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The structure of professionally important qualities of child welfare specialists and analysis of their predictors

V.N. Oslon¹ , M.A. Odintsova¹, G.V. Semya¹, U.V. Kolesnikova¹

¹ Moscow State University of Psychology and Education, Moscow, Russian Federation

 osl-veronika@yandex.ru

Abstract

Context and Relevance. The article is devoted to the development of a structure for professionally important qualities of specialists from guardianship and custody authorities and factors influencing their formation. The contradictory nature of requirements for these professionals' essential qualities stems from the need to comply with strict legal norms while simultaneously adopting an empathetic and flexible approach towards clients' needs. **Objective.** To develop an integrated structure of professionally important qualities and analyze predictors that determine the formation of these qualities. **Hypothesis.** The structure of professionally important qualities reflects the specifics of work for specialists from guardianship and custody authorities, demonstrates good psychometric characteristics, and shows significant predictive power regarding overall emotional intelligence level, subjective well-being, and procedural self-efficacy.

Methods and Materials. A total of 2036 specialists from 85 regions of Russia participated in the study, with an average age of $44,02 \pm 9,36$ years, including 1500 specialists and 536 managers. Factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis were used to assess the structure of professionally important qualities. Factors influencing this structure were identified using: author-developed questionnaire on professional qualities, Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire "EMIN", Subjective Wellbeing Scale, Uncertainty Response Scale, Russian version of Self-Efficacy Scale. **Results.** The structure of professionally important qualities demonstrated excellent fit to data, internal consistency, external validity, and high reliability. Despite differences in formal job responsibilities between leaders and specialists, they share a common psychological core of professionally important qualities. **Conclusions.** The developed structure reveals substantial predictive power related to general levels of emotional intelligence, subjective well-being, and procedural self-efficacy, enabling more effective training methods and support systems tailored specifically to key psychological and emotional aspects of practitioners' work.

Keywords: structure, professionally important qualities, specificity of the model, guardianship and custody authority personnel, predictors

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Структура профессионально важных качеств специалистов органов опеки и попечительства и анализ факторов влияния

В.Н. Ослон¹✉, М.А. Одинцова¹, Г.В. Семья¹, У.В. Колесникова¹

¹ Московский государственный психолого-педагогический университет,
Москва, Российской Федерации

✉ osl-veronika@yandex.ru

Резюме

Контекст и актуальность. Статья посвящена проблеме разработки структуры профессионально важных качеств (далее — ПВК) специалистов органов опеки и попечительства и факторам, влияющим на их формирование. Противоречивость требований к профессионально важным качествам работников органов опеки и попечительства определяется необходимостью соблюдения строгих правовых норм и эмпатичного и гибкого подхода к потребностям клиентов. **Цель.** Представить авторское видение интегрированной структуры профессионально важных качеств специалистов и выявить предикторы, которые обуславливают формирование этих качеств. **Гипотеза.** Структура профессионально важных качеств отражает специфику деятельности специалистов органов опеки и попечительства, ее составляющие обладают хорошими психометрическими характеристиками, она показывает значительную предсказательную силу общего уровня эмоционального интеллекта, субъективного благополучия и процедурной самоэффективности. **Методы и материалы.** В исследовании участвовали 2036 специалистов из 85 регионов России, средний возраст — $44,02 \pm 9,36$ лет, из них 1500 специалистов и 536 руководителей. Структура профессионально важных качеств оценивалась с помощью факторного и конфирматорного анализа. Для обнаружения факторов влияния использованы: авторский опросник профессионально важных качеств, опросник эмоционального интеллекта «ЭМИН», шкала субъективного благополучия, шкала реагирования на неопределенность, русскоязычная версия шкалы самоэффективности. **Результаты.** Структура профессионально важных качеств специалистов органов опеки и попечительства подтвердила хорошее соответствие данным, вынутреннюю и внешнюю валидность и отличную внутреннюю согласо-

ванность. Руководители и специалисты, несмотря на внешние различия в должностных обязанностях, обладают единым психологическим ядром профессионально важных качеств. **Выводы.** Структура ПВК показывает значительную предсказательную силу общего уровня эмоционального интеллекта, субъективного благополучия и процедурной самоэффективности и позволяет разработать более эффективные методы подготовки и поддержки специалистов, учитывая ключевые психологические и эмоциональные аспекты их работы.

