

V International Forum on Teacher Education
Part III: Educational Psychology

Interrelation between Character Traits and Coping Behavior in Adolescence

Ildar R. Abitov^{a*}, Marina O. Mikhailova (a), Inna M. Gorodetskaya (b)

^a*Kazan Federal University, 420008, Kazan (Russia), 18 Kremlyovskaya street*

^b*Kazan National Research Technological University, 420015, Kazan (Russia), 68 Karl Marx street*

Abstract

The article describes intercorrelations between character traits of adolescents and their stress coping strategies. The authors indicate that many researchers have studied correlations between coping behavior and different personality characteristics such as anxiety, creativity, the locus of control, self-regulatory function, self-efficacy, academic achievement, etc. However, up to the present, there have been no researches of intercorrelation between coping behavior and character peculiarities in adolescence when these psychological characteristics are being dynamically developed. The study revealed that accentuations of character in adolescence have three types of intercorrelations with stress coping strategies: compensatory, decompensatory and trait-related, incorporated into the corresponding character accentuation.

Keywords: character; accentuation of character; coping strategy; coping behavior; adolescence.

© 2019 Ildar R. Abitov, Marina O. Mikhailova, Inna M. Gorodetskaya

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Published by Kazan federal university and peer-reviewed under responsibility of IFTE-2019 (V International Forum on Teacher Education)

* Corresponding author. Tel.: + 79033444783; e-mail address: ildar-abitov@yandex.ru

Introduction

Adolescent crisis is one of the most acute age crises during the lifetime. Some authors point out that it is especially important for character and personality development. Lichko (1985) notes that character development and formation of aptitudes, interests, and bents occur during this period. Karabanova (2005) indicates that teenagers develop their life philosophy and system of values, therefore this age is very significant for the individual identity. Shapovalenko (2005) remarks that special attention should be paid to the fact that problem of coping strategies and techniques are developed in the adolescence. Two main strategies may be distinguished from the various ways of behaving in a difficult situation: constructive and nonconstructive. Constructive strategies aim at the functional transformation of the situation, and as a result of this, a person feels that his capabilities have strengthened. Shapovalenko (2005) gives the following examples of such behaviors: achieving the goal using one's own resources, asking for help, thinking over the situation and the ways to resolve it, changing the vision of the situation, changing oneself, changing personal attitudes. Nonconstructive ways are psychological defense mechanisms, impulsive actions and aggressive response. Thus, the study of coping behaviors of teenagers in difficult situations and their interrelations with various personality traits are of great importance.

Krjukova, Sergienko, and Vetrova (2010) found intercorrelation between problem coping behaviors and a variety of psychological characteristics, such as trait and state anxiety, internality/externality, social intelligence and self-efficacy, talent, creativity, and experience-based loneliness. However, the literature review revealed no studies of correlations between coping behavior (ways of overcoming difficulties) of teenagers and their character traits.

Purpose and objectives of the study

Thus, many scholars point out that adolescence is a very important period for stress coping strategies formation and development of character traits. Mendeleovich (2001) considers that the character is a set of behavioral and emotional stereotypes developed during lifetime, as well as thinking stereotypes. Stress coping strategies are by nature of behavioral and emotional responses and cognitive "techniques" aimed at overcoming difficult situations. It should be noted though that there are no studies of correlations between character traits and coping behavior in adolescence.

The main tasks of the study:

- To find out if there are any interconnections between accentuations of character and coping behavior in adolescence;
- To analyze interconnections between accentuations of character and coping behavior in adolescence;
- To determine the field of psychological work with teenagers based on the research findings.

The purpose of the study is to reveal correlations between character traits and coping behavior in adolescence. The hypothesis of the study is the assumption that preference of certain coping strategies by teenagers is related to their character traits.

