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**APPROACHES TO DEVELOPING EMPATHY AMONG YOUTH  
WITH TROUBLED BEHAVIOR**

Natalia Nikolaevna Novik (a)\*

\*Corresponding author

(a) Kazan (Volga region) Federal University, Kremlyovskaya str., 18, 420008, Kazan, Russia, novik-n-n@mail.ru,  
+789172899022

***Abstract***

Ability to communicate, to show emotions and well-developed empathy are necessary for professional self-determination, confident behavior in various situational roles and building healthy interpersonal relationships. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of empathy among children of different age groups are often fragmented or have a "mosaic" nature. Currently, the problem of developing empathy among adolescents with troubled behavior has not been studied enough. The present article consists of three parts. Part one reveals the theoretical basis for the development of empathy among adolescents with troubled behavior. The second part of the article is devoted to our empirical research: 44 teenagers with troubled behavior took part in the research. Davis's Interpersonal Reactivity Index Test (IRI) and Boyko's test for assessing the level of empathic abilities were applied within this study. According to the applied materials empathy is considered as a multifaceted system of reactions of one individual to the observed events / state of another. During the experiment some extra-curricular activities for the development of empathy were carried out. The classes for adolescents with troubled behavior have been specifically developed. In the third part of the article there is an analysis of the findings and the conclusion. Empathetic teenagers can communicate and negotiate more quickly, and thus adapt in society more effectively.

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## 1. Introduction

The modern school and teachers try to educate creative, active, socially responsible, the highly educated person, with a well-developed intellect, able to find their worthy place in the society. At the same time, possession of communicative abilities and well-developed empathy are necessary for professional self-determination, confident behavior in various situational roles, building interpersonal relations, since friends, public recognition, personal interests, family, future profession currently occupy an important socially-determining place in teenager life.

The analysis of a large number of pedagogical and psychological studies made it possible to conclude that at present the problem of the development of empathy in adolescents has not been studied sufficiently, knowledge about the features of empathy in children of different age groups is rather fragmentary, "mosaic". Practically, no attention was paid to the development of empathy in adolescents with deviant behavior in the pedagogical literature. Therefore, Gavrilova's ideas about the need to study the genesis of empathy and the conditions for its development are still relevant today (Gavrilova, 1974).

Practice shows that most educators working with adolescents with deviant behavior sometimes do not see this problem simply, or are not able to develop empathy correctly, or do not fully know modern methods of diagnosis and organization of interaction with the above-mentioned category of adolescents. We can also note the negative influence of the mass media, which has a destructive effect on the formation of the spiritual and moral sphere of the individual and leads to the fact that the relations between people are characterized by selfishness, lack of mutual understanding, inability to respond emotionally to human experiences.

In order to determine the terminology, it is necessary to resort to psychological knowledge. In recent decades, there has been a gradual accumulation of productive theoretical developments in the field of empathy, but there are no concepts and theories capable of systematizing and generalizing the diverse empathic phenomena and phenomena in their development in domestic psychology so far (Karyagina, 2013).

The term "empathy" was introduced in 1909 by Titchener, who generalized within the framework of philosophical traditions the idea of sympathy with the theories of empathy with Clifford and Lips (Gavrilova, 1975).

In the encyclopedic dictionary named "Philosophy" empathy is interpreted as a person's ability to identify one of their I-images with an imaginary image of "another": with the image of other people, living beings, inanimate objects, and even linear and spatial forms (Philosophy: encyclopedic dictionary, 2004).

Zakharova (2014) studying the concept of "empathy" concludes that this property is considered as the ability to put yourself in the shoes of another person.

Yudina (2017) in the article "Empathy and Morality: The Meeting Place (a Review of Foreign Studies)" notes that empathy is studied by psychologists as an ability to: a) understand the emotions, feelings and thoughts of the other and separate them; b) empathize with the emotional state of another person; c) take someone else's point of view.

Moreover, Yudina (2017) referring to foreign authors, comes to the conclusion that children of early age are already able to demonstrate a selective manifestation of empathy. So, children at the age of two are more likely to show acts of care towards their mother than to a stranger. In additions, Yudina (2017) writes

that Rhodes and Chalik showed that children in the age range of three to nine years tend to form categories of permissible social norms depending on the person's belonging to a particular group. So, children of this age consider it wrong to harm members of their group, whereas, in their opinion, it is quite permissible to harm members of a foreign group.

