stage”.

Another report from the orphanage noted “the girl is sociable with contrasting behavior. She can be calm and cheerful, and sometimes she behaves inappropriately. She understands speech addressed to her well. Her vocabulary is enriched, but she uses it depending on her mood. She clearly pronounces only 5–6 words (bunny, water, who's there, give, go). She knows and calls children in the group and adults by name. Her sensory abilities are poorly developed. She does not distinguish colors well and does not name them. She is not very assiduous, but she likes classes in a group and individually. She understands the set goal well and strives to achieve it. She is very independent, but she likes to be given more attention. She is jealous of communication between teachers and other children. Walking, climbing, throwing are well developed. She can undress herself and tries to dress herself. Development group 4, degree 3”.

When Katerina was admitted to the psychiatric hospital, it was noted that the girl's speech was not developed; she

¹ Not their real names.

had psychomotor retardation. She was restless, picked up different objects, practically did not react to comments, and was capricious. Her understanding of spoken language was not complete. Her attention was quickly exhausted. She constantly repeated any word that she heard. Her intellectual-mnemonic sphere was reduced.

In the department, she adapted quite quickly and was not oppressed by her stay at the hospital. However, she was restless and agitated and often ran along the corridor, jumped, and climbed into cabinets. She snatched toys from other children and could bite or hit, but did not engage in play activities and did not communicate with anyone. She did not maintain eye contact and did not respond to comments. She practically did not communicate with children or participate in play activities, and often asked to be held. She fell asleep only in someone's arms and cried when she was put to bed. She was consulted by a speech therapist ("understanding of spoken language is partial, coherent speech is absent, pronounces individual sounds. Oral praxis is impaired. Conclusion: general speech underdevelopment, level 1").

Based on the results of a psychiatric examination at the age of 3, Katerina was diagnosed with mild mental retardation and pronounced speech disorders. When she was discharged, it was recommended that her case file be sent to a medical and social examiner because of the signs of disability. In 2010, the girl was assigned to a disability group for a year, which was then extended for another year. She attended a combined-type correctional kindergarten. She did not receive any treatment.

A year later, Katerina was again admitted to a psychiatric hospital with a diagnosis of delayed speech development combined with mental retardation. At that time, the girl was already being raised by her aunt, who was also raising her older sisters.

From her mental status, it was learned that "the girl lags behind her peers in physical development. She has motor restlessness, disinhibited. She partially comprehends addressed speech. Her speech is defective. She says the words "give", "drink". She does not say her name, does not react to it and does not respond. She does not know her age, cannot show it on her fingers. She does not know the seasons. Her emotional reactions are inappropriate for the situation. She shows no reaction to comments. She demonstrates aggression toward children. Her attention is attracted for a short time. Her mental development does not correspond to her age. Her night sleep is sometimes restless. Her appetite is sufficient. Her memory and intelligence are reduced".

After Katerina was discharged, she periodically visited the local psychiatrist together with her guardian. According to the guardian, she threw tantrums at home, was often distracted during play ("as if she was talking to someone"), did not interact with children in kindergarten, and would go off to do her own things. At home, she sometimes played with her sisters.

When examined by a psychiatrist, she was neatly dressed, had a calm demeanor, did not answer questions right away, and had to be asked several times clearly and slowly. Sometimes she simply repeated the question asked or said her name. She could assemble a pyramid, but did not know the names of colors. She counted only to five, brought toys when asked, drew bars with a pencil, and made a house out of sticks. Nocturnal enuresis was noted. Her speech was only in the form of echolalia, with poor vocabulary. Her attention was unstable and depleted. She was emotionally labile and did not fully assimilate the program of the correctional kindergarten.

Katerina's mental state remained similar for several years. A report from a preschool for special needs children at that time stated that she was "hyperactive by nature, disinhibited. Can show aggression and self-aggression. The girl comes to kindergarten neat and takes care of her appearance. She has self-service skills and prefers to play alone in a group. Most often, this is a ritual of dressing up in clothes of cartoon characters, real and fictional characters. The child hears a bizarre fantasy of fairy tales, cartoons, and fictional and real events. In rare cases, there is alienation of the pronoun "I". In joint games with children, she shows a constant struggle for leadership; such games do not last long. The child violates the rules of the game, behaves aggressively, argues, fights, and offends children. Subsequently, because of Katerina's behavior, children refuse to play with her and do not accept her into games. *Her usual game plot includes causing harm, damage, imitation of physical injury, and murder*".

