

# Research on the Moral Development of High School Students

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**Abstract**—Research on the moral development of high school students on the verge of adulthood, relevant in the scientific, practical and social aspects. Psychological and pedagogical practice is often not very effective due to the lack of a holistic theoretical understanding of the moral sphere of the individual, the age-specific nature of its development, and the peculiarities of manifestation in this sensitive period – the teenage. Results of this study may be useful for social forecasting of youth work. We studied 100 schoolchildren aged 16-18 years (50 females and 50 males). Based on a systematic approach 44 parameters of the moral development of high school students were studied by 6 methods. The hypotheses about specific structure of the moral sphere and the leading component of the moral development of high school students, differences between students of a gymnasium and a comprehensive school, and presence of typologies of moral development are confirmed. Structure and content of the moral sphere of the high school student's personality (cognitive, emotional and behavioral) and system-forming cognitive component are revealed. Level of moral development of gymnasium students is significantly higher than in comprehensive schools. Three groups of senior pupils are identified by the level and content of the components of moral development: "Morally formed", "Morally informed" and "Morally affective".

**Keywords**—high school student, moral sphere of personality, moral development.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Period of high school age is a stage in the formation of the sphere of moral self-awareness, gaining a worldview position, and moral self-determination. Neoplasms of senior school age determine the nature and content of the moral development of the individual. In the youthful period of a person's moral formation, the moral sphere gradually loses the features of "childishness", acquiring the basic qualities inherent in the developed moral sphere of an adult. In this period of development, a person has a clear idea of morality, the truth or falsity of various moral standards. The ideas about the importance of morality among high school students are associated with the obligatory and mutual observance of moral standards with the severity of their group-centric orientation. Implementing moral standards in behavior based on the strategy of reciprocity, high school students experience a sense of emotional satisfaction.

Young men overcome the fragmentation of moral convictions; their autonomy of moral convictions and moral behavior as a whole increases. On the basis of increasing

ethical criticism, high school students need to critically reassess and rethink the world. In general, adolescence is characterized by global moral initiative. The moral development of a high school student is a starting stage, when a person can be recognized as moral [1].

Studies of moral development are devoted mainly to the study of the process by which an individual assimilates socially approved norms, rules and restrictions and begins to focus on them in his behavior. Theory and empirical research are mainly focused on three conceptual aspects of this process: moral judgment (how a person talks about moral situations), moral behavior (how he behaves in such situations) and moral feelings (what he feels at the same time).

In psychology, the first studies of moral development were conducted as part of a cognitive approach. Studying moral consciousness, J. Piaget associated his development and functioning with the gradual formation of the child's cognitive abilities and considered intelligence as a cognitive aspect of behavior. The concept of moral responsibility J. Piaget was based on the identification of stages in the development of moral responsibility (objective and subjective). Following a cognitive approach, most researchers turned to the study of moral judgments, which are the objective consequences of behavior or the subjective intentions of its subject [2].

Going beyond the general cognitive approach, L. Kohlberg emphasized that moral development is an independent sequential process, and not a reflection of general cognitive development. In the system of L. Kohlberg evolutionary stages are distinguished, grouped into three moral stages: 1) pre-conventional, 2) conventional and 3) post-conventional. Adolescence corresponds to the third stage. It is focused on maintaining good relationships, maintaining on maintaining established rules and forms of behavior and moral standards of a group with which a person identifies himself as accepted as external constraints. The post-conventional stage is the highest. It is associated with an intrapersonal approach to solving moral problems and is rarely found even in adults [3-4].

An alternative to the cognitive approach was C. Gilligan's empathic approach, where the principle of care is fundamental – an empathic orientation to the needs and requirements, feelings and experiences of another person. The author proposed the idea of the existence of stable types of moral orientation, which are determined by the social attitudes of the individual: normative (an attitude to observe the principle of justice and the rights of all people) and

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empathy (an attitude to care and the real well-being of specific people) [5-6].

