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Personality in Norm and in Pathology**SPECIFICITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE OF  
ADOLESCENTS WITH REALIZED VICTIMHOOD**Olga Andronnikova (a)\*  
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andronnikova\_69@mail.ru**Abstract**

The study objective is to display the specifics of the individual experience of adolescents with realized victimhood. The hypothesis resides in an assumption that an objective, cognitively simple, emotionally negative, traumatic, and non-reflective individual experience functions as a factor in personality victimization. The study (N = 130) was participated by respondents aged 14 to 15, including 70 girls and 60 boys. The study used the following methods: V.V. Vetrova's projective essay "My vivid childhood memories", Questionnaire for adolescents "Representation of traumatic events in the individual experience of adolescents", methods for studying the propensity to victimized behaviour by O.O. Andronnikova. Methods of mathematical data processing by U-Mann-Whitney. It has been revealed that there is a significant difference in all the main characteristics of individual experience. The individual experience of adolescents with realized victimity is characterized by objectivity, cognitive simplicity, weak reflexivity of experienced events, and is saturated with emotionally negative and traumatic events. In addition, we have discovered that not only the traumatic event itself leads to victimization, but also the particularities of its reflection, representation in the mind of an adolescent. Further study perspectives are intended for finding techniques to work with the individual experience of adolescents, which would allow them to correct their victimization.

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## **1. Introduction**

Currently, the relevance of the study of the personality victimization process is increasing more and more. Despite the fact that the problem of personality victimization is actively considered within the framework of criminal victimology, for the psychological research, this phenomenon is studied as isolated cases. At the same time, to get a deeper understanding of the nature of victimization, we need to consider not only social, but also psychological factors that determine this phenomenon. Among these factors, one of the most important is an individual experience of a person. However, the category of individual experience remains poorly studied today, and the issues of the influence of individual experience on the victimization process of an individual remain unclear.

### **1.1. Personality victimization**

In psychological science, questions of personality victimization are actively studied. Andronnikova (2019), Finkelhor et al. (2010), Rudensky (2018), consider the victimization of certain age categories. The authors note the age-specific character of victimization and the differentiation of factor influence. As supported by the definition of victimity and the attitude of modern researchers that it is a subject's predisposition to become or be a victim, we suppose that victimization is a social and psychological dynamic phenomenon and is the realization of the victim's personality outwardly.

It makes sense to study victimization through external (behavioural) manifestations and understanding of the factors that determine its formation and development. Within the frame of our study, we consider victim behaviour as a deviation from the standards of safe behaviour, which occurs in the aggregate of social, mental, and moral manifestations (Andronnikova, 2019).

Once we have assessed the existing studies of various objective and subjective factors of personality victimization, we suggest that individual experience of a person, which generalizes all processes experienced by the person, is one of the main factors of victimization.

### **1.2. Individual childhood experience**

To consider the individual life experience as a factor of personality victimization, we initially need to clearly define this category. However, in modern science, the concept of individual experience is extremely broad and ambiguous. There is a difficulty in defining the category of individual experience, which leads to a variety of descriptions of various forms of experience, depending on the objectives of the study.

In the context of the study of personality victimization, we find interesting a study of Ilyina (1998), which addresses the traumatic experience of a personality. Ilyina studies traumatic experience as a violation of physical and emotional boundaries, as a consequence of violence experienced in childhood. Such an experience entails a violation of relations with one's body, including a change in a positive attitude towards it, a distortion of bodily expression, and a style of movement. The traumatic experience by Ilyina (1998) includes not only physical abuse, but also inadequate parental attitudes, emotional deprivation and symbiosis, humiliation, and threats, i.e. that which leads to the violation of attachment, or forcibly fixes them. It is the experience, according to the author, that plays one of the main roles in the

etiology of personality disorders. Ilyina's studies are confirmed by numerous studies in subsequent years (Connolly, 2020; Folyan et al., 2020; Narvey et al., 2021 and many other studies).

