

Structural Components of the Self-Concept of Adopted Adolescents

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Abstract

One of the most important distinctive features of adolescence is the formation of the self-concept, which is of crucial importance for all subsequent development and formation of an adolescent as an individual. The study of the self-concept of adolescents from adoptive families is not only relevant, but also socially important, which has not been adequately studied in the scientific literature. The purpose of this paper is to present the revealed features of the structural components of the self-concept (cognitive, emotional, behavioral and evaluative) of adolescents from adoptive families. The leading methods of research are the ascertaining experiment, testing and statistical processing of the results of the study. The experiment involved 26 children aged 11-16 years, brought up in adoptive families. **Results:** It was found that the adolescents from adoptive families are characterized by sufficient self-awareness and ability to self-reflection. It is important for them to feel needed, but at the same time they have difficulties in choosing a model of behavior in an adoptive family environment, and their prospects for improving relations with others are controversial. Teens rate high the ability to communicate with peers and satisfaction with their status among peers. A realistic attitude toward their behavior is typical of most of the subjects, but they often display negativity towards the requirements of adults. Adolescents are uncritical to their health, to the possibilities of realizing their intellectual abilities and changing their character. System-forming indicators of the self-concept of adolescents from adoptive families are the assessment of one's own behavior and intellectual abilities, the ability to communicate, and the popularity among peers. **Relevance of the study** is that its results can be an additional source for specifying and supplementing modern theories and practices on the formation of a positive self-concept of adolescents.

Keywords: Self-concept, Components of the Self-Concept, Self-Image, Self-Ideal, Teenagers, Adoptive Families.

Introduction

The study of the self-concept promotes further, conscious construction of the behavior of the adolescent. Self-concept largely determines the social adaptation of the adolescent's personality,

being also a regulator of his/her behavior and activities. Manifestations of the negative self-concept of a teenager lead to his/her social maladjustment.

Having studied and analyzed various approaches to and theories of the construction of the self-concept, G.N. Svidenskaia notes that there is no single interpretation of the concept of the "self-concept", as well as its structure, factors and mechanisms of development. The author argues that the experience of the individual plays an important role in the formation of the self-concept, in particular its socio-psychological content [1].

E. Burns describes the self-concept as the totality of all representations of the individual about him-/herself, associated with their evaluation and treats it as a set of attitudes directed at oneself. However, since its inception, the self-concept itself becomes an active beginning, an important factor in interpreting experience, and for analyzing the structural components of the self-concept it should be considered as a set of interrelated components: cognitive, evaluative, and behavioral. There are three basic modalities of self-adjustments: a real self, a mirror self, and an ideal self [2].

The works by K. Rogers show that the self-concept is a subjective representation of a person about him-/herself, about his/her interaction with the world, and also the values associated with these concepts. Self-concept is realizable, although it is not necessarily realized and reflects those characteristics that a person perceives as a part of him-/herself, it often reflects how we see ourselves in connection with the various roles we play in life [3].

E. Erickson considers the problem of the self-concept through the prism of ego-identity, understood as arising on the biological basis of a product of a certain culture [4].

Foreign scientists, such as A.M. Wood, J. Maltby, N. Stewart pay special attention to the cognitive and emotional component of the self-concept. Scientists hold the view that the mental state and satisfaction with the life of an individual depends on well-being, psychological self-satisfaction and the presence of positive emotions [5].

The problem of developing self-awareness and self-relationship of adolescents within and outside families was raised by such psychologists as M.Iu. Kondratiev [6], A.M. Prikhozhan [7], G.Kh. Bagandova [8], J.G. Barber & P.H. Delfabbro [9] and others.

Questions relating to the self-concept of adolescents are widely covered in the scientific literature, but little information is available on the study of the self-concept of the adopted children.

It is known that adopted children experience great difficulties in adapting to external conditions. They quite often have a violated socialization in the broadest sense of the word. The main problem of such children is the choice of an adequate form of behavior in unfamiliar conditions.