Ключевые слова: структура, профессионально важные качества, специфика структуры, специалисты органов опеки и попечительства, предикторы

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Introduction

Modern society faces numerous challenges in protecting children's rights and supporting families in difficult life situations. In this context, the role of specialists from guardianship and custody authorities (hereinafter referred to as GCA) and their professional preparedness to effectively fulfill their duties is particularly important.

The professional status of GCA specialists is rather contradictory. On the one hand, they belong to the category of civil servants¹, endowed by law with the authority to "prevent violations of children's rights, protect their interests, and ensure social and other state guarantees...", thereby implementing social policy in general (Urazbaeva, 2016). On the other hand, they are

specialists providing assistance to individuals, families, or groups in difficult situations. In other words, GCA specialists act both as representatives of state authority and as social workers. In their professional activities, they face a dilemma: on one side, the requirement for strict performance of official duties, and on the other, the need for a sensitive attitude towards the needs of those requiring help. This creates a situation of uncertainty regarding tasks, methods, and areas of responsibility. The contradiction influences public expectations, which demand both strict legal solutions and simultaneously accuse specialists of inaction, overstepping authority, excessive control and punitive measures, as well as a lack of empathy. As a result, specialists are constantly under pressure from society

¹ Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation dated May 16, 2025 No. 1217-r "On the Concept for Improving the Activities of Guardianship and Custody Authorities in Relation to Minors." URL: <http://government.ru/docs/all/158995/> (accessed: August 8, 2025).

and social institutions, which blame them for erroneous decisions (Oslon et al., 2024), leading to professional burnout and psychological health issues among them. A significant personnel shortage has become a consequence of that (16% vacancy rate as of 2024).

This situation has created a need for better selection and the development of pathways for both personal and professional growth of GCA workers, taking into account the dual nature of their activities (as civil servants and helping professionals).

Empirical research emphasizes the importance of the connection between values, motivation, and personality traits of civil servants. Within an empirical study based on a system approach, characteristics such as “responsibility,” “flexibility,” and “intellectual efficiency” contribute to the development of an internally motivated personality of civil servants (Boyarkin, 2008; Aamodt, 2022; Cobanu, Androniceanu, Lăzăroiu, 2019; Henderson et al., 2021). Within the concept of aptitude as a “generalized psychological formation existing as a system of personal variables, attributes, or qualities” (Borodina, Korchemny, 2019), key predictors of professionally important qualities (hereinafter referred to as PIQs) for civil servants include speech-thinking, emotional-volitional, and communicative qualities. This highlights the significance of diagnostics in personnel selection. Diagnostics is conducted through personal-professional characteristics, which underscores the need to develop these qualities in potential candidates.

Research based on the concept of organizational proactivity has shown that the proactivity and initiative of civil servants play a key role in their ability to adapt and enhance their work efficiency (Lepekhin, Lebedeva, Kruglov, 2020; Grubert, Steuber, Meinhardt, 2022; Meng et al., 2019).

Contemporary research indicates that the PIQ predictors in civil servants include: a high capacity for self-learning and planning, com-

munication competence, legal and information literacy, managerial abilities, work motivation, restraint, level-headedness, and integrity. Priority qualities for civil servants are considered to be intelligence, cultural behavior, diligence, discipline, consistency, fairness, and care for subordinates. Self-regulation skills are important for overcoming difficult situations, and the level of interpersonal trust within an organization contributes to employee motivation (Afonin, Afonin, Solodilov, 2020; Kalgin, Kalgina, 2018; Panarin, 2002; Petoyan, Velikodnaya, 2023; Puzanova, Semenova, 2017; Ryabova, 2019; Khaidov, 2013).

In international (Demirel, Sadykova, 2021; Hökkä, Vähäsantanen, Paloniemi, 2020) and domestic (Kozub, 2024; Sabyna, 2023) research, emotional intelligence (EI) is considered a systemic predictor that contributes to increasing workplace trust, team trust, alignment of value orientations, identification of individual and organizational goals and priorities, and psychological well-being.