The effect of individual experience on personality development is a subject of psychological and pedagogical researches whether appear as some activities for drawing up a program of action, achieving a goal, monitoring and evaluating someone's actions, or as a set of knowledge, skills and abilities that are part of the personality structure defining characteristics of its orientation and development, being the reason or basis for the success of educational activities.

Based on the theoretical analysis of the main approaches to the study of individual experience and research patterns proposed by Vetrova (2000) and Salikhova (2003), we can assume that individual experience as a type of personal experience of a person, which is presented in his/her mind as the experience of own's life manifested mnestic, projective, fantasy impressions and events of the past, as well as in actual verbal and non-verbal activity.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The gained individual experience of a child as a factor for victimization was studied in different aspects. Thus, the results of the study for causes of sexual crimes committed by adolescents showed that most of them were first sexually abused by adults in their childhood (Fagan, 2020). Today psychological literature notes various events of life experience that lead to victimization of a personality, i.e. physical violence, watching the violent behaviour of others (rape, suicidal attempts, murder), separation from parents, death of parents, illness and surgery, abduction, catastrophe, etc. (Finkelhor et al., 2007).

We suppose that not only the listed events lead to victimization of a personality, but any impressions of the past events presented in the mind of a person, which carry a negative potential in assessing the surrounding reality, oneself, and attitude to own life.

The study by Mwachofi et al. (2020) dedicated to the effect of childhood events on the mental health of North Carolina adults (19,187 observations) revealed that adults with low mental health and a tendency to depression with a significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) level of difference experienced the following events: offence by parents, divorce of parents, alcoholism or drug addiction of one of the parents, beating of one parent by the other, fights between parents, mental illness of one of the parents, regular physical punishment or beating, sexual abuse. These findings are consistent with earlier studies by Schilling et al. (2007), who also noted the gender and ethnic differences in the influence of negative childhood experiences on the occurrence of antisocial behaviour, drug use and a tendency to emotional disturbances.

Hughes et al. (2017) analysed 37 studies of the effects of various episodes of childhood violence on physical and mental well-being in adulthood. The authors note the patterns of relationships between the number of violent episodes and their typical distribution and the specificity of the negative consequences of the victim plan arising in adulthood.

Nurius et al. (2015) provide a study to conclude on the effect of toxic stressors experienced at an early age as a result on the parameters of perceived well-being, psychological stress, and disruption of daily activities.

Dowd (2019) notes the impact of childhood violence not only on adult mental health and social well-being, but also on the subsequent parenting and health of their children.

However, despite a significant number of studies showing the role of negative childhood experiences on further victimization, it should be noted that the mechanisms of this influence are not sufficiently studied (Connolly, (2020).

The conducted theoretical research on the problems of victimization and individual experience of a person allows us to conclude that individual experience influences the victimization of a person, i.e. is one of its factors.

### **3. Research Questions**

Based on the conducted theoretical analysis of the problems of victimization and individual experience of a person, we assume that individual experience influences the victimization of a person, i.e. is one of its factors. However, the question of the essential characteristics of individual experience that mediate victimization of the individual remains open.

The study of the characteristics of individual experience made it possible to single out as significant (Salikhova, 2003) – integrity, eventfulness (saturation of individual experience with events), emotional saturation (immersion in individual experience), openness (ability to reproduce one's experience, reflect it in communication with other people, constantly bring something new into own's experience), spontaneity/self-discipline (a way of acquiring individual experience).

Thus, the main questions of the study were formed. The first question concerned the difference in the essential characteristics of individual experience among adolescents with severe victimization. The second question of the study focused on the specificity of the severity of the characteristics of the individual experience of adolescents with victim behaviour: subjectivity, emotional characteristics of adolescents' memories, the cognitive complexity of individual experience and its fullness with traumatic circumstances.

