

VII International Forum on Teacher Education

## Moral self-determination and legal representations of adolescents

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### Abstract

The paper presents the results of a study of the relationship between moral self-determination and legal representations among adolescents. The study used the method of researching moral self-determination by A.B. Kupreychenko, A.E. Vorobieva, the method of researching legal representations of L.A. Yasyukova. A total of 92 adolescents, aged 15-16, took part in the study. The carried out correlation analysis using the coefficient of rank correlation r-Spearman made it possible to reveal statistically significant relationships between ideas about morality, moral strategies, moral orientations and legal ideas of adolescents ( $p < 0.05$ ). The results obtained indicate the following. The adolescents' representations about the natural origin of morality are associated with the representations that it is permissible for a person in business to circumvent the prescribed rules and laws. With the representations formed among adolescents about the importance of morality for society, there is an awareness of the need for legal regulation in the business sphere and the desire to comply with legal norms and laws in the field of business relations. The more the adolescents' strategy of compulsory observance of moral norms is expressed, the worse the need for legal regulation in the civil sphere is realized. The more the adolescent's moral strategy of reciprocity is expressed, the more he is focused on adhering to the norms of behavior in business relations. The more expressed in adolescents an orientation toward personal needs rather than public ones, the more clearly their social infantilism and civic passivity are manifested, and the worse the need for legal regulation of social relations is realized. The results of empirical research confirm the hypothesis put forward about the connection between moral self-determination and legal representations in adolescents. The data obtained indicate the possibility of studying the morality of the individual as the basis for the development of legal consciousness in adolescence. The research results can serve as a basis for the development of programs for the prevention of deviant behavior in adolescents.

*Keywords:* morality, moral self-determination, legal representation, adolescents.

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Published by Kazan federal university and peer-reviewed under responsibility of IFTE-2021 (VII International Forum on Teacher Education)

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## **Introduction**

To strengthen modern Russia in the international political arena, it is necessary to develop a legal culture and legal consciousness of the population. Unfortunately, the political, economic, social changes that have taken place in Russia over the past decades are leading to a crisis and a change in socio-normative systems. The established values and norms of morality have been destroyed in Russian society. In such a society where morality and ethics are degrading, it is difficult for the young generation to make their moral choice.

Scientists note that personal success is most important for adolescents, while concern for the well-being of others is not important (Molchanov, 2005). The categories of morality, good and evil disappear from their consciousness. At the same time, the process of developing morality and moral values during adolescence not only helps to join the life of society, but also maintains optimal health. Moral improvement of a teenager is necessary for his correct and healthy development. Immoral actions distort the personality, make it empty, devoid of content (Zhuravlev & Yurievich, 2012). In addition, a low level of moral development can lead to illegal actions and cause destructive behavior.

The increased number of crimes committed by adolescents testifies, firstly, to low moral development, and, as a consequence, to low development of legal awareness. Secondly, the problem of juvenile delinquency indicates the need to study the characteristics of the formation of morality and legal consciousness in adolescence. In this regard, it seems promising to study the role of moral self-determination in the formation of legal consciousness in adolescence. The phenomenon of moral self-determination of a person is studied most holistically and systematically in Russian psychology within the framework of the subjective approach. Moral self-determination includes the search for moral ideals, the creation of moral codes, the resolution of moral and spiritual contradictions, crises, the choice of behavior and forms of social activity (Kupreychenko & Vorobyova, 2013). Self-determination is part of the process of becoming a adolescent's personality.

Thus, an important fundamental task is to study the problem of the relationship between morality and legal consciousness of adolescents. The study of the phenomenon of moral self-determination makes it possible to move from the study of individual moral characteristics to a comprehensive analysis of the content of the adolescent's moral consciousness.

Legal consciousness is viewed as a system of ideas, which are based on an understanding of the role of law, legal norms in regulating relations between members of society, between a person and the state, under the influence of which attitudes towards these norms are formed (Yasyukova, 2000, 2008).

