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## Troubled Adolescents Starting a Family: Ways to Support

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### Abstract

Readiness of young people for family life is a determining factor in the formation of a healthy nuclear family. Recently, the importance of the family institution has been actively promoted in our country, and special attention is paid to the troubled families and children at risk. This problem is particularly relevant for adolescents who are prone to troubled behavior, with a majority of them having gone through a traumatizing experience of family life.

The basic theoretical and methodological procedures for facilitation of adolescents starting family life have been fully developed in the scientific literature. However, it is necessary to take into account the specifics of the adolescents' lifestyle, including the manifestation of various deviations. The latter has not yet been studied thoroughly enough in modern studies.

The purpose of this study is to experimentally test the effectiveness of the developed pedagogical conditions for the formation of readiness of deviant behavior-prone (troubled) adolescents for family life.

The main research methods are pedagogical experiment, monitoring, testing, conversation, and statistical methods for the processing of the research results. The experiment involved 188 adolescents, 68 of whom are prone to deviant behavior (32 - EG, 36 - CG). Our study participants are students of the Kazan schools located in the Republic of Tatarstan, aged 14-16.

As a result of the introduction of the developed pedagogical conditions for the formation of readiness of deviation-prone adolescents for family life, among the students of the experimental group demonstrated statistically relevant positive changes in three components of readiness for family life (cognitive, value-based and behavioral), the control group students showcased no significant changes for the given period of time.

Piloted pedagogical conditions can be used by the comprehensive and specialized educational institutions in when working with students teachers, teachers and educational psychologists dealing with children at risk.

*Keywords:* family life, readiness for family life, adolescents, deviant behavior, pedagogical conditions of readiness for family life.

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## **Introduction**

At present, in many countries, even in economically developed and stable states, there is an ongoing transformation of family values and traditional foundations. Rather serious changes are taking place in the family and marriage institution. The crisis of family is particularly evidenced by the decrease in the prestige of the family, degradation of the family lifestyle, lack of need to have children, an increase in domestic violence and number of divorces, as well as in growing share of alternative marriages and family relations.

The relevance of the study is stemming from the increasing importance of the family institution for the stability of society and the state. An orderly family can be created only assuming a certain readiness of young people for family life. Pursuant thereto, there is undoubtedly a growing role of preparation of the younger generation for future family life, and, obviously, it is necessary to develop pedagogical foundations for the implementation of this process.

According to the Russian scientists, preparation for future family life is one of the main tasks young people address in the period of their adolescence and youth (Isaev & Kagan, 1986; Dorno, 1990). This age range is defined as a crucial period in the formation of gender identity, sex-role stereotypes that underlie family interaction.

It is important to note that individualized ideas of adolescents at risk about the institution of the family, most often, are distorted or formed inadequately, as the basis of the deviant behavior of adolescents rooted in the improper upbringing in the family.

Consequently, the problem of developing readiness of deviant behavior-prone adolescents for family life, besides being relevant, is also of great social significance.

## **Purpose and objectives of the study**

Purpose of the study is to empirically test the effectiveness of the developed pedagogical conditions for development of readiness of troubled adolescents for family life.

## **Literature review**

To date, a vast array of information has been accumulated in the theory and practice of psychological and pedagogical research, revealing the scientific foundations and experience in shaping readiness of adolescents and young people for the family life.

The study of preparation of the younger generation for adulthood, as well as pedagogical aspects, psychological, medical, and hygienic issues of raising a family man are discussed in the works of Khripkova & Kolesov (1981), Isaev and Kagan (1986), Kon (1990), Grebennikov (1999), Kulikova (1999), Mukhametzyanov (2006) and others.

We analyzed the ways and forms of maintaining moral relationships and preparing adolescents for independent family life (Anisyutin, 2011); there was developed a concept of the family spiritual and moral values formation and facilitation of readiness for marriage and family life of the senior high school students in the context of family and school interaction (Akutina, 2010; Zritneva, 2000); there was exposed the process of socialization of a child in the family, his/her preparation for the future marriage and parenthood (Barsky, 1971; Bestuzhev-Lada, 1988, etc.); there were identified factors that influence the formation of readiness for family life (Chudnovsky, 1980; Dubrovin, 1981; Yufereva, 1985; Arabov, 1996; Kovalev, 1998, etc.).