Analyzing moral dilemmas in adolescence and youth, S. V. Molchanov identified the main strategies for making moral decisions. The most popular strategies were withdrawal and contextual dependence. Moral decision-making by adolescents and young men depends on the context of communication and interaction. The age dynamics of moral orientation is associated with the transition from the principle of care to the principle of justice, and then to the position in which both principles are used – care and justice [7].

R. Magid and L. Schultz, discussing the process when non-moral problems can acquire moral content, suggest that it arises because the moral imperative to take care of the interests of a loved one increases the value of behavior [8].

M. Jambon and J. Smetana note that socialization approaches focused on the development of conscience through guilt and internalized behavior, usually measured in terms of compliance, while cognitively developing theories emphasized evolutionary changes in moral judgments and reasoning [9].

The disadvantages of the cognitive approach, which include reassessing the role of moral attitudes and the lack of research on behavior itself, actually ignoring the motivational component of moral behavior, were overcome in subsequent

works. In particular, G.Z. Shafikova found that the motivation of moral behavior in adolescents is not differentiated: social motives are closely intertwined with cognitive trends and demonstrativeness. They are realized through cognitive actions, and social activity is determined by the implementation of altruistic motives. Adolescents distinguish morality from sociality. In the first phenomenon, they reflect the need for personal initiative and norms, and in the second, the need for external sanctions [10].

It should be noted that in some works the consideration of individual elements of moral development is built systematically. So S.V. Shestopalov in the formation of moral values of high school students includes the totality of their components: cognitive (worldview), emotional and behavioral [11].

However, the above approaches unilaterally consider the moral development of the individual and do not allow determining the general level of morality. A person may know the requirements of public morality, but be negative about them and not follow them in their behavior.

Hence, a morally developed personality is characterized by the unity of moral consciousness, feelings and behavior, which predetermines a systematic approach to the study of the moral sphere of a person and its moral development. In accordance with the author's concept, the moral sphere of personality is an integral unity and interaction of cognitive, emotional and behavioral components (fig. 1) [12].

