

Loneliness in Adolescence: a Resource or a Problem?

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the consideration of the problem of loneliness among adolescents. The research results present the characteristics of loneliness as a resource for developing the personality of a teenager. A set of possible problems related to the approach described in the paper is also considered within the framework of studying the social and psychological features of the population living in the Altai region, a bordering territory with Mongolia and Kazakhstan.

1. Introduction

For many centuries, loneliness has been considered one of the most serious problems of mankind. In the psychological and pedagogical literature, the phenomenon of loneliness is interpreted ambiguously. Some authors emphasize the negative aspects associated with the experience of loneliness, a sense of isolation, the risk of developing mental disorders. Others, in turn, see adolescent loneliness as a resource for personal development. The relevance of the study lies in the contradiction.

The loneliness of adolescents is of particular concern, since it is during this age period, according to most foreign and domestic researchers (A. G. Ambrumova, O. E. Kalashnikova, J. V. Wallerstein, G. B. Kelly, V. Kiseleva, I. S. Con, D. Myers, F. Raye, A. A. Rean, E. E. Rogova, R. V. Shmelev and others), that loneliness is experienced more often and is one of the most serious and especially dangerous problems. Loneliness is the cause of disappointment and the collapse of hopes, perceived threat to the formation of interpersonal relations can limit the development of the adolescent and lead to negative socio-psychological phenomena of withdrawal from social activity, manifested in an asocial behavior (alcoholism, drug addiction, etc.), joining criminal communities, suicidal behavior. Statistics show that at present, the number of teen suicides is growing and one of the main factors contributing to this phenomenon is a strong feeling of hopeless loneliness [1, 2].

The greatest development of research in this area was made in the United States, where the main psychological approaches to the study of loneliness appeared and took shape: psychodynamic (G. Zilburg, G. Sullivan, F. Fromm-Reichman), phenomenological (K. Rogers), existential (K. Moustakas), sociological (K. Bowman, D. Riesman, F. Slater); interactionist (R. Weiss), cognitive (E. Peplo, V. Serma, D. Perlman, D. Russell, and others), cognitive-behavioral (D. I. Young), intimate (V. J. Derlega, S. T. Margulis), system-wide (J. Flanders). In Russian psychology, the problem of loneliness is not formed as an independent subject of study. In our country, loneliness is most often seen in the context of the issue of communication and personality development of a teenager (K. A. Abulkhanova-Slavskaya, V. N. Kunitsyna, N. V. Kazarinova, A. A. Bodalev, J. V. Puzanova and others) and family relations (I. Volkova, V. Muzychenko, A. Z. Rubinov, Yu. P. Kosheleva, G. V. Starshenbaum, E. Tokareva, E. S. Yakhontova, O. V. Zaitseva, Yu. A. Malakhova, N. S. Borzilov, a and others) [3, 4].

However, we should note the appearance at the end of the 20th century in the domestic psychology of individual scientific works, publications devoted to the study of loneliness as a socio-psychological phenomenon (S. L. Verbitskaya, N. P. Romanova, V. S. Drobyshevsky, S. G. Trubnikova (Korchagina), and others), as well as focused on cultural-historical forms of loneliness (S. A. Vetrov, Yu. M. Shvalb, O. V. Dancheva, etc.), psychological features of loneliness in adolescence and youth (I. S. Kon, O. B. Dolginova, E. E. Rogova, A. R. Kirpikov, V. Kiseleva, S. V. Malysheva, E. V. Neumoeva, N. V. Peresheina, Z. N. Safina, I. M. Slobodchikov, G. R. Shagivaleeva and others) [5].

Adolescence is a period of development of self-awareness. A teenager analyzes his/her thoughts, feelings, inner world, which requires isolation from society. The formation of the self-image occurs, and the structure of self-relationship arises.

In a number of works it is noted that a teenager experiencing loneliness is characterized by the presence of such features as excessive desire for self-affirmation, monotony in behavior, focus on one's own feelings, low self-esteem. On the other hand, loneliness is a resource for the development of the mechanisms of reflection and self-consciousness of a teenager.

