

## Specific Features of Value Orientations and Social Mindsets of Deviant Teenagers

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### ABSTRACT

The importance of the studied problem is determined by a continuous growth of suicidal activity in a majority of economically developed countries of the world. The statistical data on teenage suicides is especially frightening: according to the recent data (2014) among teenagers at the age of 15-19 there are 5,9 suicidal cases for 100 thousand people and Russia remains on first place in the world in the number of suicides among teenagers. In a developed conception of the RF demographic policy for a period up to 2025 (The order of The RF President of October 9 2007, № 1351) it is supposed to reduce the mortality rate from suicides at the expense of raising the effectiveness of preventive work. Thus there is a burning issue of both studying suicidal behavior factors in teenage milieu and development of the preventive measures system. In this connection the article is directed towards the study of value orientations and social mindsets of teenagers who prone to suicidal behavior. The article contains the results of empirical investigation of studying value orientations and social mindsets in teenagers who prone to suicidal behavior. Specific features of interaction of the social mindsets system and value orientations have been identified in teenagers prone to suicidal behavior as a basis of controlling their behavior having influence on the suicidal activity manifestation. The leading approaches in studying this problem are holistic, systemic and dialectic approaches that ensure holism and comprehensiveness of the study based on the holistic personal development that takes into account the history of a personality. The materials of the article are of practical value for psychologists, social workers and staff members of educational institutions which are involved in work with deviant teenagers.

### KEYWORDS

Suicidal behavior, teenage years, social mindsets, value orientations

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## Introduction

Stress-producing conditions of the man's life activity in the contemporary world are gathering momentum, in this connection the issues of social and psychological adaptation of a personality in the contemporary world are growing more important.

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Modern tendencies of society development are reflected to a greater extent in the young people's consciousness acting on the social control of behavior which is expressed in various forms and in a suicidal form as well. That is why the issue of young people's adaptive abilities depending on psychological peculiarities of a personality is very topical.

Suicidal behavior differing both in the content, purpose orientation and degree of danger for the personality can be manifested in various forms from self-destructing behavior directed towards a self-inflicted harm which can be deliberate or unintentional up to the suicide commitment. Suicidal manifestations are expressed not only in an external, behavioral aspect; the deformation of the system of values and normative perceptions that is the system of internal control leads to suicidal behavior. Disorders of external social ties are closely connected with the deformation of internal behavioral control- value orientations and social mindsets (Maklakov, 2001).

Teenage years are a transition period of the person's development which is filled with a great number of contradictions, age conflicts, mental breakdown. Social situation of development in this period determines not only the dynamics of mental development in teenage years but the change of a teenager's attitude to the world and to himself, the development of self-consciousness and personal identity processes (Bozovic, 2008). Among the majority of problems associated with the formation of a teenager's mentality is suicidal behavior which is one of the most significant and representing the greatest danger to life (Vygotsky, 1972).

A specific teenage type of suicidal behavior is a suicide with the motivation of self-destruction which is characterized by the absence or an extreme short period and instability of longing for death. The less the age of teenagers is the brighter the predominance of aggressive orientation of behavior is manifested over suicidal one especially in case of defiant and blackmail attempts of suicides (Efimova et al., 2015). E.M. Vrono (2001) points out that a teenager often lives through the problems of the three "I": insurmountability of difficulties, interminable misfortunes and intolerance of melancholy and loneliness. A desperate teenager has to fight with these three "H": helplessness, half-heartedness and hopelessness. In the process of this fight he can come to the conclusion that he is incapable of anything and signs the death warrant to himself. In this context suicidal manifestations are expressed not only in an external behavioral aspect; the deformation of the internal control system which is composed of value and normative perceptions leads to the development of suicidal behavior. This gives a possibility to assume that suicidal behavior is a result of unfavorable social development, of a socialization failure that arise at various age stages. The disruption of external social bonds is closely connected with the deformation of internal behavioral control – value orientations and social mindsets (Kalinina et al., 2016; Parfilova & Valeeva, 2016; Chizh et al., 2016).

The problem of a social mindset has remained in the limelight of psychology for many years though this interest either rises or diminishes. A possible cause of the interest fluctuation to this problem is both the phenomenon nature of the social mindset itself (its ability to be manifested in various spheres of the mental organization of a person) and natural laws of development of psychology as a science. At present along with the differentiation of psychological knowledge the systematization of psychological ideas takes place at the philosophical level which leads to the rethinking of the collected material (Devyatkin, 2000).