Literature review

Krjukova (2010) refers to a joint study of scholars from Germany and St. Petersburg (Russia) that showed that there are significant differences only between the age of adolescents and their perception of

life situations as difficult, for example, only their rueful feelings about academic achievements increase with the age. Another study revealed that while teenagers tend to use functional coping more rarely and emotional coping more often. There are also researches that indicate that younger children use more behavioral and problem-focus strategies and teenagers use emotion-focus and cognitive strategies. The author concludes that during childhood a person acquires direct and immediate coping style through learning and observation, while less evident and more complicated coping methods may be internalized in adolescence due to development of meta-cognitive self-regulation skills (Krjukova, 2010). The author distinguishes several coping styles of teenagers and investigates how each style correlates with different variables. Krjukova (2010) indicates that productive coping style correlates with self-efficacy, high self-esteem, creativity, optimism and trait anxiety, and state anxiety negatively contributes to this coping style. Social coping style of adolescents positively correlates with academic achievement, neuroticism, self-efficacy, extraversion, creativity parameter (development) and trait anxiety and negatively correlates with intellect coefficient, low self-esteem, scientific achievements (gifted adolescents). Unproductive coping of teenagers positively correlates with neuroticism, trait anxiety, creativity parameter (fluency), low self-esteem, extraversion, academic achievement, and pessimism. Krjukova (2010) considers that teenagers have a less expressed and more contradictory interaction between personal determinants and coping behavior of teenagers than adults. This may be the case for the fact that in adolescence personal disposition is in the stage of its development (Bjorklund & Pellegrini, 2002).

Sergienko, Vilenskaya, & Kovaleva (2011) noted that a longitudinal study showed the relative stability of coping behavior of adolescents aged 14 to 18 years. They named such productive and social strategies as “problem-solving”, “work, achievement”, “friends”, “positive focus”, “outdoor activities”, “diversion of mind”. The least used are such non-productive strategies as “non-coping”, “discharge”, “mutual actions”, as well as “professional aid”. The authors point out that boys have a larger variability of coping styles than girls; girls have more stable coping-styles. Based on the correlational analysis, Sergienko Vilenskaya, & Kovaleva (2011) note that girls (especially in early youth) are less flexible in choosing problem-solving strategies. They have considerably fewer correlations between components of self-regulation: coping behavior, behavioral control, and psychological defense. 14-year-old boys and girls both have 30 correlations between coping-strategies and behavioral control, but by 18 years girls show only 7 correlations opposed to 45 in the boys’ sample group. Boys have more negative intercorrelations between coping strategies and behavioral control components. Negative correlations are mostly revealed with non-productive coping strategies. In the female group positive correlations prevail between behavioral control scales, on the one hand, and productive and social coping strategies, on the other hand. Correlations between coping strategies and psychological defense mechanisms are predominantly positive. The authors suppose that these findings may point at the fact that constellations of problem coping strategies are being formed in adolescence, and this process goes earlier for girls. The researchers conclude that development of coping styles in adolescence occurs due to the more frequent use of productive and social coping strategies and less frequent addressing to non-productive coping strategies. Thus, the quality and quantity of correlations between coping strategies and behavioral control scale alter. Boys have more various coping styles than girls. General “growth” in the coping style dynamics occurs during the period when young people finish high school and choose their future professions (Sergienko, Vilenskaya, Kovaleva, 2011).

Vetrova (2011) points that coping behavior in adolescence and youth is individually specific depending on the respondents’ age and gender, coping behavior mainly correlates with emotional

regulation, and psychological defense is interconnected with volitional control. The author notes that male groups show more variability between behavioral control parameters, coping strategies, and psychological defenses. Vetrova considers that the process of formation of coping behavior styles in adolescence and early youth is based on the earlier adaptive mechanisms such as behavioral control and psychological defense (Vetrova, 2011).

Ilukhin (2011) carried out the study among students where he investigated the development of coping strategies and their use during intellectual tests. He concludes that the development of coping strategies of students means an increase in the quality of coping control, emergence of new strategies and their sophistication. While developing students reveal more coping control, i.e. less maladaptive coping strategies and restructuring of social support (Ilukhin, 2011).

Methodology

To investigate character traits peculiarities we chose “Character traits inventory” by Manolova (2009). It consists of 80 questions and four options of answer: 1 – absolutely disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – agree, 4 – absolutely agree. Coping behavior was studied using the “Adolescent Coping Scale” adapted by Krjukova (2010). It contains 79 statements describing human behavior in difficult situations. Each statement has 5 degrees of agreement from 1 – “I never behave like this, it is unacceptable” to 5 – “very often”. No 80 is an open question and presents the following instruction: “List your other behaviors to overcome your anxiety or problem that disturbs you now most of all”.