Empirical research on predictors of PIQ in helping professionals, based on the theory of prosocial activity, highlights altruism, morality, empathy, resilience, responsibility, absence of prejudice and subjective bias (Shermazanyan, 2015; Meng et al., 2019), and emphasizes the development of “positive” empathic processes (Karyagina et al., 2017). Key predictive indicators of PIQ include ability to handle stress, tolerance, altruistic orientation, striving for self-knowledge and development, and lack of fear of criticism (Bykova, 2015; Sorokoumova, Isaev, 2013).

Civil servants and helping professionals differ in their emphasis on PIQs, which is related to their professional duties. While the former prioritize managerial and organizational abilities, the latter prioritize empathy and readiness to support clients.

Thus, the professional activity of GCA specialists requires a unique combination of

qualities characteristic of both civil servants and helping professionals. This creates a problem of uncertainty but also opens opportunities for developing an integrated framework of their PIQs.

To apply this model in practice, an analysis of the predictors of PIQs that determine the formation of these qualities in GCA specialists is necessary. This became the comprehensive practice-oriented goal of this study. We hypothesized that the structure of PIQs would reflect the specifics of GCA specialists' activities, demonstrate significant predictive power of the general level of EI, subjective well-being, and procedural self-efficacy, and that its components would possess good psychometric characteristics.

Materials and methods

To identify the PIQs, an expert survey was conducted with specialists and managers of regional GCA offices with varying experience and status from 5 federal districts of the Russian Federation. They were asked to list, in any order, the most important professional qualities from their perspective. Subsequently, the project experts selected the most frequently mentioned qualities and compiled the questionnaire «Psychologically Important Qualities of a Guardianship and Custody Authority Specialist» (Appendix A), which was evaluated in regional GCA departments.

Research tools and procedure:

- The proprietary questionnaire “Psychologically Important Qualities of a Guardianship and Custody Authority Specialist” allows for the identification of psychologically important qualities and includes a set of personal and professional characteristics (N = 35). These characteristics determine the specialist's ability to effectively perform duties, interact with colleagues and clients, and cope with emotional and professional workloads in their work, which impacts overall effectiveness. Respondents were asked to rate

the degree to which each PIQ was developed in them on a 5-point scale, where: 1 point = minimally prominent, 5 points = maximally prominent. For example, the ability to patiently listen to an interlocutor, the ability to initiate and maintain a conversation, the ability for effective and conflict-free interaction with groups of people of different levels, etc.;

- The emotional intelligence questionnaire “EMIN” (Lyusin, 2004);
- The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale, or WEMWBS (Osin, Leontiev, 2020);
- The Uncertainty Response Scale (Odintsova, Radchikova, 2025);
- Russian version of the self-efficacy scale, adapted in 2024 by the authoring team of V.N. Oslon, M.A. Odintsova, G.V. Semya, U.V. Kolesnikova and awaiting publication in the Journal of Organizational Psychology.

Methods: Factor analysis (principal component analysis followed by Varimax rotation), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), Cronbach's alpha; Kolmogorov-Smirnov test; Student's t-test, with effect size calculated using Cohen's d; Pearson's correlation coefficient (r); linear regression analysis. SPSS Statistics 27.0 software was used.

Study participants. The study involved 2036 specialists from guardianship and custody authorities from 85 regions of Russia, average age 44.02 ± 9.36 years (median = 45 years). The total number included specialists (N = 1500) and managers (N = 536).

Results

The initial item pool consisted of 51 statements. Through several successive cycles of factor analysis (principal component analysis with Varimax rotation), we eliminated items that cross-loaded onto multiple factors with loadings exceeding the established threshold or that compromised factor interpretability. As a result of this procedure, the final version of the instrument

was reduced to 35 statements. Factor analysis of the 35 items allowed us to identify 6 factors, explaining 61,66% of the total variance:

1. Client-oriented mindset and professional ethics (10 items, 17,51%).
2. Communicative and analytical aptitude (7 items, 13,07%).
3. Client interaction competence (7 items, 11,37%).
4. Verbal communication proficiency (4 items, 7,095%).
5. Psychological hardness (4 items, 6,33%).
6. Professional integrity and accountability (3 items, 6,18%).