B. Fish & B. Chapman note that children in the adoptive family are subject to inadequate development, because they had been influenced by the action of the high-risk environment and the process of self-employment before coming to the family [10]. Foster children experience a sense of loss of control over their own lives [11].

Adolescents from the adoptive family do not participate in extra-curricular, creative activities; they often manifest internalization symptoms, including depression, as well as symptoms associated with behavioral disorders. Thus, the lack of involvement of adolescents in school activities has implications on the way they react to their experiences (A.S. Wojciak, L.M. McWey, C.M. Helfrich [12]).

Russian psychologist N.A. Viktorova showed in her studies that the behavior of adolescents from adoptive families is characterized by the emergence of a number of specific features, the most important of which are the desire to communicate with peers and the appearance in the behavior of signs that indicate the desire to assert their independence, personal autonomy. The revealed features make it possible to speak about the onset of the process of a teenager separation from the initial development environment. Standing him-/herself out from the environment, the teenager compares him-/herself with those around him (with adults and peers) and

forms his/her attitude to him-/herself already as a member of society [13].

Within the framework of this paper the results of research of structural components of the self-concept of adolescents from adoptive families are presented.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted on the basis of the State Institution "Center for Assistance in Adoption of Children Deprived of Parental Care, Preparation of and Support to Adoptive Families in Kazan". A total of 26 teenagers aged 11-16 years took part in the study.

The study of the structural components of the self-concept of adolescents from adoptive families was carried out using the following methods:

- The Interpersonal Diagnosis of Personality (T. Leary), aimed at investigating the subject's conception of him-/herself and the ideal "self" and the predominant type of relationship to people – the study of the cognitive component.
- "Who I am" test (M. Kuhn and T. McPartland, modif. by T.V. Rumiantseva), which allows studying the content characteristics of a person's identity – a cognitive component.
- A "self-concept" scale (E. Pearce, D. Harris), assessing the level and nature of the development of the self-concept in various subscales - emotional and behavioral components.
- The Dembo-Rubinstein method modified by A.M. Prikhozhan, based on the direct evaluation (scaling) by adolescents of a number of personal qualities, such as health, intelligence, character, etc. - an evaluation component.

Results and Discussions

Figure 1 shows the results of diagnosing the adolescents from adoptive families using "The Interpersonal Diagnosis of Personality" (T. Leary).