The theses of Gnoyevaya (2006) and Sataeva (2004) are of particular interest to our research, as they are reflecting the specifics of the formation of the senior students' readiness for family life in the conditions of the psychological and pedagogical department of the rehabilitation center and the preparation of orphans for independent family life in an orphanage.

As for the specificity of deviant behavior children's awareness of family life, Kruglova (2006) stresses that the experience of communication in the process of joint activities acquired in a family is the foundation on which the image of an ideal family is built.

In her work, Biktagirova and Valeeva (2015) note that the formation of students' readiness for family life is associated with the formation of their readiness for responsible parenthood. The study experimentally confirmed the effectiveness of the developed program "I am the Future Parent" for the formation of students' readiness for parenthood.

The problem of readiness for marriage of today's young people is addressed in foreign literature covering various aspects. Carroll et al. (2009) argue that young people's attitude toward marriage is associated with a wide range of values and behaviors in an emerging adult life. Family formation values, marital timing and marital importance are related to child-centeredness, non-marital cohabitation, out-of-wedlock childbirth, and spousal independence. Marital importance is negatively associated with endorsement of non-marital cohabitation, out-of-wedlock childbirth, and spousal independence, but is positively associated with child-centeredness.

Scientists have found that young people's lifestyle models predetermine their expectations of marriage in the near future. For example, college students prone to substance use and sexual permissiveness have distant marital horizons and family values are less important to them (Carroll et al., 2009).

Educating parenthood can affect not only paternal behavior, but also many aspects of family life (Bates et al, 2017). The WeGrill Program is a definite approach to parenthood education. The program, based on several learning theories, helps fathers and their adolescent children master the realm of family life, plan the future, and develop skills in the field of healthy nutrition.

Studies reveal the rhetorical aspects of sex education (Kelly, 2016); protective factors of family life for immigrant youth (Burgos, Al-Adeimietal, & Brown, 2017). However, despite a wide range of studies addressing the problem of readiness for family life, the issues of the formation of readiness for family life of deviant behavior-prone senior adolescents have not yet been studied thoroughly enough and they are basically of polemical nature.

Analysis of the literature and scientific researches shows a large variety of assessments, opinions, attempts to explain the phenomenon of readiness for family life.

Here is a comparative analysis of the key concepts developed by a number of authors. Zritneva (2000) and Fedorova (2009) interpret the concept of readiness as an integrative quality (education), which includes a set of specific knowledge, skills and values.

Zritneva (2000) identifies special knowledge and skills in various areas of family life (psychology of family relations, joint housekeeping, family pedagogy, interpersonal communication). Fedorova (2009) approaches the readiness for family life as the knowledge necessary for an adequate and conscious choice of a life partner, a positive attitude towards marriage and starting a family, adoption of family values, as well as the communication and reflexive skills necessary for creating a regular nuclear family.

Anisyutina (2011) in her research addressing the issue of readiness for family life considers the process of development of personal qualities of a potentially good family man, namely: an active life stance, agile interpersonal interaction skills, a persistent value system.

The concept of "readiness for family life" is approached by Andreeva (2004) as the system of socio-psychological mindsets of an individual, determining the emotional and positive attitude to the family lifestyle, the values of marriage.

According to Andronnikova (2009) readiness for family life is the willingness to accept another person with his or her inner world, habits, interests into your life. The basis of the phenomenon under consideration is young people's perception of the family, future life partner, because they are based on the ideas about family roles that are habitual to humans.

It is important to emphasize that the analyzed definitions of the concept under study share following: acceptance of family values, a positive attitude towards family lifestyle, and the skills of the effective communication and interaction.

In our study, the concept of readiness for family life is understood as a system of such social and psychological mindsets of a person, which determine the emotional and positive attitude to family life, ensure acceptance of family values, together with the knowledge and skills of family pedagogy, interpersonal interaction, and joint household management.