The six-factor structure provided the clearest, most logical, and theoretically sound model. Each factor clearly corresponded to the constructs underpinning our methodology. The decision to retain six factors was based on a combined consideration of statistical criteria and substantive meaning, which is standard and recommended practice in psychometric research.

The results of the confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated a good fit of the data to the proposed structure ($CFI = 0,926$; $TLI = 0,919$; $RMSEA = 0,0514$ [0,0498; 0,0531]; $SRMR = 0,0412$), thereby confirming the six-factor PIQ structure.

Evidence for internal validity comes from the obtained positive correlations among the subscales, suggesting they belong to a single construct. The correlation coefficients ranged from $r = 0,473$ to $r = 0,708$. The strongest relationships were found between the “Professional integrity and accountability” and “Client-oriented mindset and professional ethics” subscales ($r = 0,708$), and between “Communicative and analytical aptitude” and “Client interaction competence” subscales ($r = 0,706$), reflecting their conceptual connection. The absence of excessively high correlations ($r > 0,80$) indicates that the subscales are not redundant.

All subscales demonstrated good to excellent internal consistency: “Client-oriented mind-

set and professional ethics” ($\alpha = 0,917$); “Communicative and analytical aptitude” ($\alpha = 0,891$); “Client interaction competence” ($\alpha = 0,849$); “Verbal communication proficiency” ($\alpha = 0,769$); “Psychological hardness” ($\alpha = 0,802$); “Professional integrity and accountability” ($\alpha = 0,804$).

Testing the external validity of the six-factor PIQ structure revealed weak to moderate positive correlations for all PIQ subscales with intrinsic, integrated, and identified motivation (ranging from $r = 0,151$ to $r = 0,309$), and weak negative correlations with external motivation and amotivation (ranging from $r = -0,145$ to $r = -0,258$). Moderate positive correlations were found between PIQ subscales and subjective well-being (from $r = 0,326$ to $r = 0,483$), weak to moderate positive correlations with all self-efficacy indicators (from $r = 0,274$ to $r = 0,417$), weak correlations with cognitive responses to uncertainty (from $r = 0,141$ to $r = 0,277$), weak to moderate correlations with readiness for change (from $r = 0,190$ to $r = 0,323$), and weak to moderate negative correlations with emotional responses to uncertainty (from $r = -0,186$ to $r = -0,334$). Multiple moderate positive correlations were found between PIQ components and all EI subscales (from $r = 0,274$ to $r = 0,478$). Thus, a specialist’s PIQ is directly related to their ability to cope with uncertainty, professional motivation, subjective well-being, and emotional intelligence.

The confirmation of the psychometric properties of the PIQ structure for GCA specialists provides a basis for identifying differences between specialists and managers, as the former primarily perform helping professional functions, while the latter perform civil service functions.

Significant differences in all PIQs were found between specialists and managers. Managers demonstrated higher scores than specialists in “Client-oriented mindset and professional ethics” ($4,53 \pm 0,40$ / $4,47 \pm 0,46$): $t(2034) = -2,56$, $p = 0,01$, $d = -0,129$. They also rated themselves higher on “Communicative and analytical apti-

tude" ($4,24 \pm 0,45/4,04 \pm 0,53$): $t(2034) = -8,19$, $p = 0,000$, $d = -0,38$; "Client interaction competence" ($4,27 \pm 0,43/4,17 \pm 0,51$): $t(2034) = -4,36$, $p = 0,000$, $d = -0,20$; "Verbal communication proficiency" ($4,20 \pm 0,54/4,14 \pm 0,61$): $t(2034) = -2,41$, $p = 0,016$, $d = -0,11$; "Psychological hardiness" ($4,31 \pm 0,50/4,17 \pm 0,57$): $t(2034) = -4,78$, $p = 0,000$, $d = -0,23$; "Professional integrity and accountability" ($4,62 \pm 0,42/4,53 \pm 0,53$): $t(2034) = -3,613$, $p = 0,000$, $d = -0,18$.