#### **3.1. A study plan**

Based on the selected questions of the study, a study plan was developed, and a study sample was determined, which consisted of 130 adolescents, aged 14 to 15, including 70 girls and 60 boys with different content of individual experience. The study procedure was carried out on the principle of voluntariness, and confidentiality of the information received. The empirical study included three stages:

#### **3.2. The empirical study included three stages:**

At the first stage, we differentiated the sample (N = 130) based on the realized victimization into two groups G-1 (N1 = 48) – with a high indicator of realized victimization and G-2 (N2 = 82) with a standard indicator of realized victimization. Next, a psychodiagnostic examination of the subjects was carried out, and the central tendency of the distribution of the studied characteristics (mean values) was revealed in each group separately, and the frequency of occurrence of the characteristics in the subjects was calculated for two groups.

At the second stage, the U-Mann-Whitney method revealed significant differences in the studied parameters (characteristics of individual experience) in subjects between G-1 (N1 = 48) and G-2 (N2 = 82).

At the third stage, a qualitative analysis of the individual experience of subjects with high levels of realized victimization was carried out.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose is to study individual experience as a factor for victimization of an adolescent's personality. Based on the theoretical analysis, a study hypothesis has been formed that an objective, cognitively simple, emotionally negative, traumatic, and non-reflective individual experience is a factor in personality victimization.

#### **5. Research Methods**

To solve the set tasks, the following methods were used: methods of psychodiagnostic examination, tests with a set of the following techniques: Vetrova's (2000) projective essay "My vivid childhood memories", Questionnaire for adolescents "Representation of traumatic events in the individual experience of adolescents", methods for studying the propensity to victimized behaviour by Andronnikova (2005).

Methods of mathematical data processing: factor analysis. All calculations were performed using the Statistica 8.0 software.

#### **6. Findings**

In order to study the victimization of the personality of an adolescent, we carried out diagnostics using the methods "Propensity to victimized behaviour" by Andronnikova (2005). The results under the methods for the propensity to victim behaviour in the group as a whole are in the average values zone, which indicates an adequate and calm attitude of adolescents to the events occurring, and the reasons for conflict situations that occur from time to time or dangers to psychological or physical health are not related to personal characteristics of the test subjects and do not cause a violent desire to defend themselves or attack first. Nevertheless, about 48 adolescents in the sample have high rates of realized victimization. These adolescents made up Group 1. Group 2 included adolescents who showed average and low values of realized victimization.

Subsequently, the groups were compared in terms of the parameters of the propensity to victim behaviour and the specificity of individual experience using U-Mann-Whitney U (Table 1).

According to the results, we can conclude that in the group with realized victimization, the indicators for the main forms of victim behaviour are significantly higher, except for the scale "Propensity to addictive and helpless behaviour" ( $U = 1860$  at  $p = 0.60$ ). This may indicate that the adolescents of Group 1 have formed the leading ways of realizing their victim potential and the division into groups is justified.

Significant differences in the characteristics of the individual life experience of adolescents according to the methods "My vivid childhood memories" are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Assessment of the reliability of differences between G-1 and G-2 groups according to the U-Mann-Whitney test (significant differences)

Studied signs	Sum of ranks		U-Mann-Whitney	Significance level
	G-1	G-2		
<b>Methods of the propensity to victim behaviour</b>				
Aggressive behaviour;	106.5	41.5	0	0.00
Propensity to self-injurious and self-destructive behaviour;	105.54	42.6	46	0.00
Propensity to hypersocial behaviour;	99.83	45.4	320	0.00
Propensity to uncritical behaviour;	91.08	50.52	740	0.00
<b>Methods "My vivid childhood memories"</b>				
The predominance of the position of Subject 1 or Object 2	71.96	61.72	1,658	0.061
Number of words in a story	70.67	85.89	1,796	0.30
Saturation of the story with events	43.96	78.11	934	0.00
The meaningfulness of the memories	51.21	73.87	1,282	0.00
Structure of memories	54.5	75.79	1,560	0.008
Liveliness of the memories	51.5	73.7	1,296	0.00
Author's involvement	56.33	70.87	1,528	0.008
Cognitive difficulty level	27.63	87.67	150	0.00
<b>Questionnaire for adolescents "Representation of traumatic events in the individual experience of adolescents"</b>				
Enmity with classmates / mates in the yard (bullying, ignoring)	100.67	44.91	280	0.00
Enmity with teachers (misunderstanding, prejudice)	73.77	51.3	1,280	0.00
Alcohol ingestion	72.01	54.38	1,434	0.005
Divorce of parents	79.75	57.2	1,284	0.001
Constant abusing by parents (misunderstanding, exaggerated demands, dissatisfaction, etc.)	73.84	51.25	1,284	0.001
Saw from a distance how violent actions were committed to another (fight, beating, sexual violence, etc.)	60.6	57.16	1,566	0.031