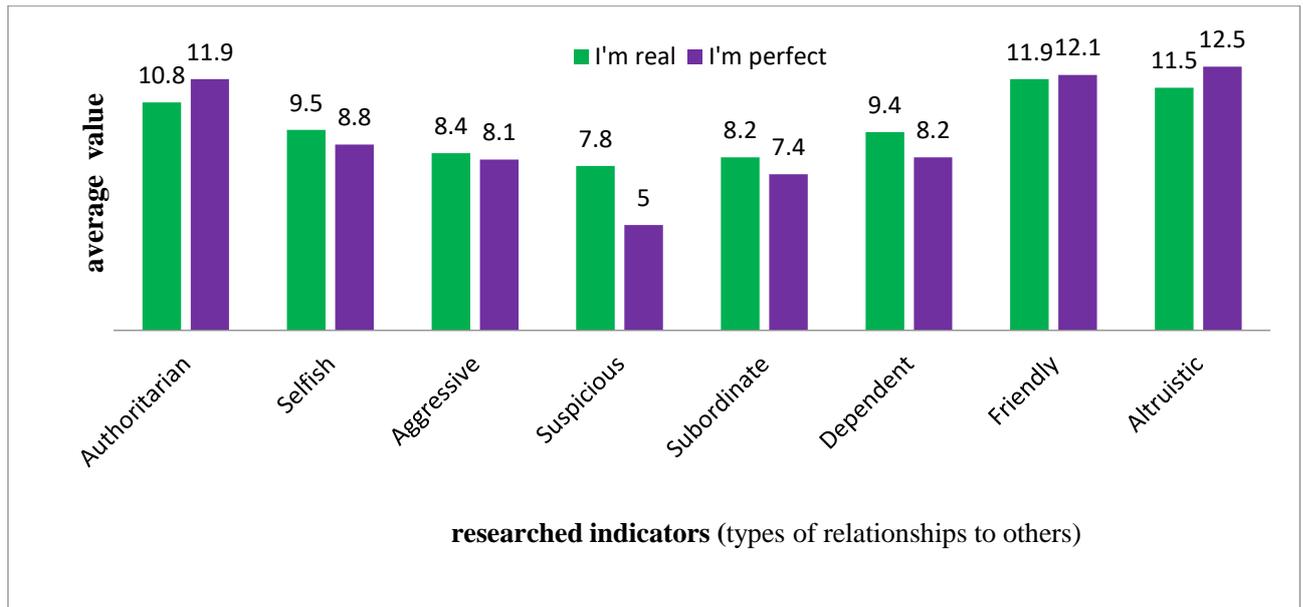


Fig. 1. Comparative Characteristics of the Indicators of Mean Values of the Images of Real Self and Ideal Self of the Teenagers Brought up in Adoptive Families (in Points)

Types of attitudes to others such as "Authoritarian", "Selfish", "Dependent", "Friendly" and "Altruistic" in the image of a real self are extreme in terms of severity (range from 9 to 12 points).

In general, the teenagers from adoptive families show contradictory attitude to their environment with the prevalence of conformal attitudes, congruence in contact with others, on the one hand, and upholding their own point of view, a tendency toward leadership and domination, on the other.

Adolescents from adoptive families are characterized by a desire to help and compassion for everyone, by obsessional help and excessive activity towards others. They want to be "good" for everyone without regard to the situation, and focus on social approval. They are obedient, timid, do not show active resistance and try to act in the same way as the people around them. At the same time, they are vigorous, dominant, require respect for themselves, often show selfish traits, and are also competitive.

In our opinion, this is due to the fact that teenagers, former inmates of orphanages, do not know how to behave in new situations, what kind of behavior to choose, so they wait for help, advice and guidance, and adopt behavior from others.

Analyzing the results of the ideal self on the scales "Friendly" (12.1 points) and "Altruistic" (12.5 points), we can state that the behavior of adolescents on these types of relationships is already extreme and

they even want to be more friendly and altruistic. They strive for behavior that already borders on pathology. The subjects also tend to dominate, lead, with a penchant for an authoritarian tyrannical type (11.9 points for the ideal self on the scale "Authoritarian").

In terms of an ideal self the values of other indicators in the adopted adolescents are lower than those for the self-image.

The greatest discrepancy between the two modalities of self-adjustments was revealed on the scale "Suspicious" (by 2.8 points), which indicates the desire of the adolescents to be less judgmental of all social phenomena and surrounding people, and, above all, of his/her adoptive parents. At the same time, adolescents tend to be more confident in themselves (the "Dependent" scale), emotionally restrained, and openly express their own opinion (the "Subordinate" scale).

The difference between real self and ideal self in all scales is quite small, which indicates that the subjects set themselves more realistic goals, accept themselves as they are and are undisposed to serious changes.

Figure 2 shows the results of the analysis of the severity of different identity components of the adolescents from adoptive families (according to the "Who I am" test by M. Kun and T. McPartland, modified by T.V. Rumiantseva).

