

Subjective Predictors of Psychological Well-being of Gifted Adolescents

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The paper presents the results of empirical verification of the theoretical model of subjective predictors for the psychological well-being of gifted adolescents, including subjectivity, hardiness, self-efficacy, the general emotional background, represented by the level of personal anxiety, and characteristics of the self-concept of adolescents. It was assumed that the factors moderating the relationship of these variables are the attitude of adolescents to their own giftedness, as well as the specificity of the activity in which adolescents show signs of giftedness, and the level of their achievements in it. The sample consisted of 422 adolescents aged 15–17 years enrolled in specialized educational programs for adolescents who show academic, mathematical, leadership and sports talent. The collection of empirical data was carried out using questionnaires and testing (Scale of psychological well-being; Frankfurt scales of self-assessment; Questionnaire of subjectivity; Test of hardiness; The self-efficacy scale; Test for determining self-efficacy; Integrative test of anxiety). Structural equation modeling was done using the IBM SPSS Statistics ver. 23 software package and the AMOS module made it possible to recognize subjectiveness ($p < 0.001$), the psychological well-being of gifted adolescents and the influence subjectivity and hardiness is mediated by the attitude of adolescents to their own giftedness ($p < 0.01$), which, in turn, is determined by the level of their achievements ($p < 0.01$). The characteristics of the self-concept, as well as such factors as "the type of activity in which the signs of giftedness are manifested" and "gender", were not included in the empirical model. The prognostic potential of the model and the possibility of solving on its basis the tasks associated with the psychological support of the personal development of gifted adolescents are discussed.

Keywords: giftedness, adolescents, psychological well-being, hardiness, subjectivity, self-efficacy, attitude to own giftedness.

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Представлены результаты эмпирической верификации теоретической модели субъективных предпосылок психологического благополучия одаренных подростков, в числе которых рассматриваются субъектность, жизнестойкость, самооффективность, общий эмоциональный фон, представленный уровнем личностной тревожности, и характеристики Я-концепции подростков. Предполагалось, что факторами, модеризирующими взаимосвязи этих переменных, являются отношение подростков к собственной одаренности, а также специфика деятельности, в которой подростки проявляют признаки одаренности, и уровень их достижений в ней. Выборку составили 422 подростка 15—17 лет, обучающихся на специализированных образовательных программах для подростков, проявляющих академическую, математическую, лидерскую и спортивную одаренность. Сбор эмпирических данных осуществлялся с помощью анкетирования и тестирования (Шкала психологического благополучия; Франкфуртские шкалы самооценки; Опросник субъектности; Тест жизнестойкости; Тест определения самооффективности; Интегративный тест тревожности). Моделирование структурными уравнениями с помощью программного пакета IBM SPSS Statistics ver.23 и модуля AMOS позволило признать значимыми субъективными предпосылками психологического благополучия одаренных подростков субъектность ($p < 0,001$), жизнестойкость ($p < 0,001$) и самооффективность ($p < 0,001$), причем влияние субъектности и жизнестойкости опосредуется отношением подростков к собственной одаренности ($p < 0,01$), которое, в свою очередь, определяется уровнем их достижений ($p < 0,01$). Характеристики Я-концепции, а также такие факторы, как «вид деятельности, в которой проявляются признаки одаренности» и «пол», в эмпирическую модель не вошли. Обсуждаются прогностический потенциал модели и возможности решения на ее основе задач, связанных с психологическим сопровождением личностного становления одаренных подростков.

Ключевые слова: одаренность, подростки, психологическое благополучие, жизнестойкость, субъектность, самооффективность, отношение к собственной одаренности.

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Introduction

Studies of psychological wellbeing are both a highly demanded and widely discussed issue in psychology. Currently large amount of the data was accumulated to characterize the relationship between psychological wellbeing and giftedness, although research outcomes remain controversial. M.Neiart argues that there are two opposing points of view. According to the first one, gifted people are more adaptive, and due to a higher level of cognitive abilities and self-reflection, they more easily resolve conflicts, overcome struggles and developmental asynchrony, which in its turn contributes to their psychological wellbeing. Another point of view states that a higher level of ability in gifted people makes them more vulnerable to interpersonal conflicts, thus impeding their adaptation and wellbeing [29]. At the same time, cognitive and/or intellectual potential is most often considered to be the main predictor of psychological well — or ill-being in many studies.