Software SPSS 12.0 (Russian version) was applied to process the acquired data. Nonparametric methods were used: the Mann–Whitney U-test and the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient.

46 adolescents (23 male and 23 female) took part in the empiric research. They are 8th-9th grade students of the Municipal budgetary general education institution in Kazan, Russia. The age range is 14-15 years old.

Results

The empiric study showed intercorrelations between some accentuations of the character of teenagers and some stress coping strategies. The excitable type of accentuation is directly correlated to the parameters of the coping strategy “belonging” ($r=0,294$; $p=0,048$). Respondents with such trait as expressiveness; high amplitude, intensity and velocity of emotional response; tendency towards the physical ventilation; high rate and high intensity of motor response and communicative behavior; low emotional self-control; high self-esteem and high susceptibility to suggestion in stressful situations show interest to other people's opinions about them, and act to get other people's approval. This correlation may be determined by high importance of contacts and relations with significant others (first of all, referent group of peers) for teenagers with “excitable” traits.

An inverse correlation was found between the demonstrative accentuation and the parameters of the coping strategies “ignore the problem” ($r = - 0,424$; $p=0,003$) and “not coping” ($r = - 0,302$; $p=0,042$). The more expressed such traits as egocentrism, the trend to manipulative behavior, plasticity, observation skills in communication, leadership, high motor activity are, the more rarely they use such stress coping techniques as self-severeness, self-criticism and intentional denial of the problem. Besides this finding indicates that the more expressed demonstrative de-accentuation is, the more frequently teenagers use the described behaviors in stressful situations. These correlations may be explained by the fact that teenagers with demonstrative de-accentuation have low egocentrism (possibly ignoring one's own interests), high

behavioral and emotional rigidity, and low motion behavior dynamics (tardiness, fixedness, constrained movements). In this case, rigidity and low egocentrism may cause ignoring and active and constructive stress coping strategies and their maldevelopment. As a result, in stressful situations, these respondents intentionally deny the problem or blame themselves without any attempts to resolve the problem. The found correlation may lead to a “vicious circle” when character traits prevent from developing and using constructive stress coping strategies and vice versa, non-constructive strategies strengthen such character traits as rigidity and inability to protect one’s own interests and be more active. Therefore, these character traits and described coping strategies may result in psychotherapy with teenagers of this type.

Direct correlations were found between the anxious and dysthymic character accentuations with the parameters of the coping strategy “not coping” (anxious type - $r=0,34$; $p=0,021$; dysthymic type - $r=0,361$; $p=0,014$). The more pronounced such character traits as limiting the range of social contacts, anxiety, responsibility, suspicion, tendency to long-term rueful feelings, impulsiveness, propensity for panic reactions in situations of uncertainty, the more often they refuse to take any actions to resolve a problem, “gain from illness”, try to solve a problem together with others or attend various meetings. Joint actions can be a way to compensate for the lack of activity of these individuals and the lack of flexibility of their own behavioral programs. We consider that it may be helpful to use the methods of psychological training groups working with adolescents of an anxious and dysthymic types.

Inverse correlation was revealed between the emotive character accentuation and the “physical recreation” coping strategy parameters ($r= - 0,293$; $p=0,048$). The more such traits as reflexivity, compassion, delicacy, burning sense of justice, emotional sensitivity are expressed in the respondents, the less often they use keeping fit and sports to overcome a stressful situation. Apparently, this interrelation is caused by preferences and interests of teenagers with such character traits. They primarily focus on intellectual and emotional contacts. Physical recreation and sports are not in their interest area.

The cyclothymic type of character accentuation is directly correlated with the coping strategy “seek relaxing diversions” ($r=0,471$; $p=0,001$). The more adolescents experience the rise and fall phases in activities, the more often they use various forms of activity, such as reading books, watching TV, and entertainment with friends to overcome stressful situations. The use of this stress coping strategy, in our opinion, is a way to compensate for the passivity and emotional decline that teenagers with this type of character feel during the “dysthymic phases”.