The proposed model of legal consciousness includes the attitude not only to legal regulation, but also to various mentality, beliefs and traditions. Legal consciousness is an integral indicator of the civic maturity of a person who is aware of the possibilities of legal regulation and is active in relation to legal reality (Yasyukova, 2008). Legal consciousness regulates human behavior in a legally significant situation and is a source of legal activity. The legal consciousness of an individual reflects legal reality in the form of legal knowledge and skills, evaluative attitudes to law and the practice of its application, value orientations and legal attitudes that regulate human behavior. Lawful and deviant behavior is the result of a certain set of properties and characteristics of legal consciousness (Ratinov & Efremova, 1988).

Despite the relevance of the study of the legal consciousness of adolescents, there are currently not enough scientific works devoted to this problem in psychology and related disciplines. The planned research is intended to fill this scientific gap. The obtained results of the study will become the basis for the preparation and implementation of a set of measures for the development of morality and legal consciousness of adolescents. The results will be useful in the work on the prevention of deviant behavior of adolescents in the educational and upbringing processes, to stimulate the prosocial behavior of adolescents, the formation of moral ideals, civic responsibility, moral activity, legal consciousness. Understanding the connection between morality and legal consciousness, the laws governing the formation of morality will make it possible to develop precise effective programs to combat various forms of destructive behavior of the younger generation.

### **Purpose and objectives of the study**

The aim of the project is to study the relationship between moral self-determination and legal ideas of adolescents.

The theoretical hypothesis of the study consists in the assumption that the moral self-determination of the individual plays an essential role in the formation of legal representations in adolescence.

Empirical research hypothesis: there is a relationship between moral self-determination and legal representations of adolescents.

To achieve the goal of the project, the following tasks have been set:

1. Conduct a theoretical analysis of the problem of morality and legal consciousness of adolescents in domestic and foreign science.
2. Develop a program of empirical research, including characteristics of the sample and methodology.

3. Conduct an empirical study of the relationship between moral self-determination and legal representations of adolescents.

### **Literature review**

In Russian psychology, the problem of morality is increasingly attracting the attention of Russian scientists (Volovikova, 2004; Kupreychenko & Vorobyova, 2013; Zhuravlev & Yurevich, 2012). Moral-ethical, moral problems have come to the fore today in a number of sciences, including psychology (Zhuravlev & Yurevich, 2012). One of the promising areas of research in the psychology of morality is the study of moral self-determination. The process of moral self-determination is especially significant at the present time for the life of an individual, group, society. It includes the search for moral ideals, the creation of moral codes, the resolution of moral and spiritual contradictions, crises, the choice of behavior and forms of social activity (Kupreychenko & Vorobyova, 2013). There is a stable component in the basis of personality self-determination. This is a value-moral core, which combines the picture of the world and ideas about the organization of the human community, the meanings of life, values and orientations of the individual, ideals, taboos, vital abilities, life principles, life aspirations (Zhuravlev & Yurevich, 2012). The value-moral core is the basis of the moral self-determination of the individual. The indicators of moral self-determination are moral strategies, attitude to morality, moral orientations (Kupreychenko & Vorobyova, 2013).

During adolescence, changes in the brain encourage young people to think more deeply and abstractly about the world around them. Such thinking forms in adolescents ideas about the world, about how they will interact with it. Adolescence is characterized by professional and personal self-determination, a system of value orientations and social attitudes is being formed (Kupreychenko & Vorobyova, 2013), and a crisis of worldview arises (Volovikova, 2012). During the transition from childhood to adolescence, the number of agents of moral socialization (parents, peers, school, media), influencing behavior and values, increases.

Teens are beginning to understand why people make different choices. How rules are related to justice, public good, safety of society. Adolescents develop their own moral code. Within the framework of their established values, adolescents can think more about what is right and what is wrong, what their role in the world is and what they should do when faced with personal moral dilemmas.

The crisis of worldview is especially difficult in conditions of ideological instability (Volovikova, 2012). Teens need adult support to support new ideas and ways of thinking.

The process of forming a value system pushes adolescents to get involved in activities that are of interest to them and to establish a connection with the wider world. This bond can help adolescents make choices that will protect their health and their future.

