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**PSYCHO-EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING OF ADOLESCENTS:  
GENDER ASPECT**

Larisa Golovey (a), Marina Danilova (b)\*, Liudmila Rykman (c), Ksenia Anufriyuk (d)

\*Corresponding author

(a) St Petersburg State University, Universitetskaya Emb. 7/9, St Petersburg 199034, Russia, lgolovey@yandex.ru

(b) St Petersburg State University, Universitetskaya Emb. 7/9, St Petersburg 199034, Russia; dan\_m@mail.ru

(c) St Petersburg State University, Universitetskaya Emb. 7/9, St Petersburg 199034, Russia;

lyudmila\_ryk@mail.ru

(d) St Petersburg State University, Universitetskaya Emb. 7/9, St Petersburg 199034, Russia;

anufriyuk@yandex.ru

***Abstract***

The study considers psycho-emotional well-being as an integrative construct, consisting of personal, cognitive-evaluative and emotional components. The aim is to examine the level and structure of psycho-emotional well-being of adolescents taking into consideration their gender. Within the study 190 persons aged 14-17 (73 boys and 117 girls) were screened using a complex variety of methods to evaluate their psycho-emotional well-being from various points of view. With lowered competency indexes and environment control, the study identified the level of personal well-being as average. Girls were more oriented towards positive interpersonal relations, while boys were more interested in self-development. Cognitive-evaluative indexes demonstrate insufficient satisfaction of respondents with romantic relationships. Further differences were revealed in higher satisfaction of male adolescents with recreational activities, and higher satisfaction of female adolescents with social and legal security. Girls also give a higher mark to the level of need satisfaction. The structure of emotional sphere reveals an increase in the asthenic component of anxiety and emotional discomfort, which are signals of fatigue, stress and tension in all respondents, girls demonstrating higher degree of these symptoms. Correlation analysis proved the hypothesis of a high integration among all the indexes of psycho-emotional well-being. Gender differences in the structure result from the fact that male adolescents attach more importance to self-development for their psycho-emotional well-being, while female adolescents value positive relationships, need and life satisfaction.

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**Keywords:** Psychological well-being, adolescents, emotional sphere, self-development, gender differences.



## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Psycho-emotional well-being, approaches and definition**

Psychological well-being is often associated with psychological health, life satisfaction, and emotional well-being. The studies of psychological well-being proceed in two directions: the study of subjective (hedonistic) and psychological (eudemonical) well-being. Researchers of subjective well-being indicate that it includes positive aspects of perception, and its consolidated characteristic is satisfaction with life (Diener, Scollon, & Lucas, 2004). In the humanistic perspective, psychological well-being is considered from the point of view of human potentials and limitations and includes adult personality qualities (Ryff & Singer, 1998). Emotional well-being implies emotional states, emotional health, etc. (Podolskii, Karabanova, & Idobaeva, 2011). This study combines the above approaches and views psycho-emotional well-being as a holistic construct which contains three sets of indicators. Personality indicators include independence, competence, personal growth, positive relationships, self-perception, life goals, which match Ryff's model (Ryff & Singer, 1998). The authors think that self-development is another important personality indicator of well-being. The cognitive-evaluative set includes satisfaction with life and its various aspects, evaluation of living conditions, and need satisfaction. The emotional set contains affective components (happiness, affect, emotional state stability, and level of anxiety). This approach makes it possible to examine psycho-emotional well-being with a due respect to the versatility of the inner world of a human being.

### **1.2 Factors affecting psychological well-being**

The examination of factors affecting psychological well-being and life satisfaction of adolescents has identified the role of the family structure and relationships among family members, social and cultural self-identification, positive relationships in the social environment, attitude to educational institution and extracurricular activities (Gilman & Huebne, 2006). Besides these, there is an evidence that personal characteristics such as attitudes, values, copying strategies, self-regulation abilities, optimism, and self-efficacy also affect psychological well-being (Diener et al., 2004). Longitudinal surveys of twins have identified a high level of genetic determination of subjective well-being (Tellegen et al., 1998). Many researchers hold the view that there is a certain level of subjective well-being homeostasis maintained with the help of adaptation mechanisms (Cummins & Nistico, 2002). Thus, it is possible to conclude that psychological well-being is affected by the factors of social environment and, possibly, by innate genetic factors. Therefore, it seems relevant to study psycho-emotional well-being of adolescents with a focus on the gender factor.