The analysis of individual experience leads to the following conclusions. According to the methods "My vivid childhood memories", 71% of the subjects have showed the predominance of the object's position and 29% of the subject's position in the individual experience of adolescents. Table 2 shows the results of the distribution of memories by periods of life, reflecting the subjective experience.

**Table 2.** Distribution of subjective memories by periods of life

Periods of life	Number of cases (%)
Early years (0 to 3 years old)	18
Preschool childhood (4 to 7 years old)	65
Close past	10
Not specified	7

The position of the subject in the memories of adolescents is mainly manifested in the period of preschool childhood. Such a large percentage of subjective memories related to preschool childhood and a small percentage related to the present (10% of cases) clearly indicates that adolescents are more in contact with their past childhood experience than with the experience of the present (which most likely

they do not like). The individual experience of adolescents is characterized by a sufficient variability of events (Table 3).

**Table 3.** The main content of individual experience, reflected in childhood memories

Event type	Number of cases (%)
Experience of fail	43
Experience of success	25
Experience of communication	52
Experience of research	37
Constructive activity	54
Destructive activity	38
Fresh experiences	47
Traumatic experience	59
Reflection of content	22

Despite the fact that the subjective position in the memories of adolescents is rare, the event load of memories is quite high, which indicates the richness, multifunctionality, and diversity of their past experience, but the reflexivity of such memories is rather low (22% of cases). It should be noted, however, that adolescents' memories often reflect traumatic experiences and experiences of fail. Table 4 presents the data of the analysis of the emotional characteristics of adolescents' memories.

**Table 4.** Emotional characteristics of memories

Emotional characteristics of the event	Number of cases (%)
Positive	63
Negative	29
Neutral	8

The emotional saturation of adolescent's memories in general is not high; they do not use a varied lexical set of words that fully reflects their emotional state.

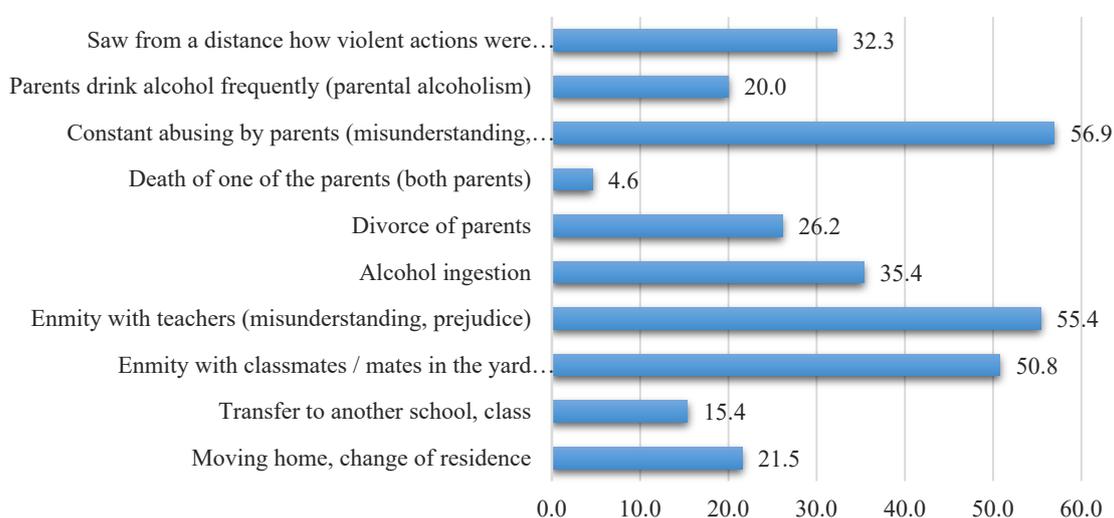
Further, for a complete analysis of the individual experience of adolescents, we have calculated its cognitive complexity, which is estimated in points and is characterized by different levels of development (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Cognitive complexity of composed stories