She uses objects only for their intended purpose. She is sociable, easily makes contact, and often initiates communication. She does not always obey the demands of an adult. During class, after a remark, she often starts to argue. She has slow thinking and sufficient efficiency. Her attention switching is low. She does not fully master the kindergarten program, with ordinal counting up to 10, quantitative representations up to 5. She knows primary colors and geometric shapes, compares them by pattern, and independently names them correctly. She assembles complex cut-out pictures and puzzles independently by design.

Active phrasal a grammatical speech is noted, as well as echolalation, often repetition of a phrase heard somewhere without connection to a real situation. Katerina constantly comments on everything, names objects, and explains her own and other people's actions. She often does not hear questions addressed to her. Her vocabulary is colloquial. She can classify and generalize, retell the fairy tales "Turnip" and "Kolobok", and list individual actions based on a series of pictures. She does not grasp the coherence of the story. She cannot retell more complex stories. She cannot identify the sequence of events. She does not understand the meaning of proverbs or sayings. She does not establish cause-and-effect relationships.

In 2012, at the age of 5, she was once again referred to the hospital by a local psychiatrist because of inappropriate

behavior. The referral stated, "the girl likes to watch movies with murders. At home she talks while staring at one point in space. She is active. Her movements are awkward. She partially comprehends speech addressed to her. Her attention is attracted after multiple repetitions of a question. Her speech is slow and chanting. She looks away, sometimes freezes, then becomes excited again. Her speech is unarticulated, consists of fragments of phrases. She does not keep her distance and hits the doctor with a toy. She has echolalia. When asked "Who are you?", she answers, "I am a dragonfly". She is aggressive toward children and demonstrates how she fought in kindergarten. She is emotionally unstable". Doctors noted oddities in her behavior, in particular, a tendency to play with aggression and imitate murders.

She was discharged with a diagnosis of mild mental retardation with behavioral disorders of the autism spectrum. By this time, the girl's speech had become coherent. The delay had been eliminated, which was confirmed by a speech therapist's examination.

According to the results of an experimental psychological study, her personality was dominated by traits of emotional immaturity, individualism, peculiar behavior, persistence and exactingness in defending her positions, an increased sense of independence, and difficulty in social adaptation. The conclusion stated, "more data for cognitive impairment (mild), caused by signs of organoidness with a tendency to fantasize and peculiar behavior".

She was discharged from the hospital with the diagnosis of other non-psychotic disorders (consequences of organic brain damage in the form of mild intellectual disability and schizophrenic symptoms). Later, Katerina was diagnosed with organic cognitive disorder with behavioral disorder requiring care and treatment and moderate emotional-volitional disorders.

Despite her psychiatric diagnosis and intellectual disability, Katerina was able to enter the 1st grade of the Engineering Center Lyceum in 2014, and she coped with the academic workload; she is currently studying in the 10th grade. She gets mainly good and excellent marks. She likes subjects such as history, social studies, and physical education. As of the 7th grade, she was bullied, laughed at, and insulted because of her short stature. She reacted painfully to this. Relationships with teachers have always been good. She has three close friends, and she has been friends with one of them since the 1st grade. The rest graduated from school and are studying at university.

In her free time, she previously studied at an art school for 2 years, plays the drums, goes to the gym, enjoys drawing, plays computer games in the genre of construction and country management like RimWorld, Metro2033, Sims 4, and Minecraft, and prefers logic games.

At the age of 14, she began to date a 24-year-old man. She met him on vacation, where he was working as a security guard at a sanatorium. Her mother forbade them to communicate, but their relationship secretly continued.

Katerina was worried about this situation. One day on vacation, she climbed a tower (about 30 floors high) in order to attract the attention of her mother and the man so that "they would make peace, and [Katerina and the man] could openly date". Occasionally, she would cut herself on her hips and shoulders using a stationery knife.

In general, by this age, Katerina's behavior was adequate, but sometimes there were conflicts in the family over everyday issues. Considering the stabilization of Katerina's mental state and her successful studies at school, in 2018, her guardian approached the local psychiatrist to ask him to remove the girl from the psychiatric register. "Everything has passed. All the fears have gone away. No illusions. She does not whisper to anyone anymore". However, Katerina refused to be examined by a psychologist or consulted by a professor.