Statistically significant differences between the groups, accompanied by small effect sizes, indicate their limited practical applicability.

These results show that professional status is a weak criterion for the level of PIQ development among GCA specialists. It is possible that individual variations in PIQ are more strongly determined by work experience, age, professional motivation, ways of responding to uncertainty, emotional intelligence, and subjective well-being.

To identify key predictors of PIQ among GCA specialists, a linear regression analysis was conducted. A direct stepwise method (with inclusion) was used, which allows for the selection of only those predictors that significantly influence the dependent variables. When constructing the regression models, all theoretically significant PIQ predictors (emotional intelligence, motivation, subjective well-being, self-efficacy, responses to uncertainty, age, and work experience) were included in the analysis (see Table). The analysis showed that the most significant predictors for client-oriented mindset and professional ethics are: overall EI level, procedural self-efficacy, cognitive responses to uncertainty, intrinsic motivation, and subjective well-being. The greatest contribution comes from overall EI level, while the smallest comes from subjective well-being. The most significant predictors for communicative and analytical aptitude were: overall EI level, subjective well-being, and procedural self-efficacy. The predictors for client interaction competence were:

interpersonal EI, subjective well-being, procedural self-efficacy, and readiness for change. At the same time, the most substantial contribution comes from interpersonal EI, and the smallest from readiness for change. The most significant predictors for verbal communication proficiency are: overall EI level, subjective well-being, and procedural self-efficacy. Overall EI level makes the greatest contribution to the assessment of verbal qualities.

The predictors for psychological hardiness are: subjective well-being, overall EI level, readiness for change, support-seeking behavior, and identified motivation. Emotional responses to uncertainty make a negative contribution to psychological hardiness. The greatest contribution to psychological hardiness comes from subjective well-being, the smallest from identified motivation.

The predictors for professional integrity and accountability were: procedural self-efficacy, overall EI level, cognitive responses to uncertainty, and subjective well-being. Procedural self-efficacy makes the most significant contribution to professional integrity and accountability.

Thus, overall emotional intelligence, subjective well-being, and procedural self-efficacy are the most significant predictors of the PIQs we have identified for GCA specialists. Despite the inclusion of work experience and age in the initial models, they did not demonstrate a statistically significant contribution ($p > 0,05$) to any of the dependent variables when controlling for other factors. This indicates that their relationship with PIQs is mediated by other, more significant variables included in the model.

Discussion

Based on factor analysis, a six-factor PIQ structure for GCA specialists was developed. This structure was confirmed to have good fit with the research data, demonstrated internal and external validity, and showed excellent inter-

Table

Results of the regression analysis for predicting professionally important qualities (N = 2036)

Indicator	Standardized regression coefficient β	Regression coefficient b	Level of statistical significance p
Client-oriented mindset and professional ethics			
Intercept (constant)		2,620	<0,001
Overall level of EI	0,223	0,007	<0,001
Procedural self-efficacy	0,172	0,034	<0,001
Cognitive responses to uncertainty	0,146	0,016	<0,001
Intrinsic motivation	0,105	0,017	<0,001
Subjective well-being	0,108	0,006	<0,001
Adjusted R-squared = 0,281; Durbin-Watson = 1,977			
Communicative and analytical aptitude			
Intercept (constant)		2,065	<0,001
Overall level of EI	0,286	0,011	<0,001
Subjective well-being	0,199	0,013	<0,001
Procedural self-efficacy	0,170	0,041	<0,001
Adjusted R-squared = 0,294; Durbin-Watson = 1,966			
Client interaction competence			
Intercept (constant)		2,162	<0,001
Interpersonal EI	0,303	0,022	<0,001
Subjective well-being	0,170	0,011	<0,001
Procedural self-efficacy	0,113	0,025	<0,001
ГReadiness for change	0,101	0,009	<0,001
Adjusted R-squared = 0,283; Durbin-Watson = 1,988			
Verbal communication proficiency			
Intercept (constant)		2,460	<0,001
Overall level of EI	0,233	0,010	<0,001
Subjective well-being	0,126	0,010	<0,001
Procedural self-efficacy	0,116	0,031	<0,001
Adjusted R-squared = 0,179; Durbin-Watson = 1,930			
Psychological hardiness			
Intercept (constant)		2,384	<0,001
Subjective well-being	0,209	0,015	<0,001
Overall level of EI	0,173	0,007	<0,001