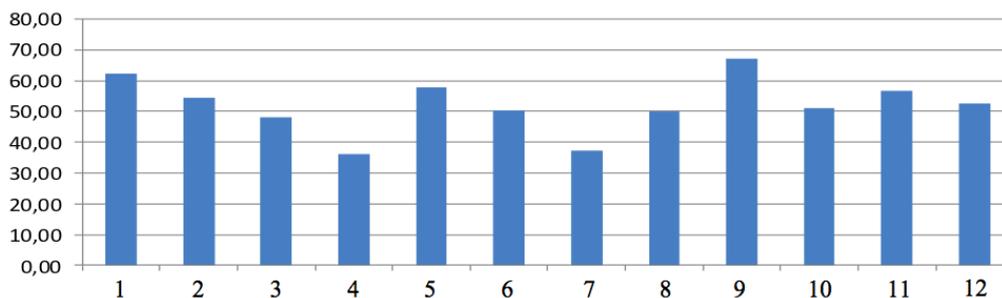
2. Materials and Methods

To implement the research tasks, the following research methods were used: questioning, a differential questionnaire of experiencing loneliness developed by E. N. Osin, D. A. Leontyev, a self-attitude questionnaire by V. V. Stolin and S. R. Pantileev, as well as methods of statistical data processing (averages analysis, Spearman's correlation analysis). A total of 90 adolescents aged 13–15 participated in the study.

3. Results

We will analyze the distribution of averages on the scales of the self-attitude questionnaire developed by V. V. Stolin, S. R. Pantileev (Fig. 1).

The highest values are obtained for such parameters as self-consistency, integral self-relation, self-interest. In modern adolescents, self-perception as a source of their own activity and self-development is stable. In general, the adolescents accept themselves and their characteristics, they are interested in knowing themselves and their personality.



1 – integral scale; 2 – self-esteem scale; 3 – autosympathy scale; 4 – expectation of a positive attitude of others; 5 – self-interest scale; 6 – self-confidence scale; 7 – other relationship expectation scale; 8 – self-acceptance scale; 9 – consistency scale; 10 – self-blame scale; 11 – self-Interest scale; 12 – self-understanding scale.

Fig. 1. Average values on the scales of the self-attitude questionnaire by V. V. Stolin and S. R. Pantileev.

We will analyze the distribution of average values among the adolescents by the method of “Differential Questionnaire of Experiencing Loneliness” developed by E. N. Osin and D. A. Leontyev (Fig. 2).

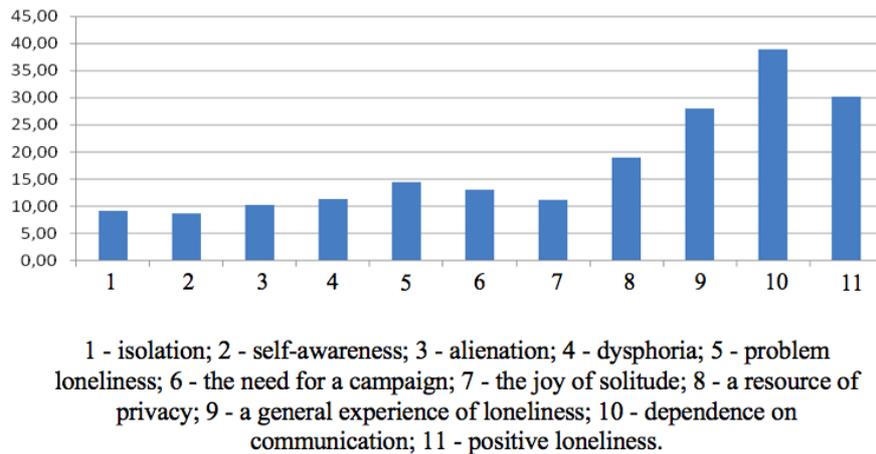


Fig. 2. Averages on the scales of the differential questionnaire of experiencing loneliness by E. N. Osin and D. A. Leontyev.