Her school report states, "During her studies, she demonstrated good and excellent knowledge of subjects. Discipline in the classroom is good. Katerina has expressed cognitive motives for learning, a desire to gain new knowledge. She studies with interest, loves to read, has stable attention, developed creative imagination, and logical thinking with consistency and evidence of her thoughts. She knows how to reason and draw conclusions, has well-developed oral and written speech, and knows how to express her thoughts. Katerina participates in various activities and performs her work conscientiously. She demonstrates great interest in the social life of the class and participates in school-wide events. She is respected by her classmates in the class and is sociable. She has a conscientious attitude to work activities and participates in socially useful work. She has no bad habits. She treats her comrades and teachers with respect and responds adequately to criticism from her elders".

On the basis of the results of a psychological examination in 2022, all psychiatric diagnoses for Katerina were removed, and it was found that she did not have any mental disorders. Therefore, she was removed from psychiatric follow-up, and the medical and social examiner was notified of this.

In 2022, she began to date an 18-year-old man, Yakov, whom she had met online. He is a fourth-year college student. She began to have a sexual life at the age of 16. She tried cigarettes for the first time at the age of 15 and currently does not smoke. She tried alcohol for the first time at the age of 16. She has not tried drugs. She is making plans for the future. She wants to become a fitness trainer and to go to university ("I can enter a pedagogical institute and become a physical education teacher or a blogger").

In the summer of 2023, she had difficulty passing exams and noted that teachers at school put a lot of pressure on her. At the same time, she took an active part in various jokes (memes) about school shootings. From that time on, she began to search on the Internet for information about "shooters", studied their biographies, and analyzed the technology of mass murders.

Katerina started to share this information with her boyfriend. She sent him videos and photos of the murders via messengers. They began to discuss these events, sometimes “jokingly” thinking about how they could execute their offenders. “It was fun and interesting”. She studied this topic so deeply that she thought about writing an encyclopedia on school shooting. She has learned the names and biographies of the “shooters” Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold by heart (“They were the first”). She knows that the shooting occurred at Columbine High School. She knows the names Vladislav Roslyakov, Mitchell Johnson, Andrew Golden, Timur Bekmansurov, Alina Afanaskina, etc. She was especially interested in Ilnaz Galyaviyev, who committed a mass murder in a Kazan gymnasium in 2021. She notes that it was after this that she became interested in the topic of school shooting and began to study the psychology of killers in detail.

She was referred to psychiatrists in February 2024 after she was invited to the head teacher’s office during lessons, where her mother, a juvenile inspector, and law enforcement officials were present. She was informed of a suspicion that fraud was to be committed using her mobile phone. At the head teacher’s request, she unblocked her phone, after which Katerina’s “vision blurred”, she fell to the floor, cut her forehead, and injured her elbow. She did not remember everything that happened later, saying that she had entered a “trance state”, and that she did not know how to explain it: she heard a lot of noise, everyone was pestering her, and she needed to be alone and think.

After that, she was informed that she was suspected of preparing to commit a crime, school shooting. She was then taken away by the law enforcement officials to give her statement. During the writing of the report, Katerina often complained that her words were being misinterpreted. After this, her laptop was confiscated from her house. As the police knew that Katerina had been under the supervision of psychiatrists for a long time, she was taken to the emergency room of a psychiatric hospital and voluntarily admitted for examination.

Several days earlier, law enforcement officials had learned that Katerina had discussed her intention to buy a smooth-bore firearm at school. It turned out that Katerina was searching for websites describing school shooting and weapons and was subscribed to suicidal groups.

According to the police, after a preventive conversation, she tried to delete the correspondence with her boyfriend but was stopped by officers. It became known that in the correspondence with her friend Yakov, there was an exchange of numerous videos with scenes of murder. Katerina had sent him instructions on how to make poisons and invited him to watch violent content.

When she was hospitalized at the psychiatric hospital, she did not complain about anything. She understood the reasons for her hospitalization but did not show any particular concern, believing that “interest in any information on the

Internet is not a crime” and declaring that the weapon was needed to practice and “feel the recoil”.

When admitted, Katerina was outwardly neat and motorically calm. Her mood was even and emotionally expressive. Despite her outward demonstration of sociability, she sometimes behaved insecurely, trying to hide her excitement with verbosity. Her judgments were superficial and frivolous.

Katerina stated the reason for her hospitalization was having corresponded with her boyfriend about the topic of mass shootings in schools and discussed types of weapons. She claimed to be amused by moments in the actions and judgments of the “shooters” (“I wonder how anyone can do this alone?”, “How can an ordinary person call himself God?! That’s ridiculous!”). When talking about this topic, she smiled, laughed, and was uncritical of her statements and judgments. In conversation, she was disingenuous, and when her statements were shown to be inconsistent with objective information and she was caught lying, she quickly found an excuse for what she said. She tried to evade the main topic of discussion, which creates the impression of a reduced focus of judgments. However, she was somewhat concerned about the consequences of her actions and feared the possible initiation of a criminal case. At this time, she became anxious, downplayed the degree of her responsibility, and tried to justify herself (“I wasn’t going to do anything to anyone..., and I wasn’t going to buy a weapon..”). She assessed herself as mentally healthy.