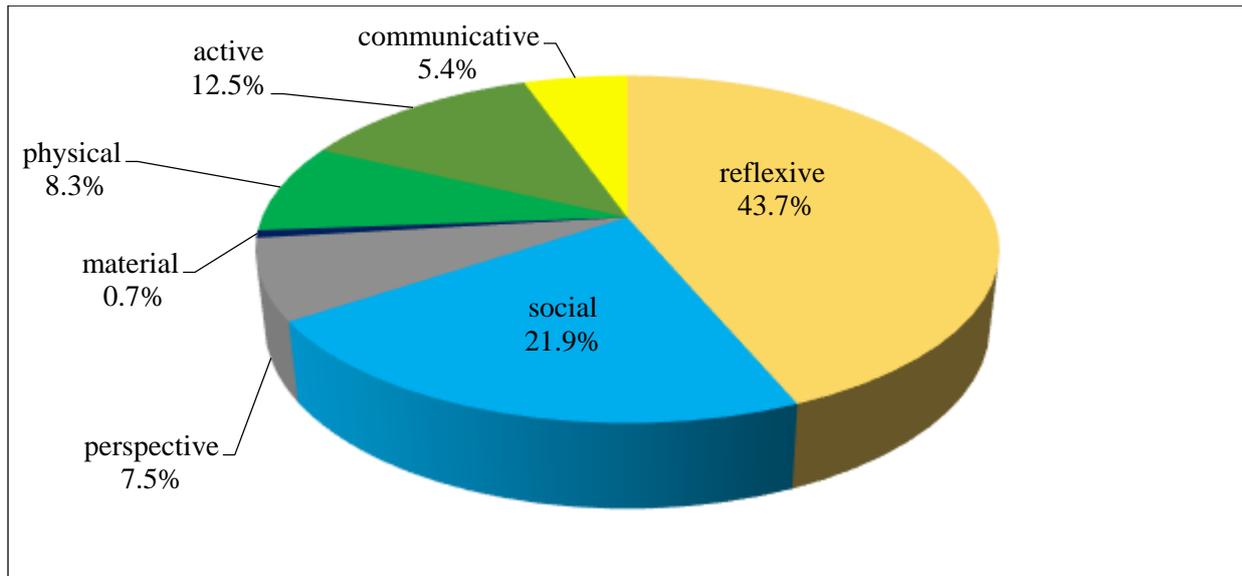


Fig. 2. Analysis of Identification Characteristics of the Adolescents from Adoptive Families (%)

The largest number of responses of adolescents correspond to such an identification characteristic as "Reflexive Self" (43.7%), which includes the following components: personal identity ("person" - 66%), personal traits ("good" - 38%), character traits ("love laughing / joking" - 54%), description of individual style of behavior, personal characteristics. Thus, children focus their attention on themselves, on their inner world, on their "self-image".

Quite often were the answers corresponding to the "Social Self" ("school boy/school girl" - 69%, "son/daughter" - 46%, "boy/girl" - 38%, "friend/girlfriend" - 31%).

Indicators on the characteristics of "Perspective Self" and "Material Self" make it possible to make the assumption that teenagers basically do not talk about further prospects, perhaps because they are satisfied with everything at the moment and that's enough for them. Teenagers very rarely describe their property, practically give no assessment of their own material status. We believe that children from

adoptive families do not have a formed concept of "my own".

Adolescents have a positive sexual identity. Their psychosexual sphere in general and the comparison of oneself with members of their gender in particular are an important and accepted internal theme of self-awareness.

Based on the psycholinguistic aspect of identity, it was revealed that nouns predominate in the self-description of adolescents (40.8%), which indicates the need of subjects for definiteness, constancy. A third of the subjects uses adjectives (33.2%) in their self-descriptions, which indicates a certain demonstrativeness and emotionality of adolescents. Insufficient use of verbs in self-description (26%) emphasizes lack of self-confidence, underestimation of their effectiveness.

Figure 3 shows the results of the study of the emotional component on the "self-concept" scales (E. Piers, D. Harris).