On the basis of the major routes for preparing young people for family life identified by the researchers, we will define its main components.

Grebennikov (1999) singles out social, moral, ethical, legal, psychological, physiological, hygienic, pedagogical, and economic aspects as the main aspects of preparing for family life.

The criteria for readiness for marriage, according to Carroll et al. (2009), include interpersonal competences, making lifelong commitments and acquiring opportunities to take care of the others.

All the above stated theoretical propositions say that readiness for family life is the most important indicator of social maturity and mental health of young people.

In our study, taking into account the peculiarities of adolescence, we are addressing not actual, but predictive readiness for family life, i.e. a fundamental conscious readiness for this move in the future.

The peculiarity of the development of troubled adolescents' readiness for family life is associated with shifting the mindset of students towards positive family experience.

### **Methodology**

Experimental work was carried out in secondary schools in Kazan, the Republic of Tatarstan. The experiment featured 88 adolescents aged 14–16 years (8<sup>th</sup> –9<sup>th</sup> grade students), 68 of whom are prone to deviant behavior (32 – EG, 36 – CG).

The study used the following diagnostic tools:

- The "Propensity for Deviant Behavior" method developed by Orel, which allows assessing the proneness of adolescents to implement various forms of deviant behavior.
- A revised knowledge test of the fundamentals of family law and its regulations and codes, which allows exploring the cognitive component of adolescents' readiness for family life.
- A revised questionnaire "Role Expectations and Claims in Marriage" (Volkova and Trapeznikova, 1985), aimed at exploring the concept of the basic functions of the family and drawing up a scale of family values.
- The intimate-sexual scale was excluded from the questionnaire, the final assessment of

the value component is defined as the average value on the scales (compatibility of the future family partner, household environment, parent-educational, emotional and psychotherapeutic, and social activity, attractiveness).

- A modified test card assessing readiness for family life (Yunda, 1990), designed to study the behavioral component of adolescents' readiness for family life. This method allows to assess the level of readiness among future spouses to jointly perform family functions, namely: to create a positive family background, maintain respectful, friendly relations with relatives, have children and bring them up, establish a healthy family life, improve themselves socially, etc.

#### Experiment description and procedure

As part of this study, there was organized a pedagogical experiment as a parallel version, aimed at shaping readiness for family life of the senior adolescents who are prone to deviant behavior. We chose the option of organizing a natural experiment, which was conducted in the settings and conditions familiar to the subjects, and they were not informed about the experiment. It was carried out during the extra-curricular time, as part of out-of-school activities and classroom advisory briefings. The experiment was run mainly by leading teachers. All 188 participants took part in the formative assessment, but the results for all stages of the formative experiment were analyzed only for the control and experimental groups consisting of 68 people selected and aligned at the ascertaining stage.

The pedagogical experiment was carried out in three stages:

1) at the ascertaining stage of the experiment, there were identified levels of cognitive, axiological, behavioral components of readiness for family in the experimental group (EG) and control group (CG);

2) at the formative stage of the experiment, there were tested the pedagogical conditions for the formation of readiness for family life of the EG adolescents prone to deviant behavior;

3) at the control stage of the experiment, there was identified the dynamics of changes in the levels of the three components of readiness for family life of the subjects in the EG and the CG, and there was tested the effectiveness of the developed pedagogical conditions. The SPSS statistical package, version 23.0, was used to process the results of the study.

Testing pedagogical conditions of the readiness for family life formation of the adolescents prone to deviant behavior

We approach the pedagogical conditions of readiness for family life as the complex of measures, content, methods and organizational forms for establishing the social position of a family man, as well as developing adolescents' ability to resist external and internal negative influences that impede the formation of readiness for family life.

The theoretical analysis of the researches on the problem under study, as well as our practical experience, allowed us to single out the following set of pedagogical conditions for preparing readiness for family life of the adolescents prone to deviant behavior:

- tracking the vitagenic experience of adolescents prone to deviant behavior;
- usage of the original program "The Path to Adulthood", featuring various forms and methods of pedagogical interaction.