During a psychological examination, Katerina was transparent about her motivation. When demonstrating interest, she performed tasks formally, without interest. She understood instructions for tasks from the first presentation and retained them during the work process. She worked at a sufficient pace. She was able to accept the psychologist’s help, but external correction was ineffective.

Her attention in load tests showed sufficient concentration and distribution (Schulte table 39", 42", 49", 46", 43"). Her direct mechanical memorization had a reduced fixation component with sufficient volume (reproduction curve of 10 words: 4, 9, 10, 10, and 6 words were delayed). With indirect memorization, she accurately reproduced 10 concepts out of 10. Her mediation of concepts was effected through specific, situational, metaphorical images with references to bullying and an immature nature of judgments with a fixation on satisfying her needs. Her drawings were ordered, enlarged, and formal with accuracy, detail, and simplified graphics. The pressure she applied to her pencil varied.

When her operational sphere of thinking was examined, Katerina revealed an ambiguity of categorization with a tendency to detail. She correctly established logical connections based on direct analogies, committing a few isolated errors on complex tests. In verbal association, her speech reactions of standard content were unevenly delayed over the latent period. In the “Naming 60 Words” technique, her associations were of a primitive, every day, playful nature, with a fixation on satisfying her own material needs.

Katerina could interpret the meaning of a story of average complexity with superficial convey. She did not always convey the meaning of proverbs and sayings correctly. She was more often confused with secondary associations. According to Raven's progressive matrices, her IQ test² indicator corresponded to a "reduced norm of intelligence". In the "Unfinished Sentences" technique, she gave brief, socially approved statements. The Bass–Darkey questionnaire revealed a "high" level of aggressiveness and hostility in her.

In the personality structure [reduced multifactorial personality questionnaire (RMPQ), individual-typological questionnaire, color selection method, human drawing], Katerina expressed egocentrism, emotional and personal immaturity, resentment, emotional instability, high impulsivity, antisocial tendencies, irritability, a conflictive nature, reactions of protest, uniqueness of motives and behavior, unpredictability of actions, motivational instability, inflated claims, a need for recognition, a tendency to avoid responsibility, and pronounced emotional fluctuation without depth of experience.

The conclusion stated, "...[in] an experimental psychological study, productivity of mnestic abilities is revealed, as are low cognitive capabilities with an IQ test indicator corresponding to the reduced intelligence norm. Also revealed are vague categorization, actualization of subjective, unlikely attributes of objects, involvement of secondary associations in a person with a frivolous, uncritical nature of judgments, egocentrism, emotional and personal immaturity, touchiness, high impulsivity, antisocial tendencies, conflict, a high level of aggressiveness and hostility, originality of motives and behavior, unpredictability of actions, inflated claims, a need for recognition, and a tendency to avoid responsibility".

According to the neurological examination and electroencephalography, no pathology was detected.

Mental status (one month after hospitalization). Katerina walked unembarrassedly into the auditorium, where 150 psychiatrists and psychologists had gathered for a clinical consultation on her case. She was the first to extend her hand to the professor for a handshake. She greeted those present with a wave of her hand and a smile. She was not embarrassed when she was asked to speak into the microphone.

During the conversation, Katerina communicated with the professor easily but without familiarity. She joked, addressed questions to the audience, and behaved naturally. She was not oppressed by the fact that she was in a psychiatric hospital and that the threat of a criminal case hung over her. At the end of the conversation, when the doctors present in the audience were asked to ask her questions, she rubbed her hands with a smile in anticipation of formulating interesting answers. She liked being the center of attention and talking about herself. She subtly and accurately understood the

professor's irony and responded sensitively to changes in the topic of conversation.

Katerina was especially emotional when she talked about the topic of school shooting. She spoke in detail about her interest in the behavioral patterns of people who committed mass murders in schools. When talking about tragedies, she would smile, joke, and be frivolous. She formally accepted the indication that this was inappropriate, but she claimed that memes and jokes about school shootings were a common phenomenon in the school environment.