Polyakova (2008) notes in her research that "it is effective to develop empathy through developing attitudes conducive to empathy, through using an intuitive channel, through the perspective of the future. It is equally possible to influence any of the following components of empathy (empathy for parents, the elderly, children, strangers, works of art. At the same time it is not effective to form the penetrating power of empathy to be centered on the present".

## **2. Problem Statement**

Empathy is often seen as the basis of moral behavior, at least in those of its manifestations, which are the rendering of assistance and the exercise of care (Prokofev, 2015).

Empathy has the function of adaptation and protection in interpersonal relationships (Worringer, 1953).

It is often difficult for adolescents to look at circumstances from the point of view of other people. This is due, in particular, to their still developing brain structures. And such a personality trait as egocentrism allows them to focus on their own needs, not considering how these needs affect others. This apparent absence of empathy is normal and usually disappears when the adolescent reaches the end of adolescence. However, a complete lack of empathy in adolescents may mean a more significant problem for mental health, while the young person begins to experience psychological discomfort (anxiety, aggressiveness, depression, neuroticity), which is very characteristic of adolescents with deviant behavior. Such adolescents tend to avoid unnecessary contacts, consider it inappropriate to show curiosity to another person, calmly relate to the experiences and problems of other people. All this hinders the ability to manifest empathy.

Another factor that influences the formation and development of empathy is the lack of harmonious and friendly family relationships of emotional contact of a teenager with his parents adversely affects his development and the formation of his personality. A direct relationship between the level of empathy of parents was revealed (the level of empathy in women is higher) and the level of empathy of their child. If in the family of a teenager parents demand from him truthfulness, honesty, obedience, complaisance, while they themselves lie in his presence, unrestrained, show aggression and quick temper, the child will certainly demonstrate the behavior that he observes in his family.

Yudina (2017) notes that adults and children may feel anxious or worried about the condition of a wide range of "other", including animals, for example pets (in Western culture), as well as inanimate objects, for example Tamagotchi (in Japan) at the same time. Probably, in these cases the signs of insecurity and vulnerability are most evident, and this contributes to the manifestation of care.

"Evaluating one's own and the emotions of others, and more defending nominations were associated with both affective and cognitive empathy, whereas aspects of emotion awareness which are linked with internalizing symptoms were related to empathic distress, suggesting maladaptive emotion appraisal. Furthermore, outsider behaviour was associated with empathic distress, emphasizing a self-focused

orientation. In contrast, more bullying was negatively associated with cognitive empathy. Overall, these outcomes demonstrate that, besides social roles, emotion awareness is an important factor for adaptive empathic reactions, whereas emotion dysregulation might cause distress when witnessing the negative feelings of others” (Rieffe & Camodeca, 2016).

“Empathy plays a crucial role in healthy social functioning and in maintaining positive social relationships” (Overgaauw, Rieffe, Broekhof, Crone, & Güroğlu, 2017).

There are also studies showing that virtual empathy (among people who spend a lot of time on the Internet) does not reduce people's ability to real empathy and is associated with feelings of social support, but it turns out to be weaker than empathy in the real world.

According to our previous studies, we found that there is a linear relationship between empathy in adolescents with deviant behavior and the level of their communication skills (Novik, 2011; 2014).

The study of individual differences consistently showed that people are not only physically, but also psychologically different. Individual psychological differences explain why some people tend to adopt different coping strategies or even use different emotional and self-regulating resources when faced with unfavorable situations. For example, while some people are prone to experiencing and express hostile and negative emotions in response to stressful situations, others tend to experience negative emotions and inhibit them, while others tend to be lighter and do not experience any negative emotions (Lazuras, Pyżalski, Barkoukis, & Tsorbatzoudis, 2012).