Parameters	Average score
Number of words in a story	3
Saturation of the story with events	1.8
The meaningfulness of the memories	1.3
Structure of memories	1.3
Liveliness of the memories	1.2
Author's involvement	1.3
Cognitive difficulty level	9.9 (average)

Cognitive complexity reflects the integrity, structuredness, eventfulness, liveliness, the degree of verbalization and the author's involvement of the described memories. As can be seen from Table 5, the individual experience of adolescents is characterized by an average level of cognitive complexity. Memories of adolescents are unstructured, but rather saturated with events that are rarely related to each other, the causes of events and their consequences are not reflected in the stories, personal involvement in the events of their own lives is also low.

Figure 1 shows the results of a questionnaire survey regarding the representation of traumatic circumstances in the life of an adolescent. Based on Figure 1, we see that adolescents most often experience quarrels with their parents, teachers and classmates, the negative experience of communication with whom can lead to traumatization of the adolescent's personality and the formation of their victimization.



**Figure 1.** Representation of traumatic events in the individual experience of adolescents (%)

Taking into account the content of an individual life experience that has led to victimization of the individual, we should note such parameters as a) specific parental behaviour (quarrels, divorce of parents, regular alcohol ingestion by the parents, rejection of the child in the family, abuse); b) the peculiarities of relationships with teachers and peers (swearing and enmity with a teacher or classmates); own behavioural experience (lack / presence of constructive ways to cope with conflict situations, enmity with classmates, bullying); personality traits of an adolescent.

The main characteristics of an adolescent's individual experience with a high level of realized victimization include cognitive simplicity, low eventfulness, weak reflexivity of experienced events, low liveliness – i.e. the inability to reproduce memories of the past or find their consequences in the present – experience of negative emotions, objectivity, non-involvement of the adolescent in the events taking place, weak reflexivity of experienced events, low structuredness.

Thus, once we have studied the characteristics of an adolescent's individual experience, we arrive at the conclusion that not only the traumatic event itself leads to victimization, but also the specifics of its reflection or representation in the mind of the adolescent.

## 7. Conclusion

The conducted theoretical analysis of the problems of victimization and individual experience of a person allows us to make an assumption that individual experience influences the victimization of a person, i.e. is one of its factors. Among the highlighted characteristics of individual experience associated with victimization are objectivity, cognitive simplicity, emotional colouring, trauma, and low reflexivity.

To check this assumption, we have conducted a study and determined that not only the traumatic event itself leads to victimization, but also the features of its reflection, representation in the mind of an adolescent.

The answers to the questions of the study posed have been given. Indeed, among adolescents with severe victimization, the relevant difference in essential characteristics of individual experience is observed. The specifics of severity of characteristic that we have brought up for the individual experience of adolescents with victim behaviour is that their individual experience is objective, cognitively simple, emotionally negative, filled with traumatic circumstances and has low reflexivity.

Thus, as a result of the study, all the tasks set before us have been fulfilled.

The obtained results extend the scientific understanding of individual experience as a factor for victimization of an adolescent's personality. The practical significance of the study resides in the fact that the obtained results can be used by specialists for development of preventive, corrective programs indented for the mental development of adolescents and their individual experience, through their awareness, so to increase the personal resource of adolescents and formation of safe models of behaviour.

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