The problem of a mindset is a key one in a great number of works. A lot of empirical investigations have been conducted – from Howland's global investigations at the Yale Research Center (Hovland, 1952) to the study of religious bigots by L.A.

Festinger (1957). The works on the problem of mindsets of G.W. Allport (1935), and M. Rokeach (1968) and many others are well known. P.N. Shikhirev (2000) foretells the role of a central object in the future psychological investigations to the problem of a social mindset.

Not going into the analysis of an array of works dedicated to the study of the phenomenon of a social mindset we would like to draw attention to the most important aspects from the point of view of understanding the notion of attitude. First of all, the turning point in understanding the attitude from the positions of social psychology is the proposition of the attitude construct offered by W. Thomas & F. Znanetsky (1994) represented as “value” + “attitude to value”. W. Thomas & F. Znanetsky (1994) defined the attitude as a “psychological process considered in relations to the social world and taken first of all in connection with social values” (Shikhirev, 2000). Once A.G. Asmolov (1977) noted that social mindsets “are determined by understanding value as a social object possessing significance for an individual” or, in other words, a social mindset describes the interaction of an individual and society in which the society is represented as a social value and an individual as the attitude to this value.

This position is essential to us and makes it possible, first of all, to consider the issue of the social mindset nature’s duality — on the part of the environment and on the part of an individual and secondly, the issue of attitude which is in each definite case grounded by an individual’s needs, to values of the society. In this context the social mindset nature’s duality enables it to be a regulating mechanism of social behavior and an individual’s activity in the society (Belicheva, 1994). On this basis we put forward a hypothesis about the interrelation of the social mindset system and teenagers’ value orientations as the foundation of controlling their behavior which has influence on the manifestation of these or those forms of behavior and also a suicidal one (Salakhova et al., 2016a; 2016b).

Taking the abovementioned into account our study faced the following objectives: 1) the study of the meaning of social values in teenagers prone to and unsusceptible to suicidal behavior; 2) the study of quantitative evaluations of the social mindset system in teenagers who are prone and not prone to suicidal behavior; 3) uncovering interrelations between the systems of social mindsets and teenagers’ value orientations; 4) analysis of differences in value orientations and social mindsets of teenagers’ personality who are prone and not prone to suicidal behavior.

### Methodological Framework

The empirical study sampling was made up of school students of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade aged 15-16, total number - 42 people. Ch.E. Osgood’s (1979) approach of semantic differential was used in the study aimed at disclosing quantitative ratings of social mindsets of a personality (Serkin, 2004); S.H. Schwartz’ (1994) values questionnaire directed towards the measurement of motivation dimensions determining the most significant value guidelines of the person’s life activity (Shapar, 2005). The suicidal behavior inclination was also used in the diagnostic technique for identifying the deviant behavior inclination (DBI) (A.N. Oryol, 2002) which is a standardized testing questionnaire designed for measuring the inclination of teenagers to perform various forms of deviant behavior and also the inclination to auto-aggressive behavior (Shapar, 2005).

*The method of semantic differential* is used in the field of psycholinguistics and experimental psychosemantics to reveal subjective (individual) semantic fields and is referred to “scaling” methods. The latter ones are applied in psychology to obtain quantitative ratings of the studied phenomenon for the purpose of objective evaluation



of its proportion to other objects. Both physical and social processes can be represented as objects of the study. Words and collocations can be objects of the study in psychology. Semantic differential in psycholinguistics is the method of quantitative and qualitative “indexing” (evaluation) of the word meaning with the use of two-pole scales on each of which there is a gradation with a couple of antonymous adjectives (Glukhov, 2005).

The procedure of conducting an experiment with the use of this technique consists in the following. The tested people are showed a word and they must write a number which corresponds to their notion of a word as a semantic unit. On each scale there is a graduation line from +3 to —3 or simply 7 graduation marks.

Good

More likely good than neutral (“average”)

More likely neutral than good

Neutral (“average”)

More likely neutral than bad

More likely bad than average

Bad (“low level”)

Ch.E. Osgood (1979) who was the first to offer this procedure of the experiment tried to obtain the evaluation from tested people of words-concepts from various notion classes (for example: flame, mother, hurricane, joy and so on). Tested people were asked to evaluate these words from the point of view of how much they are “kind” or “spiteful”, “strong” or “weak”, “big” or “small” and so on. Mathematical processing of experiment results showed that evaluations to a great extent coincided with one another on some graduation marks. With this it turned out that coinciding scales can be united in three groups — so-called “factors” to which Ch.E. Osgood (1979) ascribed the following names: evaluation, power and activity. Each of these factors incorporates four signs denoted by four pairs of antonyms — adjectives. The form for conducting the experiment on the semantic differential technique usually looks like in the following way.