In his empirical study, Ma found that the moral orientation and moral judgment of prosocial adolescents is higher than that of delinquent adolescents. In other words, the development of moral guidelines and moral judgments predetermines the social behavior of adolescents (Hing Keung Ma, 2012). To study the causes of destructive behavior in adolescence, it becomes relevant to study the relationship between moral self-determination and legal awareness of adolescents.

In our society, we can observe a fundamental rejection of the law and the desire of citizens in legal situations to be guided by existing moral principles. Our citizens initially act in legal situations, relying on their own system of moral principles, which may not correspond to legal norms (Volovikova, 2004). For many citizens, recourse to legal regulation is often associated with tragic circumstances. A person becomes a subject of law when he accepts the law as a value. In this case, the danger of losing subjectivity is facilitated by violations of the law by representatives of law enforcement agencies, which causes traumatic experiences and alienation of the legal sphere from citizens (Volovikova, 2004). Unfortunately, moral consciousness alone cannot provide law-abiding behavior. Some actions punishable by law are not always assessed as immoral, therefore moral criteria are not suitable for determining the measure of a person's legal responsibility.

Legal consciousness includes two interrelated phenomena. First, the law, a set of rules and regulations governing external behavior and providing for the corresponding legal consequences associated with its implementation or non-compliance. Secondly, the consciousness of the individual, which mediates between law and real human behavior (Ratinov & Efremova, 1988). A person's consciousness is the unity of his experiences and knowledge, through which he is aware of the world around him, other people and himself (Rubinstein, 2002). Human consciousness is influenced by public consciousness through concepts, norms, values, traditions, ideals, starting from childhood, forming ways of behavior and thinking (Abulkhanova, 2002). All the phenomena of legal reality have a regulating effect on consciousness. In the process of such interaction, it forms an appropriate form of consciousness - legal consciousness, which has a real basis, relative independence and its inherent functions. Legal consciousness is a direct conductor of law in social activities. Legal consciousness regulates human behavior in a legally significant situation.

In foreign psychology, there are directions that explain the process of legal development (Tapp & Levine, 1977), including from the point of view of the formation of moral consciousness (Kohlberg, 1984).

Tapp and Kohlberg (1977) developed a three-level concept of legal development: the level of legal obedience, legal support, lawmaking. Each level characterizes the motivation of a person's legal behavior.

Russian scientists also believe that the process of the formation of legal consciousness is carried out within the framework of the inclusion of the subject in the main social institutions (Gulevich & Golynchik, 2003; Ratinov, 1981; Yasyukova, 2000). In legal socialization, legal norms, law enforcement agencies, schools, and specialized forms of legal propaganda play an important role (Ratinov, 1981). Legal behavior is determined by external and internal factors. External factors of determination are norms, rules, sanctions, and internal factors are a formed individual value-normative model of a person, which is expressed in his own legal concept, norms and standards of behavior (Ratinov, 1981).

Legal consciousness can have a different degree of development. Signs of a formed legal consciousness are the presence of a person's cognitive activity, legal knowledge, skills that allow to recreate an objective, undistorted picture of a legally significant situation, the predominance of positive legal feelings, moods, emotions in the perception of legal activity, active implementation of legal norms. Unformed legal consciousness can have different kinds of manifestations: offenses, lack of legal knowledge, negative assessment of law, inadequate assessment of a legally significant situation, etc. (Evstafeeva, 2015).

## **Methodology**

The methodological basis for the study of the legal ideas of adolescents is the concept of legal development by Tapp (1971), moral development by Kohlberg (1984), the concept of the development of ordinary legal consciousness by Yasyukova (2000). The methodological basis for studying the morality of adolescents is the general methodological principles of Russian psychology, the provisions of the subject-activity approach (Rubinstein, 2000; Brushlinsky, 2002). The concept of morality of the individual (Volovikova, 2004; Kupreychenko & Vorobyova, 2013), moral self-determination of a person (Kupreychenko & Vorobyova, 2013). On the basis of a theoretical analysis of the research problem, adequate and reliable methods of psychological diagnostics of the studied phenomena, as well as methods of mathematical data processing, were selected adequate to the subject of the study.