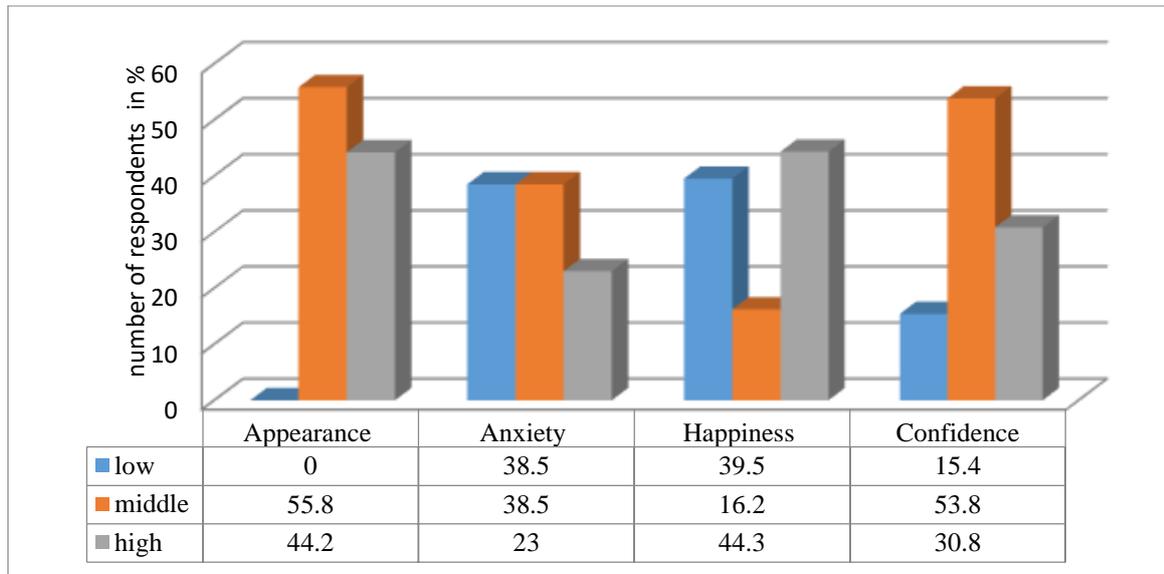


Fig. 3. Indicators of the Emotional Component of the Self-Concept (in %)

Self-concept of adopted adolescents is characterized by a positive evaluation in terms of emotional well-being. Thus, only 23% of respondents have an anxious feeling. Adolescents are satisfied with their appearance, have realistic self-esteem and are self-

confident. But at the same time, many of them (39.5%) feel dissatisfaction with the life situation. The behavioral component of the self-concept in adopted adolescents is considered in Figure 4.