### **3. Research Questions**

Furthermore, in recent years scientists have conducted researches that have revealed the relationship of empathy. Thus, the relationship between empathy and cultural motivation was proved; the relationship between emotional intelligence, empathy and psychological intelligence was revealed; empathy is considered as a factor of successful professional activity; it is explained that in the structure of personal qualities empathy is a leading factor and integrates such indicators as sociability, mental softness, emotionality, intelligence; the gender aspect of the relationship between emotional burnout and empathy is highlighted; the relationship of empathy and the psychological mechanism of the development of ethnic self-awareness of the individual is shown; the leading psychological defenses and their connections with empathy in deviant adolescents were studied, etc.

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

To find out the level of empathy of adolescents with deviant behavior, and also in which situations and to whom teenagers show empathy most often, we conducted a study. The objects of our study were 44 teenagers with deviant behavior in Kazan aged 12-15 years. They formed two groups – control and experimental. The study was conducted on a voluntary basis and the consent of parents or legal guardians.

### **5. Research Methods**

The following materials were used: 1) Test for assessing the level of empathic abilities and 2) Davis's multifactorial empathy test, adapted by Budagovskaya (2013) and Karyagina (2013).

The choice of the latter diagnosis was due to the fact that, according to Karyagina (2013) empathy is a multi-faceted system of reactions towards individuals or towards the observed events. It is possible to single out two processes that received the name "perspective taking" and "empathy" when analyzing the test results of the test, and two results – "empathic concern" and "personal distress" (Karyagina, 2013).

## 6. Findings

At the first stage of our study we determined that the initial levels of development of empathy among adolescents with troubled behavior in the control and experimental groups were approximately the same. It was found that 7 individuals (31.8%) in the control group have a low level of empathy and 6 individuals (27.3%) in the experimental group have a low level of empathy; 15 individuals (68.2%) in the control group have a very low level of empathy and 16 individuals (72.7%) in the experimental group have a very low level of empathy. During the test children behaved indifferently, they were emotionally detached, showed increased anxiety, negativism, tried to avoid communication, in several cases, demonstrated verbal aggression.

As for our second assessment tool (multifactorial empathy test), it showed that the adolescents in both the control and experimental groups on all four scales also showed approximately the same results.

During the second stage, with the experimental group, extra-curricular classes were held for several months to develop their empathy with the help of a corrective-development program (Novik, 2014). The classes were specially designed for adolescents with deviant behavior. The pedagogical system for the prevention of deviant behavior of adolescents in conditions of socio-cultural activities" by Zinnurov (2011) was a basis, in which the technology of working with children-deviants in the conditions of school is described in detail. The author of the system stresses that "using the technology of preventing deviant behavior of children and adolescents, it is possible to solve the problems of a deeper study of the pupil's personality, the results give grounds for the development of individual development routes in the conditions of the general education school. Such routes will contribute to the positive psychological and pedagogical support of adolescents and the initiation of health-saving projects to maintain the socio-psychological balance of the individual" (Zinnurov, 2011).

At the end of the training we conducted again the same diagnostics as at the beginning of the study. As a result, the following data were obtained.

Employing the test for assessing the level of empathic abilities we found that there were significant positive changes in the experimental group. For example, there were only 5 children with a very low level of empathy (22.7%), 12 children with a low level of empathy (54.6%), and 5 children with an average level of empathy (22.7%).

The multifactorial empathy test showed that according to the first scale, which is aimed at measuring people's assessment of their inclination to take into account the point of view of other people in everyday life, in the control group, adolescents rarely adequately perceived and understood the point of view and experience of another person. And, on the contrary, adolescents with deviant behavior in the experimental group were less likely to display negativity, to better perceive the point of view of another person, even if he did not belong to a group of people authoritative for him. With some degree of gratitude they treated

people who shared their life experience with them, were attentive to their words. Probably, this was facilitated by the results of classes on active listening.

According to the second scale, which reflects the tendency towards imaginary transfer of oneself to the feelings and actions of fictional heroes of books, films, performances, etc., the children of the control group were mostly indifferent. The exception was the characters of the popular among them computer games. Discussion of the beloved hero caused some emotional revival, but the scarcity and lack of verbal manifestation remained a positive emotion, expressed by some splash of facial expressions and gestures. The teenagers of the experimental group showed themselves much better: they not only could "imagine" themselves in the place of the described hero, but also told and did not hesitate about their feelings, which they experienced. These guys were involved not only in linguistic means, but they also demonstrated paralinguistic and extra-linguistic means of expression, although they were not bright. This can mean that "immersion" in the emotional state of others, as well as the ability to control others' and their own emotions, is accompanied by a reduction in the feelings of anxiety and discomfort that arise when watching the experiences of others, and in situations of intense communication.