When discussing the topic of the Kazan shooter Ilnaz Galyaviev, Katerina offered several possible motives for his behavior. The first included reasoning that Galyaviev had a traumatic brain injury, which "broke some connections in the brain, and he lost his sense of empathy". The second was that "he might have joined some kind of sect". She inclined toward the first possibility as the most convincing. She was able to explain what was meant when she used the term empathy. When asked whether she had lost this feeling when she and her friend were planning to commit mass murder, for which she tried to buy a weapon, she said no.

When asked how she felt about the fact that the shooter Galyaviev had support groups (fan girls) on the Internet after his arrest, she said that she understood their feelings since Ilnaz is outwardly attractive. "He has very beautiful eyebrows and a face". She did not see any contradiction in the idea that a killer can be judged by his appearance rather than his actions. When asked whether the attitude toward Galyaviev's actions might have been different had he been outwardly unattractive, she agreed with a smile.

At the same time, she formally understands that it is wrong to show sympathy to the killer and not the relatives of the victims, but explained, "... many are like that. Many live for fun and, for example, give a Nazi salute when they enter the classroom, not seeing anything reprehensible in it". She also does not see any deviance in her passion for school shooters, though she agrees that it is unusual: if one asks people in the street who Eric Harris, Dylan Klebold, Vladislav Roslyakov, Mitchell Johnson, Andrew Golden, Timur Bekmansurov, and Alina Afanaskina are, the overwhelming majority will not be able to answer.

She said that before she became interested in school shooters, she studied the biographies of maniacs and murderers, for example, Andrei Chikatilo, in detail. Before that, she was interested in the personality of Adolf Hitler, and her favorite desk book is still Nietzsche's philosophical treatise *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. She came to the department with this book. She was able to talk in general terms about the meaning of the book and Nietzsche's standpoint. She claimed that "being a superman is cool".

In conversation, she did not show aggression or irritation. She was carefree and interested in the impression she made

² IQ — intelligence quotient.

on the audience. Her vocabulary was rich, and her intelligence was above average. Her thinking occurred at a normal pace and was consistent and free of signs of disorders. She did not show active psychopathological production.

At the same time, her boyfriend Yakov was undergoing a psychiatric examination at the same hospital. He could not be invited to the consultation because he was transferred to a pre-trial detention center after the examination.

Yakov was 18 years old. His heredity did not show a history of psychopathology. He was born with a body weight of 3400 g against the somatic well-being of the mother and he was the only child in the family. The birth was vaginal, his mother's first, at weeks 38–39. His assessment on the Apgar scale was 7–8 points. He was discharged from the maternity hospital in satisfactory condition.

Later, Yakov passed through the main phases of development on time 2–6–10 months. He spoke his first words when he was 1 year old, and by the age of 30 months, he had established detailed speech. He went to kindergarten at the age of 5 and was characterized as an excessively shy boy, but over time he adapted. His early physical and mental development corresponded to his age.

Yakov was brought up in a single-parent family. Yakov's parents divorced when he was 2 years old. His father is a military man and took part in raising his son; he was always interested in his condition. Lately, they have been communicating more often. His relationship with his mother is friendly.

Yakov went to school at the age of 7, studied well, and was interested in drawing and modeling with plasticine. He has been boxing since the age of 17. At school, he was selective about the friends he made among his classmates. In elementary school, he experienced bullying from a more physically developed classmate. Then, the offender transferred to another school, and the harassment stopped. From grade 6 to grade 9, he was ridiculed by his classmates ("they teased me because of my long hair"). He did not repeat classes. His favorite subject was history. He completed 9 years of high school. After finishing school, he entered university, where he is now studying, specializing in economics and accounting. He lives with his mother and grandfather. He has been in a relationship with Katerina for a year.

Yakov was admitted to a psychiatric hospital at the same time as Katerina, accompanied by law enforcement officers and his mother, and gave informed consent. He was referred to psychiatrists because it was suspected that he had a mental disorder. It turned out that he had become interested in the topic of Columbine ("My girlfriend Katerina sent information, and then the girl's parents treated her badly. She was offended at school. I remembered my grievances, became interested in Columbine, read, watched, collected information about injustice and school shootings. It seemed right to me that these people could deal with those who offended them like this. They wanted to take revenge on the whole world"). He searched for information and repeatedly watched videos

on the Internet. He corresponded with his girlfriend on the topic of Columbine and was interested in buying a gun.

Mental status. The patient was somewhat tense, with a fussy look, and oriented correctly. He answered questions succinctly in a quiet voice, talked willingly, and tried to make a favorable impression. He said that he had made a mistake with his interest in information about murders and school shootings and called his discussion of video files on this topic with the girl Katerina stupid. Tears periodically appeared in his eyes during the conversation, and when he switched to another question, he stopped crying.