The analysis of average values showed the highest results on the scales “dependence on communication,” “positive loneliness,” “general experience of loneliness.” We can state that the modern teenagers have two different trends. On the one hand, they are focused on the search for communication, and on the other hand, they are able to perceive loneliness as a positive feeling, to experience positive emotions in solitude, to seek a resource of solitude. Loneliness is perceived as a resource for self-development. These results orient us to the search for relationships between the parameters of loneliness and self-relation.

As a result of the Spearman’s correlation analysis, the following results are obtained. The scale “common experience of loneliness” is negatively interconnected with such parameters as: “problem loneliness” ($r=-0,615$, $p\leq 0,002$), “dependence on communication” ($r=-0,434$, $p\leq 0,044$), “scale of self-understanding” ($r=-0,495$, $p\leq 0,019$). But this scale is positively interconnected with the following scales: “insulation” ($r=0,823$, $p\leq 0,0001$), “self-perception” ($r=0,939$, $p\leq 0,0001$), “alienation” ($r=0,748$, $p\leq 0,0001$).

In adolescence, the general experience of loneliness is associated with a feeling of isolation, alienation, and a low level of self-understanding. The scale “positive loneliness” is negatively interconnected with such parameters as “dysphoria” ($r=-0,555$, $p\leq 0,007$), “dependence on communication” ($r=-0,429$, $p\leq 0,046$), “The scale of expectation of a positive attitude of others” ($r=-0,469$, $p\leq 0,028$). But the indicator is positively interconnected with the scales: “joy of solitude” ($r=0,882$, $p\leq 0,0001$), resource of solitude” ($r=0,867$, $p\leq 0,0001$), “autosympathy” ($r=0,432$, $p\leq 0,045$).

Loneliness is experienced by the adolescents as a positive feeling in the case of searching in solitude for a resource for solitude, the absence of dependence on communication and orientation on the assessments and opinions of other people. The experience of loneliness as a positive feeling is associated with the development of autositymatia, expressed through a positive attitude towards your personality.

The “isolation” scale is negatively interconnected with such parameters as “self-incrimination scale” ($r=-0,498$, $p\leq 0,018$), “problem loneliness” ($r=-0,453$, $p\leq 0,034$), and it is positively interconnected with the scales “self-feeling” ($r=0,792$, $p\leq 0,0001$) and “general experience of loneliness” ($r=0,823$, $p\leq 0,0001$).

Loneliness of adolescents is not regarded as a problem, because it provides resources for feeling oneself, nevertheless it is perceived as a negative feeling. The scale “alienation” is negatively interconnected with such parameters as “problem loneliness” ($r=-0,538$, $p\leq 0,01$), “self-understanding” ($r=-0,627$, $p\leq 0,002$), but it is positively interconnected with the scales “self-perception” ($r=0,61$, $p\leq 0,003$) and “general experience of loneliness” ($r=0,748$, $p\leq 0,0001$).

Alienation in adolescents is not considered as a problem, however, due to the lack of self-understanding of oneself, one’s own peculiarities.

4. Discussion

Features of self-image are fundamental in the development and formation of the personality of an adolescent. By drawing the image of “I”, a teenager predetermines his/her own way of development. The increasing

complexity and deepening of self-knowledge give rise to the formation of a relatively sustainable self-image. Self-cognition is possible due to the mechanisms of reflection, which intensively occur in a teenager due to a situation of loneliness. In this vein, we see the resource potential of the state of loneliness for the development and complication of self-relation in adolescence. At the same time, the general experience of being alone, not used for the purposes of self-development and self-improvement, leads to a feeling of isolation, alienation from other people.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, we present a number of points summarizing the research results. Loneliness is the mental state of a person, which is manifested in the experience of one's separateness, the subjective impossibility or unwillingness to feel an adequate response, acceptance, and recognition of oneself by other people.

Adolescence is a sensitive period for the development of self-esteem. Self-relation is a complex, systemic dynamic formation, acting as a reflexive component of the human relationship system. Self-relation is education which is determined by the nature of human interaction as an open psychological system with the world, expressing the peculiarities of a person's attitude to herself.

A teenager can experience loneliness not only as a negative but also as a positive feeling, a resource for solitude and self-development.

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