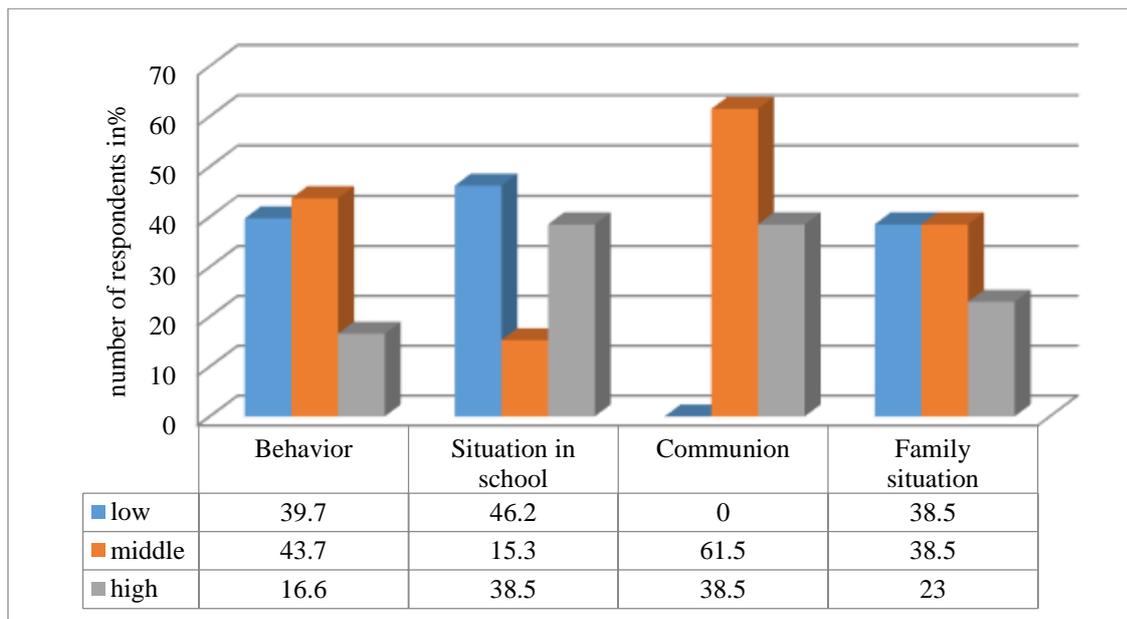


Fig. 4. Indicators of the Behavioral Component of the Self-Concept (in %)

Realistic attitude toward one's behavior is common to most of the subjects. At the same time, the other half of the subjects show a negativistic attitude to the requirements of adults, as well as worries related to the need to fulfill the requirements of adults as "small children". And only 15.3% of adolescents assess their behavior as meeting the requirements of adults.

Half of the participants from the total number of respondents assesses the school situation as unfavorable, which causes them dislike and

boredom, the other half - perceives the school situation either positively or neutrally.

At the same time, most of the adopted teenagers rate high their skills in communicating with their peers and are satisfied with their position among their peers.

The teenagers, in general, are satisfied with the situation in their adoptive families. However, 38.5% of the subjects do not like their position in the family, which can be considered as a risk factor.

The results of diagnosing adolescents by the Dembo-Rubinstein method, modified by A.M. Prikhozhan

(an evaluation component of the self-concept) are shown in Figure 5.