He demonstrated concern about the results of his girlfriend's examination and worried about whether he would be able to continue his studies at college ("I am going to miss a lot here. What should I do!"). He said that he and the girl had developed a very close relationship ("We are ready to give our lives for each other. I met her, and I am obliged to take care of her"). He admitted that he was greatly hurt by the unfair treatment of the girl in the family ("They offend her. I felt very sorry for her. I wanted to protect her somehow from everything").

The patient's attention was attracted and held sufficiently. He showed purposeful thinking at a normal pace. His judgments were infantile, his vocabulary was sufficient, and his intelligence and memory were sufficient.

Psychological examination. During the examination, the individual was available for contact. He answered questions in terms of the given question and reluctantly explained why he was hospitalized, omitting details. He was oriented correctly in all types and maintained visual contact for a short time. His mood was depressed. He was sitting with his head down. He was emotionally labile and cried when discussing his relationship with the girl. He was immature in judgments. At the same time, when asking clarifying questions, he was inclined to make confrontational statements and answered with counter questions. He also showed some mannerisms and a tendency to make pathetic statements.

In the experiment, he began to complete tasks after a single presentation of the instructions. He worked with general sufficient tempo characteristics and a formal attitude, but he was confrontational, with rigid and contradictory challenges to the psychologist's comments.

In loading tests, his attention was not impaired (Schulte tables 41", 34", 34", 33", 31"). His mnemonic functions were in sufficient volume (mnemogram of 10 words: 7, 8, 10, delayed 6; mediation 100%). In the pictogram, he produced images with simplified, inexpressive graphics, revealing a tendency to typical stereotypy. The presence of a single subjective and affiliative need was noted. He mediated given concepts quickly.

In "directed associations", he responded with sufficient tempo speech characteristics, making both "free" and hyper-concrete associations, and manifested a low formation of semantic nests ("... clothes, glasses, cosmetics, tank, cistern, snowfall, palette..."). In general, his associative

series was characterized by projections of a destructive orientation (the head “France”, “They loved to execute by guillotine there”).

Faced with complex ideas when studying the mental sphere (classification, eliminating the fourth odd one out, comparing pairs of concepts), he revealed generalizations of concepts based on latent features (“from the earth” — part of the plants, beetle, and “fruits;” “transport” — skier, part of the transport, and part of the furniture; “professions” — part of the people; a barrel-butterfly “starts with *b* and ends with *chk*,” watches — rivers “flow”). He qualitatively performed operations on direct analogies and exclusion of concepts. He correctly structured a plot sequence, understanding the embedded meaning.

He conveyed the meaning of idioms and proverbs using examples with elements of reasoning. He vaguely conveyed the hidden meaning of the story that he read through the prism of his own ideas. He revealed a tendency to use features of different significance as equivalent in the form of a sharp increase in the total number of properties involved due to the features of all three “keys”. The number of properties involved as essential was significantly expanded and actualized 238 features, and the number of properties of the third “key” exceeded 30.

According to the RMPQ results, he avoided excessive frankness with an emphasis on his peacekeeping tendencies. His methodology of color selection and drawing of a human showed features of emotional immaturity, egocentrism and rigidity, inflated self-esteem, unrealistic claims, a hypercompensatory attitude of aggressive tendencies, internal conflict, which combined sthenic features and impulsiveness with anxious-suspicious features, a tendency to cyclical changes in mood and behavioral reactions, tension of self-control, and possible destructive, aggressive tendencies.

The conclusion was made that “in an experimental psychological study, ... phenomena of a multifaceted approach to identifying leading features based on weak ones are detected. His pictogram shows the presence of a single subjective image. His verbal associations reveal the presence of responsive speech reactions “through a step”. His attention is not impaired, and his mnemonic functions are sufficient. His personality structure comprises a hypercompensatory attitude of aggressive tendencies, features of emotional immaturity, and internal conflict, which combines sthenic features and impulsiveness with anxious-suspicious traits.

According to the results of the method for identifying suicidal reactions, his indicators on the lie scale exceeded the permissible value, which indicates the insincerity of the answers given in an attempt to embellish oneself. However, with the maximum value of the anti-suicidal factor, an increase to above-average indicators is noted on the scales of “social pessimism, which indicates the presence of a negative concept of the surrounding world and a cult of values and standards that justify suicidal behavior or

even make it attractive to some extent, taking into account his emotionally unstable pattern of individual-personal properties and possible destructive aggressive tendencies with weakening control over impulsivity, while an S-reaction is not excluded”.