*Schwartz’ questionnaire* makes it possible to study normative ideals, values of the personality at the level of persuasions as well as the structure of values that has the greatest impact on the whole personality but not always manifested in real social behavior. It also helps to study values at the level of behavior that is individual priorities which are made conspicuous more often in social behavior of the personality.

S.H. Schwartz (1994) developed a new theoretical and methodological approach to the study of values. He proceeded from the point that the most essential content-related aspect underlying the difference between values — is the type of motivational objectives which they express. That is why he grouped some values in values types in conformity with the commonality of their goals. He explained it by the fact that base human values with high probability discovered in all cultures are those which represent universal needs of the human existence (biological needs, the necessity of coordinating social interaction and demand of the group’s functioning). S.H. Schwartz (1994) selected values identified by preceding researchers and also those which he found himself in religious and philosophic works dedicated to the values of different cultures. Then he grouped them in the ten motivationally different types which, from his point of view, embrace the base types (Schwartz, 1992, 1994; Smith & Schwartz, 1997): power — a social status, dominating over people and resources; achievement — personal success in conformity with social standards; hedonism — enjoyment and emotional pleasure; stimulation — excitement and novelty; self-direction — self-consistency of thought and

action; universalism – understanding, tolerance and protection of all nature and people's well-being; benevolence – maintaining and increasing close people's well-being; tradition – respect and responsibility for cultural and religious customs and ideas; conformity – repression of actions and incentives which can harm the others and do not correspond to social expectations; security – safety and stability of the society, relations and the person himself.

S.H. Schwartz (1994) developed *the theory of dynamic relations between value types*, which describes the conceptual arrangement of the values system. He stated that acts committed in conformity with each type of values have psychological, practical and social consequences that can come into a conflict or, vice versa, be compatible with other types of values. Competing value types go in opposite directions from the center, additional types are located in their degree of proximity forming a circle.

According to S.H. Schwartz' (1994) theory the values of a personality exist at two levels: *at the level of normative ideals and at the level of individual priorities*.

The first level is more stable and reflects the person's understanding of how he should act which determines his life principles of behavior by this.

The second level is more dependent on the environment, for example, on the group pressure and matched with certain person's acts (Schwartz, 1997).

This aspect of the values theory was taken into account while designing the technique and was reflected in the procedure of holding an interview on the basis of the questionnaire.

S.H. Schwartz' (1992) questionnaire to study the values of the personality looks like a scale designed for measuring the significance of ten value types.

The questionnaire consists of *two parts* that differ in the procedure of holding. The first part of the questionnaire "Overview of values" represents two lists of words characterized in the total amount of 57 values. They all have a clear motivational goal and are significant to any extent for different cultures. The first list contains term values expressed in the form of nouns. The second list contains instrumental values expressed in the form of adjectives.

A tested person is asked to evaluate the degree of importance of each value as a guiding principle of his life. The scale is used from -1 to 7. The higher the point in the range -1, 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, the more important this value is for him.

In the second part of the questionnaire "Personality profile" there is a list of 40 descriptions of a person that corresponds to this or that values type of the 10 values types. A tested person is asked to evaluate to what extent a person described in the questionnaire resembles him or does not resemble him. The scale with 5 graduation marks is used: from "resembles very much" to "does not resemble me at all".

*The diagnostic technique of inclination to deviant behavior* (IDB) is a standardized test-questionnaire for measuring readiness (inclination) of teenagers for realization of various forms of deviant behavior. The questionnaire is like a set of specialized psychodiagnostic scales directed at measuring readiness (inclination) to realization of some forms of deviant behavior.

The technique assumes recording and correction of a mindset to socially desirable answers of tested people. The questionnaire's scales are divided into content-related and service. The content-related scales are aimed at measuring psychological content of a range of deviant behavior forms connected with one another that is social and personal mindsets which are behind all these behavioral manifestations. The service scale is designed for measuring the inclination of a tested person to give socially approved information about himself, reliability evaluations of the questionnaire's



results on the whole and also for correction of results according to content-related scales depending on the expressiveness of a tested person's mindset in relation to socially desirable answers.

