



Psychological Prevention Mechanisms of Minors' Deviant Behavior

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to a very topical social problem of contemporary Russian society – the prevention of deviant behavior among children and teenagers. The theoretical and methodological analysis of approaches to the prevention of minors' deviant behavior is presented in the article. Psychological mechanisms of their implementation have been identified and the data of their effectiveness evaluation have been given. The leading approach to the study of this problem was a content-analysis (the method of qualitative – quantitative analysis of the documents' content for the purpose of revealing various facts and tendencies reflected in these documents), the phenomenological analysis of domestic and foreign literature, Internet survey of students and their parents, the monitoring of the state of preventive work in educational institutions. The use of these approaches and methods in the course of our study provided validity, reliability and authenticity of the data obtained. The conclusions have been drawn that the subject-oriented approach can be offered as the most effective in preventive work which is directed towards the formation of students' subjective attitude to deviant behavior and risks provoking such behavior. Besides, conclusions have been made that the mechanisms of personal resources' activation and subject's responsibility should become the main in preventive work organized in educational institutions. The materials of the article are of practical use to psychologists, social workers and staff members of special and educational institutions.

Keywords: deviant behavior, types of deviant behavior, approaches to deviant behavior prevention, psychological mechanisms of prevention, minors.

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INTRODUCTION

Qualitative transformations of public relations taking place in contemporary society initiated by economic, political, social factors induce not only positive but also negative changes in various spheres of social life. Difficulties of adaptation to changing conditions of life that arise in all social groups generate deformation of interpersonal relationships, the split of generations, the loss of traditions which essentially increases risks of deviant behavior among children and teenagers.

A mass character of deviant behavior spread in the teen milieu practically in all countries raises interest to the study of causes, mechanisms, methods of correction and conditions of preventing both deviant behavior on the whole [1, 2, 3] and its individual forms: aggressive [4, 5, 6], addictive [7, 8], delinquent [9, 10], criminal [11, 12], suicidal [13, 14, 15].

In the last time along with problems of an aggressiveness rise in the teen milieu, the use of psychoactive substances, crime rate and etc. new risks of deviations are getting widespread which are connected to the influence on teenagers through the Internet [16, 17, 18]. The issue is about both the development of Internet-addictions including game addictions and social network addictions and the involvement of teenagers in extremist groups and other communities posing a threat to not only social adaptation but also the minors' life [16, 17]. These threats set the task of taking new realia into account in the prevention of children and teenagers' deviant behavior.

The phenomenon of deviant behavior is referred to interdisciplinary ones. The areas of preventive work are identified in medical, psychological, pedagogical, sociological studies, and depending on explanatory theories and models of deviant behavior they differ up to opposite ones. This is the prevention connected to an early detection and correction of hereditary causes [19, 20], cerebral dysfunctions and certain properties of the nervous system as well as mental diseases [21]; control of values, norms, needs and social relationships in society [22, 23]; the formation of appropriate explanatory schemes while contacting the world [24, 25]; social teaching of adequate behavioral reactions [26, 27]; the skills formation of managing aggressive behavior [28, 29]; the formation of the need for self-actualization, personal growth [30]; formation of constructive behavior in difficult situations [31, 32, 33, 34] and others.

A diversity of areas creates certain difficulties while building the system of preventive work in broad pedagogical practice. Understanding psychological mechanisms through which the prophylactic influence is exerted on a person can contribute to overcoming these difficulties. From our positions the forming-up of preventive work in view of psychological mechanisms' action possesses a significant potential to raise its effectiveness, however psychological mechanisms of preventive work in contemporary studies are not elaborated sufficiently. There is an objective necessity of their identification and analysis.

METHODOLOGICAL BASES AND METHODS

Scientific approaches to the implementation of preventive work offered by researchers serve as the ground for the identification of psychological mechanisms for the prevention of deviant behavior.

Among the offered approaches the informational-enlightening approach is widely spread [35, 36] that implies the enlightenment activity among the minors, their parents, teachers directed towards the provision of information about legal, social and personal consequences of deviant behavior, about its provoking factors and the ways of counteracting these factors. This approach is aimed at raising legal responsibility of young people for their behavior and people's well-being in the social environment.