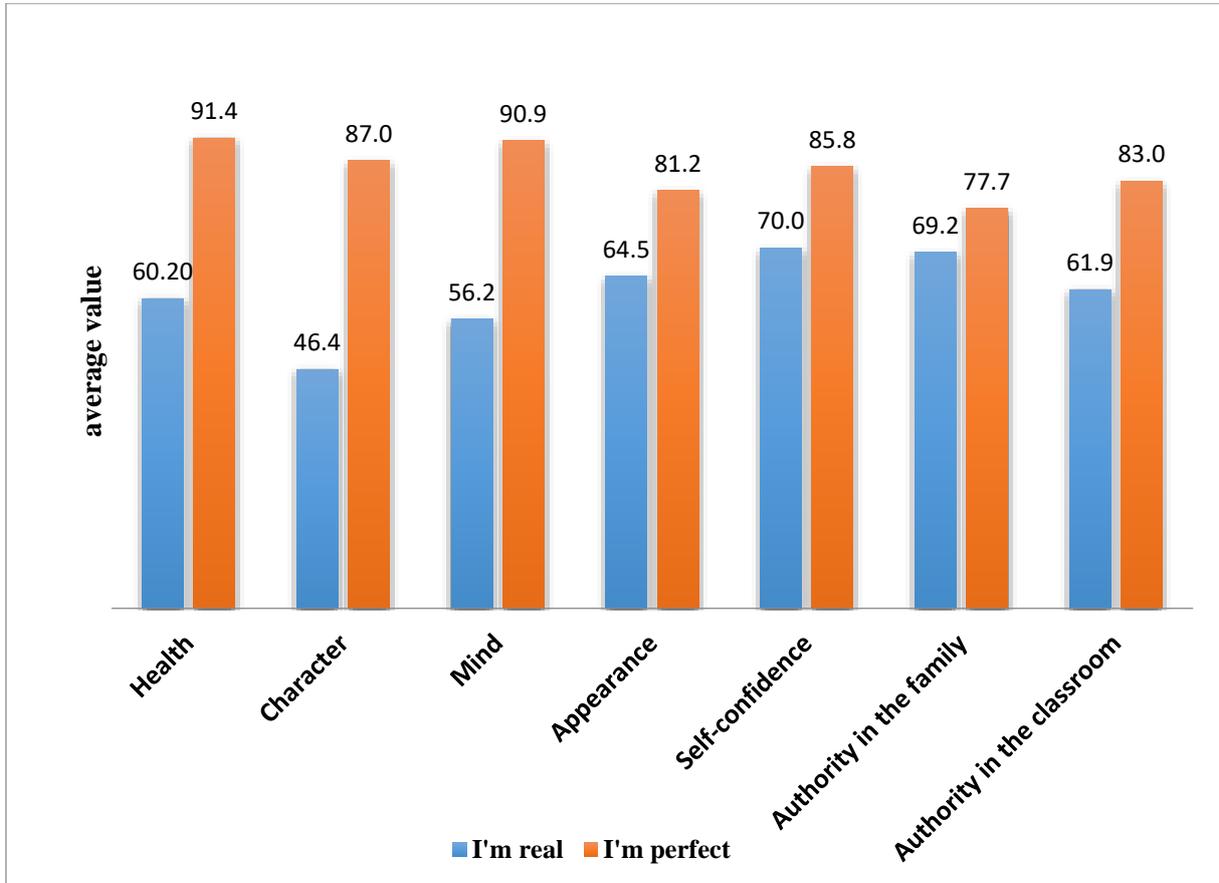


Fig. 5. The Value of the Average Indicators for the Sub-Methods of the Dembo-Rubinstein Methodology (in points)

Adolescents from adoptive family are characterized by realistic (adequate) self-esteem (highly appreciate their attractiveness, self-confidence, as well as their authority among peers and in the adoptive family). A comparatively high level of claims of adolescents from adoptive families indicates their optimal representation of their abilities, which is an important factor in personal development. At the same time, this category of children is characterized by uncritical attitude towards the state of their health

and the opportunities for realizing their intellectual abilities. The greatest discrepancy (over 23 points) on the scales "Health", "Character", "Mental abilities" indicates a conflict between what the teenager strives for and what he thinks possible for himself. With the help of correlation analysis, the structure of the interrelations of the investigated indicators of the self-concept is determined. Figure 6 shows highly significant strong correlation links, with $p \leq 0.01$.