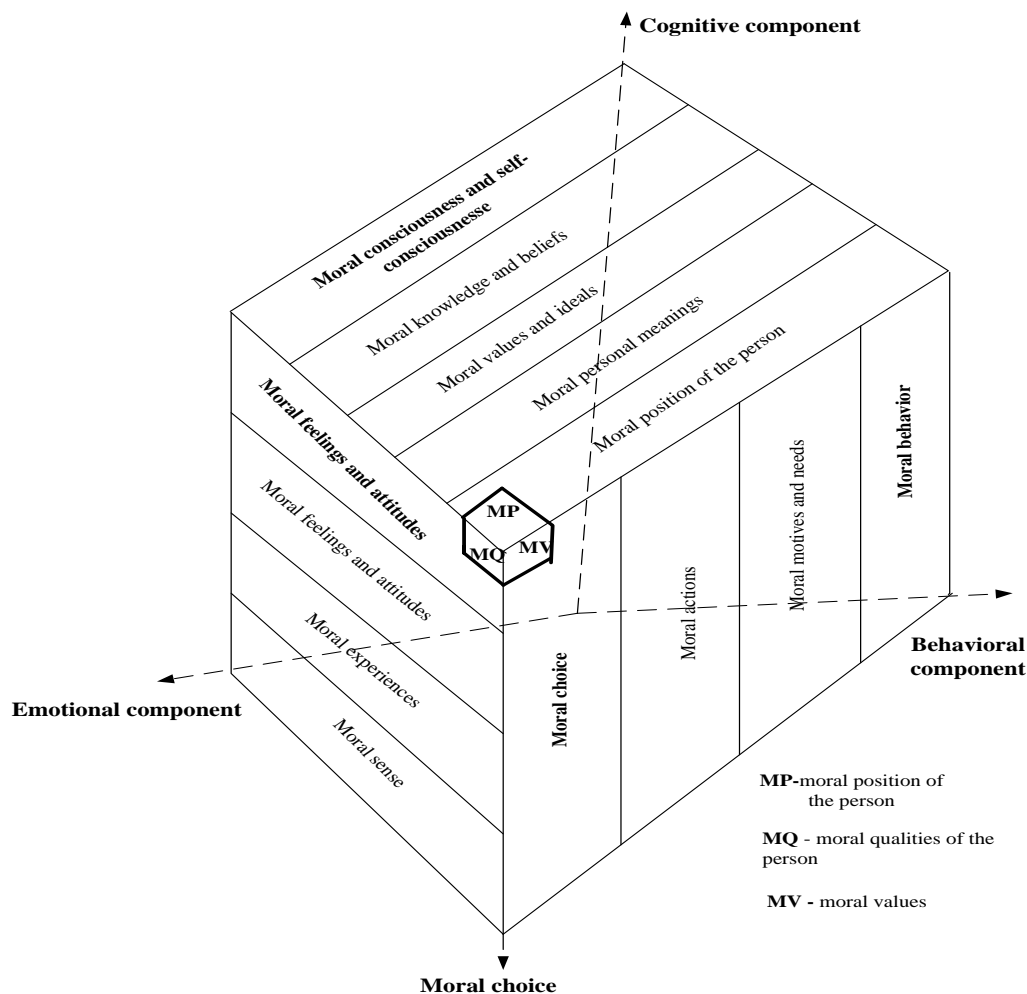


Fig. 1. Moral sphere of personality of high school students

The cognitive component contains cognitive representations, the content of which is knowledge of moral categories, a system of world views; awareness of oneself as an active subject of life, capable of applying moral standards in various life situations, making free choice and bearing responsibility for it. It includes moral consciousness, moral knowledge and beliefs, moral ideals and moral values. The emotional component is characterized by the orientation of emotions in relation to one's own moral activity, the emotional coloring of the assessments of the image of the "I" in the moral aspect, the ability to empathy, empathy; includes moral feelings and moral experiences. The behavioral component acts as the rational basis of the moral activity of the individual. It reflects the degree of compliance with moral guidelines, a conscious experience of the value of one's own actions. It includes moral needs, moral motives, moral actions that determine the line of moral behavior [13].

From the position of a systematic approach, the moral development of a person at high school age is a process of forming the moral sphere of a person as an integral unity and the interaction of cognitive, emotional and behavioral components that ensure the unity of moral consciousness and personality behavior based on free choice [14].

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is based on the principles of development, the unity of consciousness and activity. The theoretical basis of the study was: the concept of the development of the moral sphere of the personality of E.R. Gizatulina, N.V. Melnikova, R.V. Ovcharova [12-14].

The study was conducted in gymnasium No. 30 and comprehensive school No. 45 of the city of Kurgan. It was attended by 100 people aged 16 to 18 years (50 females and 50 males), who studied in the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> school grades.

The objective was to identify the specifics of the personality's moral development of high school students.

During the study, a number of hypotheses were put forward:

1. The factor structure of the personality's moral sphere of high school students has a specific content.
2. It is possible to distinguish its backbone component.
3. The moral development of high school students depends on the learning environment (comprehensive school and gymnasium).
4. There is a typology of the moral development of high school students.

Research methods: L. Kohlberg's test of moral dilemmas to assess the level of development of moral consciousness; questionnaire "Moral self-determination of personality" by A.B. Kupreichenko, A.E. Vorobyeva – to identify attitudes toward moral standards; "Scale of conscientiousness" by V.V. Melnikova, L.T. Yampolsky – to identify the degree of respect for social norms and ethical requirements, the diagnosis of moral qualities of the person; Questionnaire of terminal values (QTV) by I.G. Senin – for the diagnosis of moral values and ideals; a set of methods for diagnosing moral upbringing (moral self-esteem, ethics of behavior, attitude to life values, moral motivation) developed by the Laboratory for the Education of Moral and Ethical Culture, State Research Institute of Family and Education of Russian

Academy of Education; methodology "MEDOS-2" by R.V. Ovcharova – to study the level of personality development (subjectivity / socio-pedagogical neglect).

To prove the hypotheses, methods of mathematical statistics were used: analysis of primary statistics and analysis of significant differences using Student's t-test, Pearson correlation coefficient, factor and cluster analysis.