Along with it, researchers offer *the health-oriented approach* [37, 38]. It is implemented by means of prophylactic measures to improve moral and mental health, the formation of mindsets for a healthy lifestyle including mindsets for freedom from any addictions, responsibility for your health, self-control of your leisure time and etc.

The diagnostic –correctional approach [39] presupposes the organization of special psychological work to discover the minors prone to deviant behavior and arrange individual and group correctional work with them.

These approaches make it possible to embrace a great number of educational process participants within a very short period of time which seems to be important in view of the shortage of time and resources. However, its efficiency can be decreased because of the anonymous character of effect and also because of a low activity and insufficient personal involvement of participants.

The personality-oriented approach is more resource-consuming [3] and presupposes the use of pedagogical and psychological tools for the development of personal qualities that contribute to combat deviant behavior. This approach matches a non-specific primary prevention including various educational and psychological events and measures that develop communication skills; teenagers' engagement in various real groups and assistance in overcoming the feeling of loneliness; support to cope with difficulties in learning activity, in communication and interaction and etc.

In another approach the prevention of deviant behavior connected to new threats of involving children and teenagers in extremist and other pernicious groups and communities in educational institutions is offered to organize on the basis of «*nurturing global civic-mindedness*» [40]). Nurturing global civic-mindedness – this is a new approach to education which is focused on the formation of knowledge, skills, values and life suggestions in the interests of active participation in peaceful and sustainable development of society. Nurturing global civic-mindedness means the development of respect to a person's rights, social justice, gender equality and ecological stability which are fundamental values contributing to peace enforcement and counteraction of violent extremism. The implementation of this approach implies assistance to the youth in developing communication skills and interpersonal communication which are needed for a dialogue, settling disputes and familiarizing with peaceful approaches to changes; assistance to

students in developing critical thinking so that they could have an opportunity to assess correctly claim statements, to verify gossips and cast some doubt on legitimacy and attractiveness of imposed values and persuasions; to assist school students in forming the potential of resistance to extremist calls and in acquiring social and emotional skills which are needed for overcoming their doubts and for a constructive participation in the life of society; upbringing critically informed citizens capable of taking a constructive part in peaceful group actions.

The subject-oriented approach can be offered as an integrating, combining all identified areas of prevention [41, 42, 43, 44] directed to the formation of a subject position of school students in relation to deviant behavior and risks provoking such behavior. The implementation of this approach assumes organization of teachers' interaction, school students and their parents in the course of joint research activity directed to revealing deviant behavior risks as well as developing practices, means and ways of preventing detected risks in view of this.

All mentioned approaches find their application in preventive work, however, they are realized at the expense of various psychological mechanisms which, in our opinion, have influence on the degree of their effectiveness. In our study we set the task of revealing psychological mechanisms realized in various prevention models and assessment of their effectiveness degree.

To solve the objectives the following methods were used: the method of contrastive analysis of scientific approaches to the deviant behavior prevention, methods of monitoring the state of preventive work in educational institutions of the Russian Federation, educational institutions' work experience generalization, the Internet survey method to find out the teenagers and their parents' attitude to the prevention of deviant behavior [42].

Monitoring of the work state of preventing deviant behavior was conducted in 85 territorial subjects of the Russian Federation. 108626 teenagers and 45738 parents participated in the Internet survey of all the regions of the RF.

RESULTS

The analysis of measures and ways of preventing deviant behavior among minors that are offered in the outlined approaches allowed us to identify a number of psychological mechanisms with the help of which preventive work is carried out.

When informing teenagers and their parents on various problems of deviant behavior not infrequently *the mechanism of scaring (frightening)* is used. It is recommended to warn about negative consequences of deviant behavior for health, emotional well-being, the achievement of social success, for the life of a person on the whole. The organizers of such kind of preventive work create information resources which demonstrate the consequences of deviant behavior without any artifice. These are horrors of imprisonment, and torments of a person abusing psychoactive substances, and sufferings of relatives when a teenager commits suicide, and devastated lives of those who was recruited in prohibited organizations and was forced to fulfill terrible orders and etc. This information, in the organizers' opinion, shall awake fear and a stable reluctance to commit any deviations.