Studies show that psychological wellbeing is influenced by factors of different levels and content. There are environmental factors such as the nature of interpersonal [1; 9; 11; 27; 31] and social [3; 21; 32] relationships; as well as intrapersonal resources necessary for successful development of adolescents in those fields in which their giftedness is manifested: resilience

[8; 17], self-efficacy [8; 24; 34], agency [5; 28], anxiety [4; 14; 25; 29; 37], perception of one's own life prospects [2; 29; 30]. The type of activity in which the giftedness is manifested also affects their psychological well-being [26; 29]. The relationship between the well-being of gifted adolescents and their achievements is also discussed [10; 18; 20; 22; 30].

Our study is focused on the subjective factors of the psychological well-being of gifted adolescents. Combining the conclusions from the review of the relevant literature with the results obtained in our previous studies, we developed a theoretical model of the subjective factors of the psychological well-being [13], which connects the well-being of gifted adolescents to their subjectivity, hardiness, self-efficacy, self-concept, and the emotional state, represented by the level of anxiety. The mediator between these characteristics and the psychological well-being of the adolescents was the attitude to their own giftedness. The attitude towards one's own giftedness expresses the attitude of a teenager towards themselves as a gifted person [7]. The proposed theoretical model clarifies the main hypothesis of our study: the attitude to one's own giftedness and, more generally, self-attitude, self-efficacy, subjectivity, and life perception contribute to the psychological well-being of gifted adolescents. However, the heterogeneous

influence of all factors is determined by the content of the activity in which the adolescent shows signs of giftedness, as well as the level of the achievements in this activity. This article presents the results of the empirical verification of the theoretical model and elaborates on the relationship between the psychological well-being of gifted adolescents and the subjective factors, the fields in which adolescents show signs of giftedness, and the level of achievements as potential predictors of the well-being.

Materials and Methods

To test the proposed theoretical model and determine the subjective predictors of the psychological well-being of gifted adolescents, the method of structural equations modelling using path analysis (the method of asymptotically nonparametric estimation) was applied. Statistical processing was carried out using the IBM SPSS Statistics ver.23 software and the AMOS module.

The study sample consisted of 422 teenagers (191 girls and 231 boys) enrolled in specialized educational programs for adolescents with academic, mathematical, physical, and leadership talent. The participants are educated in institutions for gifted children of general and boarding types in St. Petersburg and Nizhny Novgorod, the age of the study participants ranged from 15 to 17 years. During preliminary data analysis, 37 cases containing statistical outliers (influential observations) were excluded from further analysis based on an estimate of the interquartile distance. The size of the sample included in the final analysis was 387.

To assess the psychological well-being of the adolescents, we used the "Scales of psychological wellbeing" by K. Riff, adapted by L.V. Zhukovskaya and E.G. Troshchikhina. The self-concept was assessed with the "Frankfurt self-concept scales" by I. Deus-

inger, adapted by O.E. Baitinger. The subjectivity and its attributes were measured with the "The subjectivity questionnaire" by E.N. Volkova and I.A. Seregina. The assessment of hardiness as a resource for coping with stress was carried out with the screening version of the "Hardiness test" by S. Muddy, adapted by E.N. Aspen. To assess self-efficacy as an opportunity to be aware of one's abilities and use them in the best possible way, we used "Self-efficacy scale" by D. Maddux and M. Scheer, modified by L. Boyarintseva, R. L. Krichevsky. Anxiety was measured with a scale of self-assessment of the individual anxiety from the "Integrative Anxiety Test (IAT)" developed by A.P. Bizyuk, L.I. Wasserman and B.V. Iovlev. The total scores of the psychological well-being, resilience, self-efficacy, subjectivity and anxiety were analyzed. As the "Frankfurt self-concept scales" does not provide the total scores, the model included individual scales of self-concept. The mediating variable between the psychological well-being and its potential predictors, the level of achievement, was assessed with the results of participation in Olympiads, competitions, contests of various levels from 0 to 5: 0 — no achievements; 1 — achievements at the level of the educational organization; 2 — achievements at the district level; 3 — achievements at the level of the city / region / region; 4 — achievements at the national level; 5 — achievements at the international level.

Attitudes towards one's own giftedness were studied through the survey developed by the authors. The survey included general self-assessment of giftedness, as well as the more detailed assessment of benefits and risks of being labeled as "a gifted person" on a scale from 1 to 10. To achieve the goal of the study, we calculated an integral score of the attitude to one's own giftedness as a sum of scores characterizing ideas

about benefits, direct and reflected self-assessment of giftedness (with a positive sign), as well as the risks of giftedness (with a negative sign).