Indicator	Standardized regression coefficient β	Regression coefficient b	Level of statistical significance p
Emotional responses to uncertainty	-0,140	-0,009	<0,001
Readiness for change	0,113	0,012	<0,001
Support-seeking behavior	0,103	0,015	<0,001
Identified motivation	0,075	0,014	<0,001
Adjusted R-squared = 0,319; Durbin-Watson = 1,911			
Professional integrity and accountability			
Intercept (constant)		2,715	<0,001
Procedural self-efficacy	0,200	0,045	<0,001
Overall level of EI	0,143	0,005	<0,001
Cognitive responses to uncertainty	0,152	0,019	<0,001
Subjective well-being	0,137	0,009	<0,001
Adjusted R-squared = 0,214; Durbin-Watson = 2,015			

nal consistency for all its components. The minimal differences between managers and specialists indicate they share a common psychological core of PIQs, pointing to a unified professional environment despite external differences in job responsibilities.

The most significant predictors of PIQs for GCA specialists are overall emotional intelligence, subjective well-being, and procedural self-efficacy. This fact reinforces the conclusion about the need to integrate personal characteristics into the personnel professional development process (Karyagina et al., 2017).

The role of emotional intelligence in the work of civil servants and helping professionals is confirmed in numerous studies (Sabyna, 2023; Demirel, Sadykova, 2021; Hökkä, Vähäsanstanen, Paloniemi, 2020).

Procedural self-efficacy (i.e., the ability to fulfill obligations to clients while remaining objective and avoiding personal judgment, as well as

the skill to revise goals in the face of setbacks) is highlighted by researchers as an important predictor of PIQs for helping professionals (Pedrazza et al., 2013; Jawahar, Mohammed, 2022; Kolesnikov, 2021).

The fact that subjective well-being is a predictor of PIQs for civil servants is supported by the research of D.M. Zinovieva (Zinovieva, Yunda, Dolgopolova, 2010).

In our study, intrinsic motivation serves as a predictor for the formation of client-oriented values, which aligns with the concept of an intrinsically motivated personality (Boyarkin, 2008) and is corroborated by findings in a number of other studies (Arinushkina, 2016; Afonin, Afonin, Solodilov, 2020; Panarin, 2002; Petoyan, Velikodnaya, 2023; Puzanova, Semenova, 2017; Ryabova, 2019; Sorokoumova, Isaev, 2013; Khaidov, 2013).

Identified motivation plays a significant role in the psychological hardiness of GCA special-

ists, which corresponds with the conclusions of research on civil servant motivation (Donnikov, Durnovtseva, 2024).

Overall, the obtained results underscore the need to develop an individualized approach to the selection and training of GCA specialists. This could include implementing the developed psychodiagnostic tool for assessing PIQs. This will help enhance the overall effectiveness of GCA operations, which fully aligns with the challenges faced by modern society in protecting children's rights and supporting families in crisis situations.

Conclusions

Modern society has presented GCA specialists with a number of serious challenges related to child protection and family support. Their work is simultaneously a state function and a social one, creating a tension between the necessity to adhere to strict legal norms and the need for an empathetic and flexible approach to each case. Therefore, in developing a PIQ structure, the important task is not the synthesis of roles, but the formation of an integral professional identity for GCA specialists, unified by a common professional field, coupled with the psychometric validation of the

components within this structure. Our research confirmed the following assumptions:

1. The developed PIQ structure, which reflects the specific nature of GCA specialists' work and combines managerial and "helping" functions, is valid and reliable. It represents not a theoretical construct, but a ready-to-use tool for human resources work.

2. The PIQ structure demonstrates significant predictive power for overall EI level, subjective well-being, and procedural self-efficacy. This allows for the development of more effective training and support methods for GCA specialists, taking into account key psychological and emotional aspects of their work. Future research will focus on studying the long-term effects of EI and other PIQ predictors on career advancement and professional burnout among specialists.