## III. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

### A. Experimental results

In the course of the study, all four assumptions were confirmed.

1. As a result of the factor analysis, the factor structure of the moral sphere of the high school student's personality was revealed. Factorization was carried out according to 44 parameters characterizing the moral sphere of the personality of high school students. Three factors were identified, the cumulative percentage of variance is 63.2%.
  - Factor I – "Cognitive". 12 indicators have significant value: material status, development, achievement, own individuality, attitude towards social desirability, conscientiousness, disinhibition, moralization, orientation, internal conflict, self-accusation, subject of self-awareness.
  - Factor II – "Emotional". 9 indicators have significant value: creativity, spiritual satisfaction, addictive behavior, self-harming behavior, neuroticism, depression, aesthetic impression, femininity, and the subject of communication.
  - Factor III – "Behavioral". 10 indicators have significant value: prestige, social control, professional life, family sphere, closeness, public sphere, professional sphere, will, self-confidence, sociability.
2. Based on the correlation analysis, the leading component of the personality's moral sphere of high school students was identified. The cognitive component has 37 correlation connections, the emotional – 21, the behavioral – 18.
3. Significant differences between gymnasium students and students of a comprehensive school were identified using Student's t-test.

Gymnasium students are more pronounced in: prestige ( $t = 3.9$  at  $p \geq 0.01$ ); orientation to financial position ( $t = 5.4$  at  $p \geq 0.01$ ); training ( $t = 2.7$  at  $p \geq 0.01$ ); professional life ( $t = 3.9$  at  $p \geq 0.01$ ); compliance with the norm ( $t = 3.1$  at  $p \geq 0.01$ ); total activity ( $t = 4.2$  at  $p \geq 0.01$ ); self-government ( $t = 2.9$  for  $p \geq 0.01$ ).

Students of a comprehensive school are more pronounced: self-confidence ( $t = 3.8$  at  $p \geq 0.01$ ); aesthetic perception ( $t = 1.7$  at  $p \geq 0.01$ ); sociability ( $t = 3.1$  at  $p \geq 0.01$ ); setting for social desirability ( $t = 2.9$  at  $p \geq 0.01$ ); internal conflict ( $t = 3.5$  at  $p \geq 0.01$ ); will ( $t = 3.4$  at  $p \geq 0.01$ ); delinquency ( $t = 2.7$  at  $p \geq 0.01$ ); psychotism ( $t = 4.7$  at  $p \geq 0.01$ ).

4. Method of identifying the types of high school students was made by cluster analysis (table I).

**TABLE I. AVERAGE VALUES OF FACTORS ACCORDING TO THE CLUSTERS**

Factors	Cluster No.		
	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3
Cognitive	<b>0.31</b>	0.32	<b>0.54</b>
Emotional	0.22	<b>0.48</b>	<b>0.31</b>
Behavioral	0.24	0.28	<b>0.44</b>

As a result, three clusters were obtained. The first cluster included 56% of high school students, the second cluster made up 30% and the third cluster - 14%. Next, an analysis was made of pairwise differences between the clusters using the Student criterion. According to the "Emotional" factor, differences between the 1st and 3rd cluster ( $t = 2.54$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), the 2nd and 3rd cluster ( $t = 1.87$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) turned out to be significant. According to the "Behavioral" factor, significant differences are observed between cluster 2 and 1 ( $t = 3.72$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). By the "Cognitive" factor, significant differences were found in clusters 1 and 3 ( $t = 3.88$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). After that, on the basis of cluster analysis, the types of high school students were distinguished: "morally informed" (0.31), "morally affective" (0.48) and "morally formed" (0.54; 0.31; 0.44).

### B. Discussion of results

In general, high school students have a more mature moral judgment, they freely express their opinion on many of the moral issues that are offered by adults. The revealed post-conventional level of moral consciousness indicates the presence of individual principles that manifest themselves. They act according to universal principles of morality. They have formed a self-concept, the internal subjective position of the personality, as well as the ability to carry out their life activities, build life prospects, as well as be adequate in communication, strive for a high social status.