It should be noted that most data on the psychological well-being of adolescents does not take into account the factor of gender, although in a number of studies there is an indication that female adolescents demonstrate higher level of psychological well-being and have higher indexes of positive relationships, life goals, environment control, while male adolescents typically have higher level of self-acceptance (Potasheva & Gaisenok, 2016). The study of correspondence between the psychological well-being of adolescents and their faith in fairness has revealed that the psychological well-being of girls depends on their faith in intrinsic world fairness, while the well-being of boys is related to their self-confidence and self-efficacy in establishing and maintaining justice (Astaniina, 2016). Foreign research data demonstrates

a decrease in the life satisfaction, self-acceptance and psychological well-being among female adolescents dissatisfied with their bodies (Zametkin, Zoon, Klein, & Munson, 2004). Monitoring of health, social environment and emotional well-being of adolescents in Canada has revealed a lower level of emotional well-being and life satisfaction of girls in comparison with boys, the girls being more sensitive to negative impact and adolescent dysfunction (Boyce, Roche, & Davies, 2009).

## **2. Problem Statement**

The conditions of modern life and its high transitivity bring a sharp focus on psychological well-being. It is particularly relevant with regard to adolescents as this is the age when they develop their life priorities and values, reflections and independence and when they particularly vulnerable and emotionally unstable. The researchers reveal negative emotional states and depression signs in 30% of teenagers (Podolskii et al., 2011). At the same time, according to the international survey on the psychological health of adolescents, this age group is generally satisfied with their life (Boyce et al., 2009). The inconsistency can be explained by the difference in the approaches and definitions of psychological well-being. This study views psychological well-being as an integrated construct and a unity of personal, cognitive-evaluative and emotional components.

## **3. Research Questions**

The analysis has shown the ambiguity of gender differences in psychological well-being of adolescents. This can partly be accounted for by the fact that in the majority of the research the focus was on different aspects of well-being without recognising the interrelations between its components.

The authors think that psycho-emotional well-being during adolescent years is gender-sensitive and, which is expressed by the varying degree of intensity the components and their interrelations demonstrate. Male adolescents are supposed to be more oriented towards their own personality, while for the psychological well-being of female adolescents social interaction is more important. The gender differences might also be found in lower indexes of emotional functioning among girls.

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

The aim of this research is to study the integrated construct of psycho-emotional well-being and its specifics in male and female adolescents.

Tasks:

1. to analyse gender specific components of psycho-emotional well-being of adolescents;
2. to determine the correlation between various components in the structure of psycho-emotional well-being and the specifics of this correlation for male and female adolescents.

### **Participants**

190 pupils of St Petersburg secondary schools aged 14-17 (73 boys, 117 girls).

The survey was carried out in 2017-2018.

## 5. Research Methods

The Ryff scales of Psychological Well-Being (adapted by Zhukovskaya & Troshikhina, 2011);  
 The Scale of Directivity towards the Self-Development (Dermanova & Golovanova, 2018);  
 Satisfaction with Life Scale (adapted by Osin & Leontieva, 2008);  
 The questionnaire on the satisfaction with various life spheres (Golovey & Danilova, 2018);  
 Satisfaction with Life Conditions Subtest (Kopina, Suslova, & Zaikin, 1995);  
 Assessment of psychic activation, interest, emotional tonus, tension and comfort (Kurganskii & Nemchin, 2003),  
 Integrative Test for Anxiety (Bisiuk & Vasserman, 2005).

## 6. Findings

Comparative analysis has identified significant differences between male and female adolescents in all psycho-emotional well-being sets (see Table 1).