Yakov was discharged from the hospital with a diagnosis of *mixed disorder of emotions and behavior as an adaptation disorder in a personality accentuated by a mixed type*. Given his extremist orientation, he was discharged under the supervision of a district psychiatrist on the basis of social danger.

Although she was not given any psychiatric diagnosis, unlike Yakov, Laterina’s case seems more interesting and difficult to interpret. It should be noted that the obsession with school shooting arose primarily in her, and only then, through induction mechanisms, was her boyfriend drawn into them. Katerina’s development was disharmonious in nature with signs of mental, psychological, and speech development delays, which manifested themselves in a number of psychopathological symptoms. This led to her being given psychiatric diagnoses and a disability group. However, by the age of 14, her mental state had stabilized. She successfully adapted to society and coped with her studies, which allowed psychiatrists to recognize her as mentally sane.

One of the core features of Katerina’s behavior since childhood was a passion for games associated with aggression, murder, and violence. Later, in her teenage years, she became interested in school shootings, which became extremely important to her. Her interest included a detailed study of the biographies of famous “shooters” and an analysis of their actions and relationships with peers and adults.

In real life, Katerina did not encounter serious bullying, humiliation, or insults. Conflicts with loved ones were not severe enough for her to harbor traditional reasons for the formation of school shootings. At the same time, Katerina’s interest in the topic of mass murders expanded. She became interested in not only school shooters but also in maniacs, sadists, and tyrants. Her reference book was Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophical treatise *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which she studied deeply; she could recite from memory fragments of the book that were significant to her. In particular, she was fascinated by Nietzsche’s teaching about the superman, “a new type of person who rejected all moral limitations and was the creator of his own destiny and the destiny of humanity, the bearer of new moral values” [9].

The question of a possible relationship between Katerina’s mental disorders and the subsequent development of a heightened passion for school shooting became fundamental to the diagnosis.

In childhood, when Katerina had already developed an interest in games with murder and violence, she was given the psychiatric diagnoses of “mild mental retardation with significant behavioral disorders requiring care and treatment, with pronounced speech disorders, general speech underdevelopment of the level 1”, “delayed speech

development combined with mental retardation”, “mild mental retardation with behavioral disorders of the autism spectrum”, “other non-psychotic disorders (consequences of organic brain damage in the form of mild intellectual disability and schizotypal symptoms)”, and “organic cognitive disorder with behavioral disorder requiring care and treatment, moderately expressed emotional-volitional disorders”, which were later rejected. However, the psychiatrists who monitored her did not see an association between the delay in mental, intellectual, and speech development and her tendency to play games that simulated murder and violence.

An analysis of the abundant scientific literature on the subject [10–15] finds that most school shooters were recognized as mentally ill based on the results of psychological and psychiatric examinations. A study of 35 cases of surviving attackers in 115 mass school shootings from 1982–2019 [2], along with 20 randomly selected cases in which the attacker died during the shooting, showed that 87.5% of them had a misdiagnosed and improperly treated or undetected and untreated mental illness (Fig. 1).

In addition, most of the attackers experienced deep alienation from not only their families, friends, and classmates but also themselves. According to the authors, marginalization and interpersonal avoidance made them more vulnerable to untreated mental illness and radicalization, which contributed to the manifestation of violence. The authors highlight the fact that if such a person was misdiagnosed, they still had a vital need to “reduce the stigma of mental illness” to become more respected and less marginalized.

Another study of mass murders, which assessed the mental state of 14,785 killers from 1900 to 2019, found that only 11% of the perpetrators presented lifetime psychotic symptoms, but the majority had a history of non-psychotic psychiatric or neurological symptoms.

Most researchers differ on the significance of mental pathology in the birth of the impulse to commit school shootings. According to A.A. Portnova and Yu.P. Sivolap [16], not all school killers show symptoms of mental disorders,

and the most common reason for armed attacks is bullying and the desire to take revenge on the offenders. However, this position is contradicted by the fact that, in the overwhelming majority of cases, innocent people become victims of mass school killings.

Most of the literature focuses on the psychological and psychiatric assessment of people who have already committed school shootings or were preparing to do so. From our point of view, just as significant is the study of heightened preoccupation with school shooting, which can either be realized in the form of illegal actions or repressed for personal reasons (“thought crime”).