As part of the study, we used the opportunity of a focused pedagogical influence on the content of vitagenic experience, on the correction of erroneous ideas and on expanding the boundaries of positive vitagenic experience.

The selection of the information about the vitagenic experience of the families in the experimental

group was carried out through communication with the leading teacher and teaching staff, observation, study of the students' personal files and conversations with them.

The study used the method of initial realization of the life experience of students in order to ascertain the initial fund or scope of knowledge at the level of everyday consciousness of adolescents. This method was used as part of the direct statement of the question ("What do you know about ..."); when raising the topical question represented as the description of a life situation; while doing a written test.

The adjustment and correction of erroneous ideas was carried out in the classroom using information blocks in which the value of family relations, family functions, family development stages and its crises, the fundamentals of regulation of family legal relations, etc. were explained and specified.

During the experiment, students were helped to see, experience, try to follow various behavior modes, solve their problems, adopt various ways of self-realization and asserting themselves in the world. To implement all the above said, there were created situations facilitating the transformation of life experience into the values of adolescents. It was carried out through the simulation of family situations that lead to rows, quarrels, conflict situations; the exchange of letters containing actual family problems for which adolescents could give advice and hear the opinions of others; drawing up individual and group collages dedicated to problem situations of family relations and offering their resolution, etc. For example, adolescents who are prone to aggression and violence were offered situations involving humiliation and insult; for those prone to addictive behavior – quarrels based on the problem of avoiding the reality; and for the adolescents prone to violating the norms and rules, there were created situations simulating a violation of an agreement. When simulating family situations, adolescents openly expressed their emotions, thoughts, and reasons, and also they offered their own options for resolving conflicts. The number of simulated etudes also included episodes from the adolescents' own life experience. When discussing situations, students answered a number of questions: "Did you get into such a situation?", "How did you feel at that moment?", "How was this problem resolved in your family?", "What will happen or not happen in your life, if the problem is not resolved?", "What impedes the resolution of this problem?", "What options can be offered to resolve this problem?", "What changes in your family when the problem is resolved?".

When performing a complex of various exercises, the specifics of adolescents' deviation were taken into account. For example, there were used exercises with the substitution of harsh words with soft expressions for adolescents who are prone to aggressive behavior. For those who tend to follow addictive behavior pattern, it was proposed to imagine and present the desired family and family life that is possible in case of their lifestyle today. Adolescents, prone to violating norms and rules, developed their family rules and traditions.

Original program "The Path to Adulthood" is focused on the following tasks:

1. To promote the formation of an active and responsible attitude towards future family life.
2. To form knowledge about the regulatory and legal framework of family relations and specificity of their regulation, about family functions, social and moral norms of gender relations; about fundamentals of reproductive health; about the role of parents in raising children and responsibility for them.
3. To shape the values of family-marriage relations, to promote the desire to have a family and children, to foster readiness to take responsibility for themselves and their family members.
4. To develop productive coping strategies, constructive ways of resolving family conflicts, the ability to respond adequately in crisis situations.

5. To promote the development of empathy and tolerance, the ability to communicate and interact productively.

The program “The Path to Adulthood” used such forms and methods of pedagogical interaction as disputes and discussions, case situations, practical exercises, role-playing games, brainstorming, etc.

*Conditions of the experiment:* the program is designed for 25 developmental activities designed for senior adolescents, lasting 60-90 minutes, conducted 2-3 times a month.

### Results

There was carried out a diagnostics to select a study sample according to the “Propensity for Deviant Behavior” method. The following prevailing forms of deviant behavior were identified for adolescents:

- propensity to violate norms and rules – 67.7% of participants;
- inclination to aggression and violence – 53% of adolescents;
- propensity to addictive behavior (gadget addiction, smoking) – 44.1% of the total number of participants.

The results of the study are given in the Tables 1-3.