The program and protocol of the study were reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Russian State Pedagogical University. A.I. Herzen (IRB00011060 Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia IRB#1, Protocol No. 5 of 01/28/2019).

Results and Discussion

Several models of the subjective factors of the well-being of gifted adolescents were tested. To refine the theoretical model and check its compliance, the following indexes were used: the χ^2 test statistic, the comparative fit index (CFI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the goodness-of-fit index (GFI). The best fitted model has paths between the level of achievements and attitudes towards one’s own giftedness, and indicators of the self-concept. Gender and age were excluded from this model. There is no path between the personal anxiety and psychological well-being (Fig. 1). The fit indexes are acceptable, which allows us to consider the model as fitting the data

($\chi^2=11.4$; $df=8$; $CFI=0.99$; $GFI=0.99$; $RMSEA=0.03$).

According to the obtained model, subjectivity ($p<0.001$), resilience ($p<0.001$), and self-efficacy ($p<0.001$) have a direct effect on the psychological well-being of the adolescents. At the same time, the attitude towards one’s own giftedness ($p<0.01$) mediates the relation between the level of achievements ($p<0.01$), subjectivity ($p<0.001$), and hardiness ($p<0.01$) on the one hand, and the psychological wellbeing of gifted adolescents on the other. Resilience (1.26) and subjectivity (0.61) have the greatest impact on the psychological well-being of gifted adolescents. Anxiety does not directly affect the psychological well-being of adolescents, but covariates with subjectivity, resilience, and self-efficacy (the values of the coefficients are negative). The indicators of the “Frankfurt self-concept scales”, as well as the variables “fields in which giftedness is manifested” and “gender” were originally included in the analysis as independent variables, but were excluded from the final model ($p> 0.05$).

Thus, the theoretical model illustrating the subjective factors of the psychological well-being of gifted adolescents was only

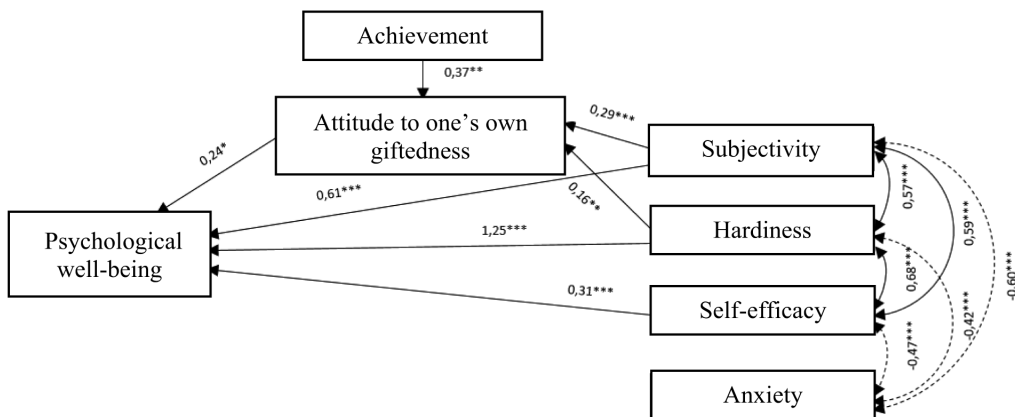


Fig. 1. The model of the subjective predictors of the psychological well-being of gifted adolescents

partially confirmed. The more intrapersonal resources gifted adolescents have that allow them to effectively cope with stressful situations (hardiness, self-efficacy, subjectivity), the more pronounced is the orientation towards active actions in difficult life situations, the openness to new experience, the orientation towards achieving high results, the more developed is the conscious and active attitude to the world and to oneself, the ability to set goals, the desire for self-development, the readiness to take responsibility for the life choices made, the higher is the confidence in oneself and one's success, the acceptance of one's own giftedness, the higher is their psychological well-being manifested in the orientation to positive interaction with others and the maximum implementation of personal resources. These relationships are present regardless of the type of activity in which adolescents show signs of giftedness, which was discussed in our previous studies [5;6] and corresponds to the described relationships between these variables in general [8; 12; 36; 37], and specifically in adolescence [33].