On the third scale, which assesses the tendency to experience feelings of warmth, compassion and concern for other people, and reveals a "helping" attitude and sympathy for someone's feelings, adolescents with deviant behavior of the control group showed mostly negative emotional reactions to the failure and problem state of another rights, while children from the experimental group in their majority reacted positively to the failure and problematic state of another person. This may indicate that the adolescents of the experimental group have a strong emotional side of empathy, are inclined to transfer themselves to the place of others and to feel feelings towards other people's states, but they are less aware of their own experiences, less able to analyze them.

On the last fourth scale, which allows us to identify feelings of unease and discomfort in responding to others' emotions in situations of assistance, in intense interpersonal interaction, in observing the experiences of other people, in contrast to empathic care, the control group showed only negative feelings: tried not to notice and ignore the feelings of the other, there was a certain nervousness, irritability, there were attempts to leave the experiment – "if only they left me alone and did not force me observe the suffering of another". In the experimental group irritability and anxiety were also noted, but the adolescents of this group sought, however, to help in order to relieve themselves of the picture of the suffering of the other person. However, this reaction is confirmed by numerous studies. People either leave the problem situation, or try to solve it sooner, but not for the sake of the welfare of another, but for the sake of their peace of mind.

With the help of the Wilcoxon T-test, we want to prove the effectiveness of the correction-development program conducted in the experimental group aimed at increasing the level of empathy in adolescents with deviant behavior.

We used the formula  $T = \sum Rr$ , where  $Rr$  - rank shift values with a rarer sign.

First we check the constraints. Our sample of 22 adolescents in each of the groups (in the control and experimental), i.e.  $n = 22$ . This is suitable for boundaries  $5 < n < 50$ .

Next, we formulated statistical hypotheses:

$H_0$ : the intensity of the shifts towards increasing the level of empathy of adolescents with deviant behavior does not exceed the intensity of the shifts toward its decrease.

H<sub>1</sub>: the intensity of shifts towards increasing the level of empathy of adolescents with deviant behavior exceeds the intensity of shifts towards its decrease (directed hypothesis).

The next step was preliminary calculations to calculate the empirical value of the Wilcoxon T-test. We built a table where the values were introduced about the level of empathy before and after the special correction-development program, their difference, the absolute value and the rank of the difference.

Further, we check the correctness of the ranking:  $\Sigma R = 253$ .

$\Sigma R = n(n + 1) / 2 = 22(22 + 1) / 2 = 253$ . The sums are the same, therefore, the ranking is correct.

Now we calculate the empirical value of the Wilcoxon T-test. To do this we select atypical shifts in the preliminary calculations table. In our example, these are lines 3, 7 and 18. The sum of the ranks of these "rare" (atypical) shifts is the empirical value of the T criterion:  $TEM = 8.5 + 4 + 4 = 16.5$

We determine the critical value of T-Wilcoxon for  $n = 19$  in the table of critical values, because there was a decrease due to exclusion of zero-shifted indicators. An axis of significance was built. The empirical value of T falls in the zone of significance:  $Temp < T_{cr} (p \leq 0.01)$ , and in this case we can accept the hypothesis H<sub>1</sub>: the intensity of shifts towards increasing the level of empathy of adolescents with deviant behavior exceeds the intensity of shifts towards its decrease. Substantive conclusion: the level of empathy after the correction-development program has increased, and, therefore, allows to form a feeling of empathy.

## 7. Conclusion

Thus, it can be concluded that the corrective work done to develop empathy in adolescents has yielded positive results. Children have become more open and considerate, have become less self-centered, and no longer feel awkward in society. The circle of their communication expanded. They learned how to appropriately express their emotions. Adolescents with troubled behavior of the experimental group already have some ability to evaluate problems from the perspective of a different person, because they understand that their point of view is no longer unequivocally the only correct one. So, they are capable of manifesting empathy.

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