The structure of the moral sphere of the personality is represented by three factors (components). The leading component of the moral sphere of the personality of high school students is the cognitive component. The distinguished components of the moral sphere of the personality of high school students are interconnected and interdependent.

The cognitive factor represents the orientation of the moral development of high school students both on the priority of material and spiritual values (development, achievement, personal identity). Development of high school students as subjects of self-consciousness (that is, a high level of their self-esteem of claims), a tendency to moralization and conscientiousness are associated with internal conflicts and self-accusation. The difficult state of internal conflict is often accompanied by disinhibition.

The emotional factor characterizes the content of the component as an ambivalent influence of affectiveness on the moral development of high school students. On the one hand, it correlates with the values of creativity, spiritual satisfaction. High emotionality accompanies aesthetic sensibility, femininity, the formation of the subject of communication (high need for communication, status in a group, sociability, and developed communicative qualities). On the other hand, affectiveness can be associated with all sorts of deviations (addiction, suicides, neuroticism and depression).

The behavioral factor can be interpreted as the connection of moral behavior with prestige motivation (self-assertion), its focus on professional life, family and professional spheres

(self-realization) and such personal qualities as will, self-confidence and sociability.

Gymnasium students are more focused on satisfying material needs, they are more satisfied with life, compared with students in schools. This may be due to greater certainty and focus in terms of vocational guidance, since they are studying in specialized classes and are already oriented to the future profession, they also prevail such a value as training and education. The lower rank of these values among schoolchildren is probably due to the fact that they are less likely to feel the stability of their position, many have not yet decided on a professional level. Gymnasium students are more sociable and are configured to interact with other people. The overall activity of the students of the gymnasium is also more pronounced than that of the students of the comprehensive school. The orientation toward social desirability is manifested most of all among students of the comprehensive school, and the norms are more observed by the gymnasium students. Will and delinquency also dominates in comprehensive school students. It is possible that a higher level of moral development of the gymnasium students is also due to the selection in the gymnasium classes and the family situation.

More than half of high school students (the first type) are moral at the level of moral ideas about social desirability, but they are poorly implemented in real behavior. The second type is characterized by the dominance of an emotional attitude towards moral categories, moral assessment and self-esteem, which leads to instability of moral behavior. The smallest group (the third type) is represented by respondents who do not have a gap between consciousness and behavior due to sensitivity to self-control, social control, general activity and sociability.

### IV. CONCLUSION

Correlation and factor analysis confirmed the confirmatory model of the three-component structure of the moral sphere of a high school student's personality (cognitive, emotional, and behavioral) and revealed the leading cognitive component (48.68% of correlations). Based on the factor structure of the personality, the level of moral development of high school students is determined by the positive unity and interaction of all three components. In this case, we have a morally formed personality. The direction of moral development is determined by the dominant component – "morally formed" (14%), "morally informed" (56%), and "morally affective" (30%). With a weak development of one or another component, the level of moral development of a personality decreases, either towards cognitiveness or towards affectiveness. Consequently, most high school students show themselves at the level of "know what is good and what is bad", a third – at the level of "somehow relate to this and experience it" and only a few "know, feel and act morally". The revealed typology of high school students in terms of moral development allows us to state that one typological group of high school students is distinguished by a gap between moral consciousness and behavior, the second – by the instability of moral behavior depending on the modality of emotional assessments and attitudes; the third is characterized by high self-control and sensitivity to social control.

The practical significance of the study lies in the possibility of using the obtained data in work with high

school students, their parents, teachers, and the administration in gymnasiums and comprehensive schools to ensure a differentiated and individual approach in shaping the morality of young people.

Proposals and implementation results. These results can be introduced into the advisory practice of educational psychologists on the moral development of high school students. They are applicable in the development of compulsory and optional courses in the training of psychologists in higher educational institutions.

The results of the study were introduced into the advisory practice of the school psychological service (gymnasium No. 30 and comprehensive school No. 49 of the city of Kurgan); in the course "Development of the moral sphere of the personality of children and adolescents" for graduate psychologists at the Kurgan State University.

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