## Results

For the purpose of analyzing the teenagers' values system who are not prone to suicidal behavior (TNPSB) and teenagers who are inclined to suicidal behavior (TISB) we conducted the comparison of the mean group figures of values with the use of Student's statistical t-criterion. At the same time a special attention was paid to significant differences in the studied teenage groups. As a result statistically significant differences were found in figures of values of "achievement" ( $t_{\text{emp}} = 2,6732$  with  $p \leq 0,01$ ) and "security" ( $t_{\text{emp}} = 2,5721$  with  $p \leq 0,05$ ) (table 1).

Much higher points of the achievement value by teenagers who are prone to suicidal behavior testify to a greater orientation towards social recognition, an aspiration to the material values possession at the same time for teenagers who are not prone to suicidal behavior this value is associated with success of their activity expressed by the elevation of their personal competence. The magnitude of the security value for teenagers who are prone to suicidal behavior is less high in comparison with teenagers who are not prone to suicidal behavior. This characterizes teenagers prone to suicidal behavior as less responsible or less trustworthy yet teenagers prone to suicidal behavior possess a less community spirit or care of people around them.

Further analysis was devoted to the comparison of the mean group points of social mindsets of teenagers who are not prone to suicidal behavior and teenagers prone to suicidal behavior with the use of Student's statistical t-criterion. With the use of the semantic differential method offered by Ch.E. Osgood (1979) social mindsets of teenagers were measured for values that correspond to S.H. Schwartz' (1992) typology. As a result of such analysis statistically significant differences were found among the studied groups of teenagers in social mindsets for "enjoyment" ( $t_{\text{emp}} = 2,7690$  with  $p \leq 0,01$ ), "social justice" ( $t_{\text{emp}} = 2,6358$  with  $p \leq 0,01$ ), "maturity" ( $t_{\text{emp}} = 2,0503$  with  $p \leq 0,05$ ) (table 2).

The difference data demonstrate that teenagers prone to suicidal behavior have a less expressed mindset for satisfying their wishes, for life enjoyment.

**Table 1.** Comparison of mean group figures of teenagers' values who are not prone to suicidal behavior and teenagers who are prone to suicidal behavior

No	Values	Mean group figures		$t_{\text{emp}}$
		TNPSB	TISPB	
1.	Enjoyment			0,5007
2.	Achievements			<b>2,6732**</b>
3.	Social power			0,2824
4.	Self-determination			0,2770
5.	Stimulation			0,9729
6.	Conformism			0,5960
7.	Support of traditions			0,8207
8.	Sociality			0,5398
9.	Security			<b>2,5721*</b>
10.	Maturity			0,0741
11.	Social culture			0,1514
12.	Spirituality			0,8238

\* significant differences with  $p \leq 0,05$ ;

\*\* significant differences with  $p \leq 0,01$ .

**Table 2.** Comparison of mean group figures of teenagers' social mindsets who are not prone to suicidal behavior and teenagers who are prone to suicidal behavior

No	Social mindsets for:	Mean group figures		t <sub>emp</sub>
		TNPSB	TISPB	
1.	Enjoyment	18,3182	10,3333	<b>2,7690**</b>
2.	Achievements	27,7727	27,2222	0,2889
3.	Social power	18,1818	15,4444	0,8837
4.	Self-determination	24,4091	28,5556	1,3474
5.	Stimulation	18,1364	17,3333	0,2498
6.	Conformism	12,0909	16,2222	1,2531
7.	Support of traditions	18,8636	17,8889	0,4788
8.	Sociality	26,2273	33,2222	<b>2,6358**</b>
9.	Security	27,5000	27,5556	0,0254
10.	Maturity	19,9545	28,3333	<b>2,0503*</b>
11.	Social culture	23,1364	24,5556	0,5054
12.	Spirituality	24,0000	23,7778	0,0926

\* significant differences with  $p \leq 0,05$ ;

\*\* significant differences with  $p \leq 0,01$ .

The mindset for sociality or social justice, equal opportunities for all, sincere relations is more typical of the teenagers prone to suicidal behavior which they seem to be short of in relations with people around them. In this context, a more marked mindset for maturity is explained by the fact that maturity is associated with mature life understanding, a deep emotional and spiritual bond with people around and comprehension of the mission in life.