However, it should be noted that this study reveals the complex nature of the relationship between the psychological well-being and subjective variables in the sample of gifted adolescents. Hardiness and subjectivity have both direct and indirect (through attitudes towards one's own giftedness) effect on the psychological well-being of gifted adolescents. On the one hand, the revealed role of these variables can be explained by the age specifics of late adolescence, when the orientation towards a conscious, active approach to the development of the personality, success, and the transformation of the environment is actualized by the life choice associated with the graduation from school. Mediating the relationship between subjectivity, resil-

ience, and psychological well-being, the attitude towards one's own giftedness plays a special role: when it is positive, it enhances the described relationships, strengthening the psychological well-being of adolescents with a high level of resilience and self-efficacy. We consider the attitude towards one's own giftedness to be a particular phenomenon that characterizes the personality of gifted adolescents, which should be studied as a predictor of their well-being in more detail.

Anxiety plays an important role in understanding the interrelations between the psychological well-being, subjectivity, resilience, and self-efficacy of gifted adolescents. In anxiety structure, personal perceptions of one's own future hold a specific place. According to the estimated model, anxiety covariates with resilience, self-efficacy, and subjectivity: the less anxious is a person about his own prospects, the higher is his self-confidence, the readiness to persevere in solving the tasks and achieving goals, the orientation to active actions in difficult situations.

Our model suggests that the attitude towards one's own giftedness is determined by the achievements, which demonstrates the role of external assessment in shaping the self-attitude towards giftedness. In the presence of high achievements, supported by appropriate awards, adolescents focus on the positive aspects of giftedness, strengthen their self-confidence, and increase their motivation for achievements. While the level of achievement is not directly related to the psychological well-being of adolescents, as was confirmed by our previous results [7], it emphasizes the importance of psychological support for gifted adolescents, aimed at forming a constructive self-attitude as a gifted person.

At the same time, some components of the theoretical model were not verified

during its empirical testing. In particular, the absence of indicators that characterize the self-concept of gifted adolescents in the final model deserves special attention. Our previous studies [6], as well as the studies of other authors [15; 16; 19; 23; 27; 35] showed that the psychological well-being and self-concept of gifted adolescents are quite closely related to each other. However, the inclusion of these variables worsened the model fit to a model rejection level. This might be explained by the fact that the other variables included in the model were total scores, corresponding to the personal characteristics in general and having a larger range of possible values than specific scales characterizing individual aspects of the self-concept. In this regard, it seems promising to further develop the theoretical model proposed by us earlier with methods of psychodiagnostics to estimate the total indicators characterizing the self-concept of the adolescents. In addition, the independent variable 'field in which signs of giftedness are manifested' was also not included in the final model. This fact can be explained by the predominance of interrelations between the psychological well-being and its subjective factors common to all gifted adolescents, which do not depend on the specifics of the activity in which the adolescent is involved. At the same time, our previous studies [5; 7] indicate that the psychological well-being of adolescents who are gifted in various types of activities, and the characteristics of their personality, which are considered in our study as its subjective factors, demonstrate a qualitative difference in the values of individual scales while remaining close on the total scores. This issue is a challenge of constructing a model introducing the scores obtained on individual scales. Also, this variable was

not included in the final model due to the uneven size of subgroups of adolescents with giftedness in different fields. The absence of the "gender" factor in the final model is explained by the gender-specific issues of activities in which adolescents are gifted. The psychological well-being of gifted adolescents involved in gender-associated and non-associated activities remain a topic for future research.

As for the limitations of the presented model, the outlier cases excluded from the final analysis may constitute a special group where the correlations between the psychological well-being and other variables differ from those presented in the estimated model. In addition, when constructing the model, mainly total scores of the psychological well-being of adolescents and their subjective resources were introduced, without considering their content features. The level of achievement in a field of giftedness was estimated according to self-reports and was not confirmed by official documents. The uneven size of the subgroups of adolescents who are gifted in different fields, already mentioned above, as well as different organizational conditions for the education of adolescents who took part in the study, could also have influenced the final results.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the estimated structural model, which describes the subjective factors of the psychological well-being in gifted adolescents, has an acceptable explanatory power and describes the relationship between the components included into it. It is important to consider the predictive capabilities of the model when organizing psychological and pedagogical work with gifted children and adolescents. The efforts of teachers and psychologists should be aimed at the building and developing

resilience, subjectivity, self-efficacy of gifted adolescents, forming positive attitude towards their own abilities, supporting adolescents who do not demonstrate high achievements for one reason or another. The results obtained in our study confirm

that subjective factors of supporting and strengthening the psychological well-being of gifted adolescents with consideration of the peculiarities of the social situation of their personal development is a topic for future research.

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