Limitations. The absence of comparisons with other professional groups does not allow us to claim the absolute uniqueness of this structure, although it does support its validity and internal consistency for this particular group. Not all possible predictors of professionally important qualities and their impact on the professional success of child protection specialists have been examined.

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Appendix

Appendix A. Questionnaire “Professionally Important Qualities of Child Guardianship and Custody Specialists”. <https://doi.org/10.48612/MSUPE/e7en-ahkn-3v68>

Information about the authors

Veronika N. Osloan, Candidate of Science (Psychology), Professor at the Department of Age Psychology named after Professor L.F. Obukhova, Faculty of Educational Psychology, Moscow State University of Psychology and Education, Moscow, Russian Federation, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9625-7307>, e-mail: osl-veronika@yandex.ru

Maria A. Odintsova, Candidate of Science (Psychology), Head of the Department of Psychology and Pedagogy of Distance Learning, Faculty of Distance Learning, Moscow State University of Psychology and Education, Moscow, Russian Federation, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3106-4616>, e-mail: mari505@mail.ru

Galina V. Semya, Doctor of Science (Psychology), Professor at the Department of Age Psychology named after Professor L.F. Obukhova, Faculty of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Educational Psychology, Moscow State University of Psychology and Education, Moscow, Russian Federation, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9583-8698>, e-mail: gvsemlia@yandex.ru

Ulyana V. Kolesnikova, Research Associate, Center of Applied Psychological and Pedagogical Studies, Moscow State University of Psychology and Education, Moscow, Russian Federation, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5328-8621>, e-mail: alli-tett@ya.ru

Информация об авторах

Вероника Нисоновна Ослон, кандидат психологических наук, профессор кафедры возрастной психологии имени профессора Л.Ф. Обуховой, факультет «Психология образования», Московский государственный психолого-педагогический университет (ФГБОУ ВО МГППУ), Москва, Российская Федерация, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9625-7307>, e-mail: osl-veronika@yandex.ru

Мария Антоновна Одинцова, кандидат психологических наук, заведующая кафедрой психологии и педагогики дистанционного обучения факультета дистанционного обучения, Московский государственный психолого-педагогический университет (ФГБОУ ВО МГППУ), Москва, Российская Федерация, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3106-4616>, e-mail: mari505@mail.ru

Галина Владимировна Семья, доктор психологических наук, профессор кафедры возрастной психологии имени профессора Л.Ф. Обуховой, факультет «Психология образования», Московский государственный психолого-педагогический университет (ФГБОУ ВО МГППУ), Москва, Российская Федерация, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9583-8698>, e-mail: gvsemlia@yandex.ru

Ульяна Владимировна Колесникова, научный сотрудник Центра прикладных психолого-педагогических исследований, Московский государственный психолого-педагогический университет (ФГБОУ ВО МГППУ), Москва, Российская Федерация, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5328-8621>, e-mail: alli-tett@ya.ru

Contribution of the authors

Veronika N. Osloan — research concept design; instrumentation development; data analysis and interpretation; annotation; manuscript writing.

Maria A. Odintsova — ideas for mathematical analysis of datasets; application of analytical methods; visualization of research results.

Galina V. Semya — planning and organization of the study; supervision of its implementation; data analysis; editing of the manuscript text.

Ulyana V. Kolesnikova — creation of electronic survey tool; collection and extraction of data; evaluation of quality of questionnaires; formatting of the manuscript.

All authors participated in the discussion of the results and approved the final text of the manuscript.

Вклад авторов

Ослон В.Н. — концепция исследования; разработка инструментария, анализ и интерпретация данных, аннотирование, написание рукописи.

Одинцова М.А. — идеи математического анализа массива данных, применение методов для анализа данных, визуализация результатов исследования.

Семья Г.В. — планирование и организация исследования, контроль за проведением исследования, анализ данных, редактирование текста рукописи.

Колесникова У.В. — создание электронного инструмента опроса; сбор и выгрузка данных; оценка качества анкетных данных, оформление рукописи.

Все авторы приняли участие в обсуждении результатов и согласовали окончательный текст рукописи.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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