The mechanism of *emotional contagion* is similar in action but opposite in sign. It is manifested through the transference of a certain emotional state against a background of excitement. The mechanism of emotional contagion acts, for example, owing to participants' positive emotions when healthy life style events are arranged, they feel they belong to this interesting and significant activity. Or this mechanism acts when someone supports the experience of sharing «a secret», a concealed discussion of this «secret» with participants of a closed group when receiving the evidence of «admiration», a teenager subconsciously assimilates the patterns of dictated behavior. An emotional richness of information, its constant replenishment creates an effect of «emotional contagion» stimulates a desire to follow imposed patterns.

The mechanism of *suggestion* serves as one more prevention mechanism. The organizers of preventive work use various ways of verbal and non-verbal influence on teenagers' state of mind for the purpose of urging them to do certain acts. Teenagers, due to small life experience and insignificant social status, are more subject to suggestive influence.

The mechanism of imitation plays a great part. Its action is based on a teenager's ambition of popularity, of a high social status, of his belonging to a «special caste», a privileged group. Teenagers strive to imitate «stars» and if «stars» call for deeds contributing to self-development and socialization then this imitation can ensure the prevention of deviant behavior. However, not infrequently the deeds of «the stars» which are flamboyant and deviant in its essence are discussed and heroized by teenagers and the mass media which creates serious obstacles for preventive work. «The stars» augment the attractiveness of deeds which lays down the foundation for the effect of another mechanism – *identification* – identifying oneself with another significant person.

The presented mechanisms are based on the optimal environmental conditions around a teenager and provide the prevention effectiveness as if from outside in relation to a teenager. That is why such prevention depends on changes of a teenager's living conditions and may not have a long-term and stable effect. More effective are the mechanisms connected to internal conditions. Activating personal resources can be referred to such mechanisms that help to counteract deviation risks: an adaptation potential [45], constructive strategies of behavior in difficult situations [46], resilience [47, 48], adaptation resources [49, 50]. In this row, the most significant mechanism, in our opinion, is the mechanism of «*subject responsibility*» [32, 33, 34, 51]. It presupposes the nurturing of a teenager's subjective position in relation to deviant behavior, developing resilience to deviation risks, taking responsibility by a teenager for his behavior and consequences. This mechanism, unlike external mechanisms, can not act as an artifact of some measures or subconsciously it requires a purposeful and conscious involvement of a teenager in preventive work, taking a proactive stand and a great strain of internal powers.

The study of experience gained in preventive work at educational institutions based on the monitoring of 2015–2017 where 85 territorial subjects of the Russian Federation took part, as well as the survey of teenagers and their parents revealing their attitude to preventive work at educational institutions enable us to determine the frequency of use and effectiveness degree of discovered prevention mechanisms in view of objective values of the

deviant behavior decline in the teen milieu and subjective assessment of their attractiveness, significance and effect according to the survey participants' opinion.

The monitoring results and Internet survey show that in the course of implementing preventive work, the events of an information and enlightenment character are frequently used making use of the mechanisms of warning about negative consequences of deviant behavior (they have been pointed out practically in 100% of educational institutions' monitoring reports and questionnaires filled in by teenagers and their parents). Various events and campaigns are also organized like health days, competitions, flash mobs and etc., that base on the mechanisms of suggestion and emotional contagion (they are mentioned in 90% of educational institutions' monitoring reports and in 85% of Internet survey records).

A great number of educational institutions (more than 50% according to the monitoring reports data) prioritized the creation a health saving educational environment, the basic part of which is a healthy life style that embraces all participants of the educational process, the mechanisms of imitation and identification are actively used in preventive work.

The mechanisms of personal resources activation are gaining popularity in preventive activities. For the purpose of preventing deviant behavior a number of educational institutions sponsor training programs directed towards the development of communication skills, skills to resist group or peer pressure, (up to 40% according to the monitoring reports data and in 30% according to the Internet survey data), the programs of social competence development and social adaptation assistance are being implemented.

Only in an insignificant number of educational institutions (about 30% according to the monitoring reports data and less than 20% according to the questionnaire data) the mechanism of the subject's responsibility is used in preventive work through the program implementation of the volunteer movement «peer-to-peer», helping to involve teenagers themselves in active preventive work.