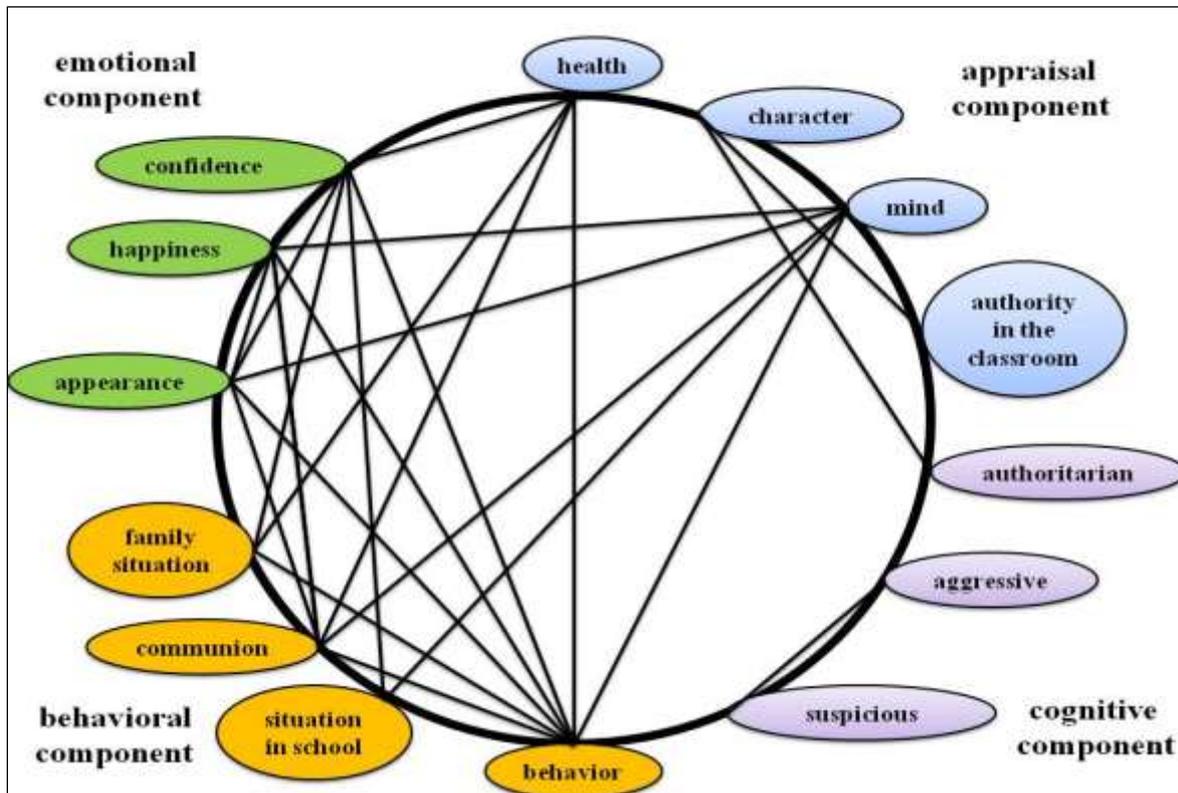


Fig. 6. Correlation Ring of Indicators of Components of the I-concept of Adolescents from the Foster Family

Among the system-forming indicators of the self-concept of adolescents from adoptive families are assessments of their own behavior, communication and popularity among peers, and intellectual abilities.

Summary

The adopted adolescents are characterized by sufficient self-awareness, the ability to self-reflection, and developed self-understanding. They also experience a number of difficulties, namely:

- 1) The difficulty in choosing a model of behavior, especially in their adoptive family, since they do not know how family relations should be built;
- 2) There is an excessive sensitivity to evaluation by others; they feel important to pay attention to themselves, to be needed. Therefore, there is an aspiration either to be “better” for society, to be ready to sacrifice their interests for the sake of others, or to seek power and authority among others;
- 3) With the importance of persistence and stability for adolescents, they rarely think about prospects and practically do not talk about the future;
- 4) About half of the subjects believe that their behavior does not correspond to the norm and they often display a negative attitude towards the requirements of adults, and also assess the school situation as unfavorable;

5) Many of them (38.5%) feel dissatisfaction with the life situation and their situation in the adoptive family;

6) An unrealistic attitude towards their health and the opportunities for realizing their intellectual abilities, as well as for changing their character.

Among the reserves for the development of a positive self-concept of the adopted adolescents are:

- 1) High assessment of teenagers’ skills in communicating with peers and satisfaction with their position among peers, which is confirmed by the data of other studies (N.A. Vikdorova);
- 2) Positive assessment of their emotional well-being;
- 3) Consideration of system-forming indicators of the self-concept (assessment of one's own behavior and intellectual abilities, ability to communicate with and popularity among peers).

Conclusion

The study of the self-concept of adolescents from adoptive families acquires not only theoretical and practical significance, but also social significance. In recent years, adoptive families in our country have increasingly become an alternative to institutional education in public institutions for orphans and children left without parental care.

Taking into account the peculiarities of the structure of the self-concept of adolescents from the foster

family, it is possible to define new directions of psychological and pedagogical approaches in resolving questions on the formation of their positive self-concept.

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