Table 1. Distribution of levels according to the cognitive component of readiness for family life in the EG and CG at the ascertaining and control stages of the experiment (percentage terms)

| Levels        | EG         |       | CG         |           |
|---------------|------------|-------|------------|-----------|
|               | Befor<br>e | After | Befor<br>e | Afte<br>r |
| <b>Low</b>    | 25         | 6,25  | 27,8       | 22,2      |
| <b>Medium</b> | 62,5       | 43,75 | 66,7       | 66,7      |
| <b>High</b>   | 12,5       | 50    | 5,5        | 11,1      |

At the ascertaining stage of the experiment, it was found (see Table 1) that the medium level of the cognitive component of readiness for family life prevails for the students of the EG and the CG, and the differences in the average values of the cognitive component in the two groups are not statistically different (according to Student's t-test:  $t_{emp} = 0.93$ , with  $p \leq 0.01$ ).

After the forming activities were carried out in the EG, there were positive changes in this component value, as well as the dominantly high level of cognitive readiness for family life (an increase of 37.5%).

Qualitative analysis of the study suggests that at the control stage of the experiment, testees of the EG could unmistakably name the circle of family members, which marriages are legally effective in the Russian Federation; 75% of adolescents of the at-risk groups answered correctly to the questions related to the conditions of marriage and divorce registration, execution of rights and obligations of the spouses; 71.9% of the adolescents have legal information related to the birth, maintenance and upbringing of a child, as well as they are knowledgeable about deprivation of parental rights, alimony payments and adoption of children, etc.

Table 2. Distribution of levels according to the value-based component of readiness for family life in the EG and CG at the ascertaining and control stages of the experiment (percentage terms)

| Levels        | EG         |       | CG         |           |
|---------------|------------|-------|------------|-----------|
|               | Befor<br>e | After | Befor<br>e | Afte<br>r |
| <b>Low</b>    | 43,75      | 12,45 | 44,5       | 41,7      |
| <b>Medium</b> | 50         | 50    | 47,2       | 50        |
| <b>High</b>   | 6,25       | 37,55 | 8,3        | 8,3       |

The analysis of the results of studying the levels of the value-based component of readiness for family life in the EG and CG at the ascertaining stage showed the dominance of the medium and low levels of the value-based component. Also, there are no significant differences in the medium level of the value-based component in the two groups (according to the Student's t-test:  $t_{emp} = 0.27$ , with  $p \leq 0.01$ ).

At the control stage of the experiment 31.3% of the EG testees showed redistribution of numbers according to the levels of the value-based component of readiness for family life. The positive effect of the conducted work is also shown by the increase in the medium and high levels of family values as the results scored correspond to high threshold level.

According to the opinion of the senior adolescents of the EG, the following values are especially important in family life: proper parental responsibilities; attentive, caring and trusting relationships in the family; stylish and attractive appearance (both personal appearance and the one of the future partner); commitment to professional self-realization (more pronounced among girls); readiness to solve emerging household problems in the family. It is interesting to note that with respect to household values, role-based ambitions of the testees are more focused on their own active participation in joint household management, rather than on the expectations of such behavior from a partner.

Table 3. Distribution of levels according to the behavioral component of readiness for family life in the EG and CG at the ascertaining and control stages of the experiment (percentage terms)

| Levels        | EG         |       | CG         |           |
|---------------|------------|-------|------------|-----------|
|               | Befor<br>e | After | Befor<br>e | Afte<br>r |
| <b>Low</b>    | 62,5       | 43,75 | 58,3       | 58,3      |
| <b>Medium</b> | 37,5       | 37,5  | 41,7       | 41,7      |
| <b>High</b>   | 0          | 18,75 | 0          | 0         |

The study at the ascertaining stage showed that more than half of the senior adolescents of the EG and the CG had unsatisfactory readiness for family life. It is statistically confirmed that there were no differences in the medium level of the behavioral component for the both groups (according to Student's t-test:  $t_{emp} = 0.38$ , with  $p \leq 0.01$ ).

On the basis of Table 3, it can be argued that after the forming experiment, 18.75% of EG students showed a positive trend in redistribution of levels of readiness for family life. Senior adolescents got some ideas about their future family and behavior scenarios in difficult family situations; the choice of ways to harmonize family relationships, parenting; creating a favorable psychological climate in the family; commitment to improve manners and forms of behavior; the desire to adequately represent themselves and their family.