As their cases (especially Katerina’s) show, they Katerina and Yakov considered their preoccupation a kind of harmless hobby to which, as they declared, many of their peers are inclined. This type of abnormal hobby is designated by the term “cult hobbies” [17, 18]. At the same time, such a hobby (entertainment) is considered “fun and cool”. Apparently, this is precisely the reason why, even in the face of possible criminal punishment, Katerina was ready to discuss these topics openly, without “remorse”, demonstrating naivety and carelessness.

A study by U.B. Grinenko on the attitude of young people to death and the phenomenon of school shooting [19] showed that those who had previously heard about school shooting had significantly higher scores on the scales of “depression” and “paranoia” than those who were not familiar with this phenomenon, while other personal qualities did not differ significantly between the two groups. The author agrees that attackers tend to form extreme ideas when they are planning to strike a school. In addition, respondents in the group aware of school shooting were more inclined to rational solutions to moral dilemmas, which suggests an emotional preference for “death” and a decrease in the subjective significance of life.

It is noteworthy that Katerina and Yakov’s ideas of school shooting were of a rather abstract (theoretical) nature and were not intended to be carried out in relation to specific individuals. It was a kind of “imagination game”, similar to computer games, in which one can control many processes, including life and death. Unlike that of Katerina and Yakov, the aggression of real school shooters is usually directed at specific offenders. Their mood is always characterized by depression, anger, and a sense of injustice and is never accompanied by frivolity or cheerfulness.

Katerina’s fascination with Nietzsche’s concept of the superman, a being freed from the prevailing morality in society, does not present the features of fanaticism and dysphoria. She talks about it vividly, in a sense trying to evoke a reaction of surprise in listeners. Usually, such preoccupations are based on deeply rooted ideological attitudes and the search for one’s own place in an unjust world, and the impulse to realize them is born of paranoia.

Traditionally, heightened preoccupations are classified as behavioral deviations [16] typical of adolescents and

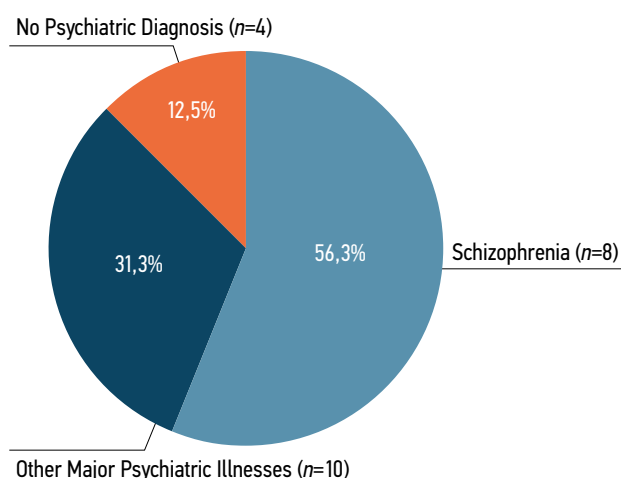


Fig. 1. Distribution of school shooters by diagnosis of mental disorder [2].

young adults. In extremely rare cases, they become psychopathological and reflect some kind of mental disorder. Katerina's heightened preoccupation with school shooting was projected on the Internet and was not associated with contacting like-minded people in real life. This type of deviant behavior is currently the most common [20–22]. In contrast, Katerina did not have any mental disorders, nor was there any connection between her heightened preoccupation with school shooting and her previous diagnoses.

According to M.Yu. Puchnina and V.A. Puchnin [7], there is an association between preoccupation with Columbine communities and a tendency to commit school shooting. However, it remains unclear why the vast majority of participants in destructive online communities do not commit violent crimes and why those who committed mass murders in schools and gymnasiums had not previously been members of Columbine communities. The authors also note similarities between Columbine communities and online "death groups". This is confirmed by the results of sociological research carried out by U.B. Grinenko on the correlations between young people's attitudes to death and the phenomenon of school shooting [19].

Thus, the case presented demonstrates the importance of differential diagnostics of psychopathological symptoms

and psychological phenomena that reflect the "delusion — exaggerated ideas — worldview" continuum.

The formation of xenophobia using the example of school shooting with the attempts of a young person to justify the correctness of his own position and the desire to take some action to change the surrounding reality shows that they are quite common in modern culture. Justification or, at least an "understanding" of the feelings of people who decided to commit mass school murders, the infantile desire to make something out of any life event "cool", to create a meme, to laugh at something that is not customary to laugh at ("ethical inversion"), should be recognized as fertile ground for the formation of an exaggerated interest in school shooting. While without their destruction it is impossible to cope with future tragedies in educational institutions.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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