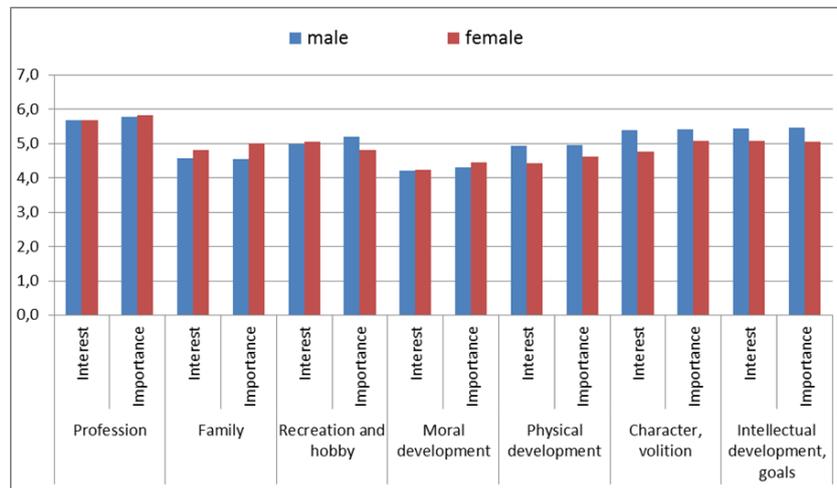
**Table 01.** Significant differences in the indexes of psycho-emotional well-being of male and female adolescents

Sets	Indicators	male		female		p
		Average	$\sigma$	Average	$\sigma$	
1. Personal	Positive relationships	10.29	2.84	11.15	2.4	0.04
	<b>Tendency towards self-development</b>					
	Interest towards physical development	4.94	1.8	4.42	1.84	0.07
	Interest towards personal sphere (volition and character)	5.39	1.51	4.78	1.46	0.01
2. Cognitive-evaluative	<b>Satisfaction</b>					
	Family relations	6.62	2.65	7.3	2.44	0.08
	Recreational activities	6.13	2.85	4.89	2.82	0.00
	Hobbies	7.27	2.41	6.4	2.97	0.03
	<b>Need satisfaction</b>					
	Opportunities for recreational activities	4.31	0.95	3.88	1.11	0.01
	Social and security	3.6	1.05	3.91	0.86	0.04
Total satisfaction of basic needs	46.58	7.84	49.35	7.36	0.02	
3. Affective-emotional	<b>Psychic states</b>					
	Psychic activity	12.76	4.37	14.12	3.91	0.03
	Emotional tonus	8.32	3.49	9.37	3.73	0.05
	Comfort	9.56	3.82	10.91	4.35	0.03
	<b>Personal anxiety</b>					
Emotional discomfort	5.62	2.24	6.64	1.76	0.02	

Note:  $\sigma$  – standard deviation; p – significance level of differences

The analysis of personal indicators has demonstrated that the most developed parameter is the tendency towards personal growth (11.28 for boys; 11.75 for girls), while the least developed is the understanding of potentials and the ability to take control over the circumstances of their own life (9.03 for boys; 9.16 for girls on a “Competence” scale). Consolidated indexes of psychological well-being are within average values (61.5 for boys; 65.2 for girls). However, girls demonstrate significantly higher values on the

“Positive Relationships” scale, which implies a higher level of skills in building relationships with other people and a greater social interaction orientation. The study of the importance of self-development has revealed that the interest towards self-development varies from 4.2 to 5.68 on a 7-point scale, i.e. it is slightly above the average level (figure 1).



**Figure 01.** Directivity of interest and importance of self-development

For the self-development of adolescents the most important spheres are professional (5.67 – boys, 5.68 – girls) and personal (5.39; 4.78, respectively). Boys demonstrated a higher interest in the development of character and volition ( $p=0.01$ ). Speaking about the importance of self-development, the structure of priorities is the same for boys and girls: the higher importance of professional self-development (5.78; 5.83), character (5.43; 5.09) and life goals (5.46; 5.06).

The analysis of cognitive-evaluative indicators of psycho-emotional well-being determined the level of life satisfaction on the entire sampling as average for boys and girls (21.6; 22.79). In the satisfaction with various spheres of life boys are more satisfied with communication (7.42) and material benefits (7.01), than other aspects of their life. Girls are most of all satisfied with their schoolmates (7.37) and family (7.30) and least of all with their leisure and rest (4.89). The satisfaction with romantic relations is the last in the ranking both for boys (5.07) and for girls (4.67). Boys are more satisfied with their recreational activities and rest ( $p<0.001$ ) and extra-curricular activities ( $p=0.03$ ) than girls.