The study used the methodology "Moral self-determination of personality" (Kupreychenko & Vorobyova, 2013). The questionnaire assesses the personality's ideas about the origin, significance and role of morality in the life of society, the key elements of ethical strategies, the moral orientation of the individual. Contains three semantic blocks: ideas about morality; moral strategies; moral orientations of the individual (Kupreychenko & Vorobyova, 2013); research methodology of legal representations (Yasyukova, 2000).

It is aimed at assessing the formation of legal identity and the willingness of the subject to adhere to legal norms in various spheres of life and interpersonal relations. This technique allows us to distinguish four levels of development of legal consciousness: legal nihilism; the level of contradictory and defective legal consciousness; the level of basically formed legal consciousness; the level of fully formed legal consciousness. In total, 92 adolescents, aged 15-16 years old (the period of early adolescence), took part in the study. These are students of secondary schools of the Chelyabinsk region. The performed correlation analysis using the coefficient of rank correlation  $r$ -Spearman made it possible to identify statistically significant relationships between ideas about morality, moral strategies, moral orientations and legal representations of adolescents.

## Results

A negative relationship was found between ideas about morality and legal representations in the business sphere ( $r_s = -0.432$ ;  $\rho < 0.01$ ). A positive relationship was revealed between representations about the importance of morality for society and representations about the important role of law and legal regulation in the business sphere ( $r_s = 0.431$ ;  $\rho < 0.01$ ). A negative connection was revealed between the moral strategy "obligatory / non-obligatory observance of moral norms" and legal representations in the civil sphere ( $r_s = -0.331$ ;  $\rho < 0.05$ ). A positive correlation ( $r_s = 0.357$ ;  $\rho < 0.05$ ) was also found between the moral strategy "reciprocity / non-reciprocity of moral behavior" and legal representations in the business sphere. A negative correlation was found between the egocentric orientation of a teenager and the indicator of the functioning of legal consciousness in the civil sphere ( $r_s = -0.409$ ;  $\rho < 0.01$ ). The results of empirical research confirm the hypothesis put forward about the connection between moral self-determination and legal representations for adolescents.

## Discussion

The results of the study indicate that adolescents' ideas about the natural origin of morality are associated with ideas about the permissibility of circumventing prescribed rules and laws in business relations. The revealed connection between the ideas about the importance of morality for society and the ideas about the important role of law and legal regulation in the business sphere indicates that with the ideas formed among adolescents about the importance of morality for society, there is an awareness of the need for legal regulation in the business sphere and the desire to comply with legal norms and laws in the field of business relations. The results also indicate that the more the adolescents' strategy of compulsory observance of moral norms is expressed, the worse the need for legal regulation in the civil sphere is realized. Perhaps, legal representations testify to the distrust of adolescents in the system of legal regulation in our society.

The support in social relations for them can be moral norms, and not the law, which they do not know due to inexperience, or legal nihilism, characteristic of our society and influencing the formation of the legal consciousness of the younger generation. The positive correlation between the moral strategy of “reciprocity / non-reciprocity of moral behavior” and legal representations in the business sphere indicates that the more a teenager's moral strategy of reciprocity is expressed, the more he is focused on adhering to the norms of behavior in business relations. The teenager's expectations related to the observance of other rules of business interaction are his representations as a guarantor against deception.

The negative relationship between the egocentric orientation of the adolescent and the indicator of the functioning of legal consciousness in the civil sphere suggests that the more pronounced in adolescents the orientation towards personal needs, and not towards social needs, the more clearly their social infantilism, civic passivity are manifested, relationship.

Thus, the results of empirical research confirm the hypothesis put forward about the connection between moral self-determination and legal representations in adolescents.

## **Conclusion**

The data obtained indicate the possibility of studying the morality of the individual as the basis for the development of legal consciousness in adolescence. The research results can serve as a basis for developing programs for the prevention of deviant behavior in adolescents. For effective implementation of measures to prevent illegal behavior among adolescents, a clear understanding of the essence of this process and the role of morality and legal consciousness in it is necessary. The data obtained during the implementation of the project will serve as the basis for the development of a set of measures aimed at shaping the legal consciousness of adolescents in order to prevent illegal behavior.

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