## Discussions

1. The conducted theoretical analysis showed that social mindset expressed a definite attitude of an individual to the society values. For the teenagers who experience the personality formation it means a special breakdown of community values in their consciousness that is expressed then in a definite behavioral orientation. In this context, peculiarities of social mindsets for society values in teenagers who are prone to suicidal behavior, associated with a suicidal behavior orientation are of special importance.

2. A conducted empirical analysis showed that teenagers who prone to suicidal behavior attach a great importance to the value of "achievements" and less importance to the value of "security". It is possibly explained by teenagers' aspiration, bent on self-destruction, for respect from people around them, the search for mutual relations. The feeling of community spirit, closeness to people at same time is lowered in them.

3. It is worth paying attention to peculiarities of social mindsets for certain values in teenagers who are inclined to suicidal behavior. A low level of a mindset for life enjoyment and much higher level for social justice, maturity points to a more serious attitude to life. Teenagers prone to suicidal behavior are directed towards more sincere, deep relations with people around and they see a meaning of life in it. This is what they are short of in relations with other people and it leads to intrapersonal tension and it seems to increase the level of inclination for suicidal behavior.



4. The system of teenagers' value orientations who are not prone to suicidal behavior is characterized by the orientation for professional self-determination and rationality in acts and deeds pointing to orientations for clear socially approved goals what reduces the level of inclination for deviant behavior and decreases the probability of the deviations manifestation in behavior. In teenagers aged 15 – 16 who are not prone to suicidal behavior value orientations are characterized by, on the one hand, a trend towards happiness of other people, confidence in themselves, public recognition and irreconcilability to flaws in themselves and the others explained by an aspiration for self-assertion and favorable conditions for displaying deviations in behavior. On the other hand, this group of teenagers is characterized by the orientation for a productive life and honesty in relations with other people which is also a compensation of low self-esteem but seems to be the factor that reduces the inclination level for suicidal behavior and decreasing the probability of deviance in behavior.

## Conclusions

The obtained results in the comparative analysis of figures in young people's social mindsets giving evidence to much higher significance of achievements, traditions support, social culture and young people's spirituality who are not prone to suicidal behavior, in its turn, also characterizes the group of young people who are predisposed to suicidal behavior. For example, young people prone to suicidal behavior can be characterized as less oriented towards achievements, traditions, culture and spirituality.

The values system of young people who are prone to suicidal behavior can be distinguished as oriented to the values of stimulation showing the orientation of experiencing something exciting, the search for adventure and the need in novelty, changes. Apart from it, the values system of young people who prone to suicidal behavior demonstrates a higher level of orientation to the value of social power which shows an aspiration for a great influence on people and events, for an authority that needs to be obeyed. At the same time, for young people not prone to suicidal behavior this value is connected with the right to guide their own life in cooperation with other people which is confirmed by a higher figure of the social culture value oriented towards reciprocity in relations.

The system of young people's social mindsets who are not prone to suicidal behavior is characterized by a greater significance of the values of achievement, tradition support, social culture and spirituality. It also distinguishes young people who are prone to suicidal behavior. The system of young people's social mindsets who are prone to suicidal behavior is less oriented towards achievements, traditions, culture and spirituality. Thus it is possible to speak about the fact that young people prone to suicidal behavior are less oriented towards social recognition, success, they tend to be less ambitious. Young people who are prone to suicidal behavior also demonstrates less respect to traditions and civil order. In relations with other people, young people prone to suicidal behavior are less oriented towards reciprocity, temperance which gives evidence to an aspiration for manifesting extreme feelings and acts. Disharmony, misunderstanding their mission in life is more typical of the inner world of young people who are prone to suicidal behavior.

Young people with an inclination for self-destructing behavior experience the dissatisfaction of their life though they can assign a full-fledged meaning to their memories of the past or an orientation to the future. Low figures in the total rate of life meaning orientations in young people prone to self-destructing behavior give evidence of general dissatisfaction in life, lack of belief in their own powers. Such results are explained by the fact that in young people with an inclination for self-destructing

behavior overall dissatisfaction in life is connected with their orientation to infliction of the harm and lack of understanding is a factor contributing to suicidal acts.

### Recommendations

The presented results of theoretical and empirical studies can be useful for staff members of specialized training and educational institutions (STEI), employees of educational institutions as well as practicing psychologists and representatives of social services.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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