Direct correlation was revealed between the exalted character accentuation and the parameters of the coping strategies “social action” ($r=0,366$; $p=0,012$) and “seek relaxing diversions” ($r=0,041$; $p=0,02$). The stronger such traits as emotional states and mood cycling, high intensity of emotions, instability of life tactics and principles, the more often teenagers use various forms of relaxing activity to overcoming stressful situations: watching TV, reading books, entertainment with friends, as well as some joint actions with other people aimed at solving a problem. These behaviors seem to allow compensating for the influence of prominent emotional instability and variability in behavioral strategies of such teenagers by temporarily distracting from the problem.

Discussions

The empiric findings make it possible to make the following conclusions. There are intercorrelations between some character accentuation types and stress coping strategies of adolescents. These intercorrelations are of three types: compensatory, decompensatory and trait-related, incorporated into the corresponding character accentuation. Compensatory correlations are between the cyclothymic and

exalted character accentuation types and the coping strategy “seek relaxing diversions”; and between exalted, anxious and dysthymic character accentuations with the coping strategy “social action”. These stress coping strategies make it possible for teenagers in stressful situations to compensate for the influence of such traits as propensity to experience periods of low mood and mood swings, behavioral changeableness or rigidity of behavior. Decompensatory correlations are between the dysthymic and anxious character accentuations and the coping strategy “not coping”, as well as between the demonstrative character accentuation and the coping strategies “not coping” and “ignore the problem”. The use of these strategies may cause an increase in negative feelings and reinforce the disharmonious character traits. These coping strategies may become the target for psychotherapeutic work with adolescents with expressed dysthymic and anxious character accentuations and demonstrative character de-accentuation.

Conclusion

We consider a direct intercorrelation between the excitable type of accentuation and the coping strategy “belonging” and an inverse intercorrelation between emotive accentuation and the coping strategy “physical recreation” to be determined by such “excitable” traits as high importance of contacts and relations with the referent group, and such emotive characteristics as emotional sensitivity and reflexivity.

Acknowledgment

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

References

- Bjorklund, D. F., & Pellegrini, A. D. (2002). *The origins of human nature: Evolutionary developmental psychology*. American Psychological Association.
- Ilukhin, G. A. (2011). *Razvitiye koping-strategiiu studentov v situatsiyakh intellektualnykh ispytaniy* [Development of coping strategies of students in the intellectual test situations]. (Doctoral dissertation, Tambov State University, Tambov, Russia). Retrieved from <https://www.dissercat.com/content/razvitie-koping-strategii-u-studentov-v-situatsiyakh-intellektualnykh-ispytaniy/read>
- Karabanova, O.A. (2005). *Psikhologiya razvitiya* [Developmental psychology]. Moscow: Iris-Press.
- Krjukova, T. L. (2010). *Psikhologiya sovladaniys v raznyye periody zhizni* [Coping psychology in different life periods]. Kostroma: KSU.
- Lichko, A. E. (1985). *Podrozkovaya psikhiatriya* [Adolescent psychiatry]. Leningrad: Medicina.
- Manolova, O. N. (2009). Individualnyi kharakter: aktsentuatсии i deaktsentuatсии chert [Individual character: accentuations and de-accentuation of character traits]. *Vestnik SaGa, Series 'Psychology'*, 150-164.
- Mendelevich, V. D. (2001). *Klinicheskaya i meditsinskaya psikhologiya: prakticheskoye rukovodstvo* [Clinical and medical psychology: Practical guide]. Moscow: MEDPress.
- Sergienko, E. A., Vilenskaya, G. A., & Kovaleva, Y. V. (2011). *Kontrol povedeniya kak regulyatsiya* [Behavioral control as an actor's regulation]. Moscow: Institute of Psychology of the Russian Academy of Science.
- Shapovalenko, I. V. (2005). *Psikhologiya razvitiya* [Developmental psychology]. Moscow: Gardariki.
- Vetrova, I. I. (2011). *Razvitiye kontrolya povedeniya, sovladaniya i psikhologicheskikh zashchit v*

podrozkovom vozraste [Development of behavioral control, coping and psychological defenses in adolescence]. (Doctoral dissertation, Russian Academic of Science, Moscow, Russia). Retrieved from <https://www.dissercat.com/content/razvitie-kontrolya-povedeniya-sovladaniya-i-psikhologicheskikh-zashchit-v-podrozkovom-vozra/read>