Satisfaction of basic living needs reflects the quality of life. Both female and male adolescents are generally satisfied with the access to information to a larger degree than with other spheres (4.59 – boys; 4.51 – girls). The boys are also satisfied with an access to recreational activities (4.31) and arts (4.22), while girls express satisfaction with housing (4.28) and utilities (4.35). All respondents stress their low satisfaction with ecology (2.9 – boys; 3.45 – girls). Boys’ satisfaction with recreational activities is significantly higher ( $p=0.01$ ), while girls are more satisfied with social security ( $p=0.04$ ). The general index of basic need satisfaction for boys is within the average, but for girls significantly higher than for boys ( $p=0.02$ ).

Assessment of prevailing psychic states, included into the emotional affective set of indicators of psycho-emotional well-being, such “psychic activation”, “interest”, “tension” and “comfort”, showed

average figures for boys and girls (9 – 15 points). Emotional tonus of boys is on the upper end of the scale and is significantly higher than for girls ( $p=0.05$ ). Boys also demonstrate higher level of psychic activation than girls ( $p=0.03$ ) and feel themselves more comfortable ( $p=0.03$ ). The analysis of integrative anxiety indexes revealed that the respondents on the sampling have an average level of situational (4.32 – boys; 4.85 – girls) and personal anxiety (5.65; 6.33). However, the personal anxiety index of girls has values close to the upper reference level. Particularly pronounced indicators of personal anxiety for all respondents are the asthenic component (6.03; 6.55) and emotional discomfort (5.62; 6.64), the indicators being on the upper borderline and significantly higher for girls ( $p=0.02$ ). Asthenic component is also most pronounced among situational anxiety indicators (5.30 – boys; 5.75 – girls), the second one being the anxiety over prospects (4.68; 5.52, respectively).

Correlational analysis of the structure of psycho-emotional well-being has revealed a large number of links between the sets of indicators, total number being 179 ( $p\leq 0.01$ ) for male respondents and 187 ( $p\leq 0.01$ ) for female, which confirms the existence of an integrated construct of psycho-emotional well-being and close links between its sets. The nature of these links is as such that any increase of situational and personal anxiety, interest, comfort, and emotional tonus is accompanied by a decrease in the satisfaction with all life spheres and in the tendency towards positive relationships, situational orientation (competence) and general level of psychological well-being. Increase in competence, tendency towards personal growth, self-perception and the ability to set life goals are connected with satisfaction of basic life needs in education and family spheres, as well as with life satisfaction in general and within separate spheres (45 positive dependencies,  $p\leq 0.01$ ). While personal competence is the least pronounced indicator for all respondents, its development significantly affects their psycho-emotional well-being (5 dependencies for boys and girls,  $p\leq 0.01$ ). The specifics of these links are that the structure of psycho-emotional well-being of female adolescents does not include the parameter of self-development, their well-being being dependent on the satisfaction of basic needs and satisfaction with various spheres of life. The psycho-emotional well-being of male adolescents rests upon emotional comfort, interest, psychic activation and tendency towards personal development tasks.

## 7. Conclusion

Male and female adolescents generally enjoy good psychological well-being. Girls get higher satisfaction from warm, trust-based relations with their associates, and demonstrate empathy and ability to build close relationships. Boys have higher motivation in terms of interest towards self-development.

There is a low level of satisfaction with romantic relationships, recreation and rest, in the cognitive emotional sphere, even though satisfaction with various spheres of life is at average level. Essential differences appear in higher satisfaction of male adolescents with recreational and extra-curricular activities, and social and legal security and life quality satisfaction of female adolescents. All respondents demonstrate low level of satisfaction with environmental conditions of life.

Emotional structure reveals an increase in the asthenic component of anxiety and emotional discomfort, indicative of fatigue, stress, and emotional tension, which are more obvious in girls. It correlates to the low satisfaction of the need for recreation and rest and is a possible sign of significant academic load for teenagers.

The analysis of the links between the components of psycho-emotional well-being demonstrated a high degree of their integration. Gender differences mostly appear in higher importance of tendency towards self-development and positive relationships for psycho-emotional well-being for male adolescents and higher importance of need satisfaction and satisfaction with various spheres of life for female adolescents.

The research highlights the necessity for complex assessment of the well-being of adolescents, which would take into account various spheres.

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