The correlation analysis of statistical figures on addictive and suicidal behavior manifestations among the minors and the number of conducted preventive events and measures with support on each of the detected type of psychological mechanisms (external or intrapersonal mechanisms) gave an opportunity to establish significant interrelationships. The more events deploying the mechanisms of personal resources and subject's responsibility are carried out in the region the fewer the statistical figures on deviant behavior become.

The assessment of preventive activities by teenagers and their parents conducted on a five point scale in the questionnaire (5 - highly effective, efficient measure, 1 - low effective) showed that activities based on external mechanisms, in relation to a person, are assessed by teenagers in 2,3 points on average but by their parents in 3,1 points. At the same time activities based on the mechanisms of personal resources and subject's responsibility have an average mark of 4,4 points among teenagers, but their parents gave 4,1 points.

DISCUSSION

Our research allowed us to reveal and describe various types of psychological mechanisms underlying the prevention of deviant behavior of minors. Mechanisms of scaring, warning about negative consequences of deviant behavior, emotional contagion, imitation, identifications are provided from outside in relation to a teenager and require constant management of external conditions around a teenager from outside. Mechanisms of activating personal resources and subject's responsibility of teenagers are intrapersonal and ensure the prevention of deviant behavior from inside. From our positions intrapersonal mechanisms contribute to the effectiveness and a long term character of the preventive work outcome.

In broad pedagogical practice there is a marked contradiction in the use of psychological mechanisms of prevention. At present, the information and enlightenment approach prevails in preventive work that is conducted at educational institutions. It is based mainly on external psychological mechanisms of prevention in relation to the teenager's personality: warnings about negative consequences of deviant behavior for the person himself and people around, emotional contagion while conducting single, emotionally charged, bright informative events and evolving the feeling of involvement in all participants in the events that take place; suggestion during talks. Significantly few preventive activities based on psychological mechanisms of activating teenagers' personal resources and the subject's responsibility are held. At the same time, the results of assessing the preventive activities' effectiveness conducted on the basis of both objective values in dynamic patterns of the spread of deviant behavior cases and teenagers and their parents' objective opinion demonstrate that it is these measures and activities exactly, that deploy mechanisms of activating personal resources and subject responsibility, are significantly interrelated with the statistical data decline of deviances and are assessed significantly higher by teenagers and their parents.

The resolution of this conflict is possible on the basis of the subject-oriented approach to organization of preventive work. In terms of the content this approach presupposes an active participation of teenagers themselves in preventive work as its organizers. This can be carried out through organization of teenagers and adults' joint and divided activity of a research and practical character. Research activity can incorporate work of research teams on detecting and discussing risks and problems of deviant behavior, on devising the ways of their overcoming, on the analysis and assessment of the influence ways on a person for the purpose of involving in dangerous groups and communities and etc. Practical activity can be realized through participation in the volunteer movement «peer- to- peer» or participation in cyber-teams counteracting the people's involvement in extremist and other dangerous groups and communities. Organizationally this work can be carried out in the framework of extracurricular classes, educational events and advisory periods, in the framework of school scientific societies' activity, social projects and etc.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conducted theoretical and methodological analysis of approaches to the prevention of minors' deviant behavior shows that the offered approaches can deploy both

external and internal intrapersonal psychological mechanisms. External mechanisms act on the basis of creating pedagogical and psychological conditions around teenagers that provide their awareness about causes and consequences of deviant behavior, satisfying their significant needs in the emotional well-being, self-realization and etc. Intrapersonal mechanisms ensure the teenagers' resistance to the action of factors provoking deviant behavior.

The data obtained in the study on the effectiveness of various psychological mechanisms of preventing deviant behavior and assessment of their effectiveness indicate that the mechanisms of activating personal resources and subject responsibility must become the major ones in preventive work in educational institutions.

The article can be of use to psychologists, teachers and social workers, as well as other specialists (staff members of Special educational institutions, specialists of juvenile delinquency departments and others) working with children and teenagers who have deviant behavior. The materials of the article can be utilized in training programs of students – psychologists for work in the field of preventing minors' deviant behavior.

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