The levels and content of the three components of readiness for family life did not change significantly in the CG at the control stage of the experiment; as for the assessment of the changes reliability, no significant differences were found in the medium level of the components (for the cognitive component –  $t_{emp} = 2.13$ , for the value-based component –  $t_{emp} = 1.78$ , and for the behavioral component –  $t_{emp} = 0.38$ ).

The effectiveness of the tested pedagogical conditions for the formation of readiness for family life of deviant behavior-prone adolescents of the EG is statistically proved using Student's t-test with  $p \leq 0.01$ : for the cognitive component –  $t_{emp} = 6.49$ , for the value-based component –  $t_{emp} = 3.95$  and for the behavioral component –  $t_{emp} = -2.95$ .

In order to obtain a more comprehensive picture regarding the features of the formed structure of readiness for family life of senior adolescents of the EG, at the control stage of the experiment there was conducted a correlation analysis of the relationships between the studied components. As the result there were found highly significant correlations of strong density among all components ( $p \leq 0.01$ ) (Figure 1). In the CG at the control stage, there were found significant and highly significant correlations of moderate density.

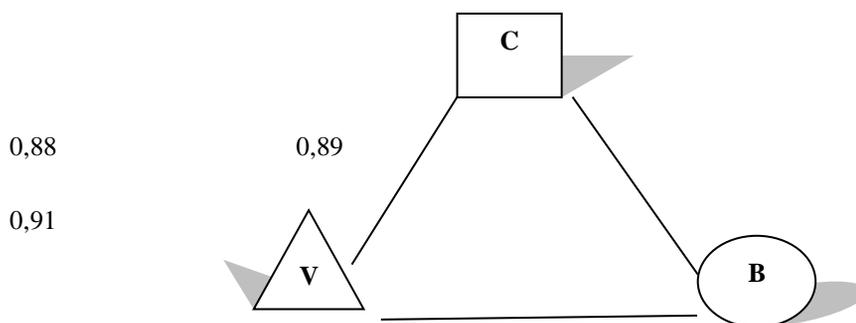


Figure 1. Correlation pleiade among components of readiness for family life in the EG at the control stage

Specification:

C – cognitive component;

V – value-based component;

B – behavioral component.

Development of comprehensive knowledge of family-marriage relations shaping the mindsets of the EG adolescents demonstrating propensity to deviant behavior contribute to acceptance of the family life values, and, in turn, form a certain readiness of an adolescent to create a family, to build relationships, to develop necessary rules and norms of behavior in a family, to the use various methods of resolving conflict situations and disagreements.

### Discussions

At the ascertaining stage of the experiment, it was revealed that for the adolescents who are prone to deviant behavior, the indicator of the cognitive component of readiness for family life has medium level, the medium and low levels of family value dominate for the value-based component; low level of readiness

for family life prevails in the behavioral component.

As a result of introducing pedagogical conditions into the educational process, there were identified significant positive changes for each component of readiness for family life in the experimental group, and no substantially significant differences were observed in the control group for this period of time.

There were revealed highly significant correlations of strong density between cognitive, value-based and behavioral components of readiness for family life among adolescents of the EG.

### **Conclusion**

Crisis phenomena in modern society associated with economic, social, and political transformations have a negative impact on the condition and functioning of the family institution. The problem of the formation of readiness for family life of the senior adolescents having various deviations acquires not only theoretical and practical significance, but social value as well.

As part of the work carried out, the effectiveness of the developed pedagogical conditions for the formation of readiness for family life of adolescents prone to deviant behavior was experimentally proved, namely: 1) taking into account the vitagenic experience of adolescents prone to deviant behavior; 2) the use of the original program “The Path to Adulthood”, which includes various forms and methods of pedagogical interaction: disputes and discussions, case studies, practical exercises, role-playing games, brainstorming, etc.

Creation of conditions for optimizing child-parent interaction based on the implementation of parental education technologies and involving them as active participants in joint activities with children are among the promising areas of further scientific research in this field of knowledge.

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