

## Research Paper

## The Course of Life Concept Development in Students Inclined to Deviant Behavior



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## ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** Deviant behavior has become a global issue of great concern and requires immediate attention. This study aimed to investigate the course of life concept development in students inclined to deviant behavior.

**Methods:** This experimental and empirical study was performed by a structural correlation as a quasi-experimental design in 2019-2020. The study setting was the Belgorod National State Research University, and the target population was the students aged 18 to 21 who tended toward deviant behavior. The samples were selected based on real groups' involvement and polar groups' isolation and comparison. The variables were the correctional program aimed at developing personal notions about the life path in students and the qualities that make up the content of the "temporary" and "value-semantic" aspects of the subjects' notions about the life path. Data on deviant behavior were collected using the questionnaires of a tendency to deviant behavior and the deviant behavior questionnaire of Robinson and Bennett. The structural equation modeling, partial least squares method, and SmartPLS software were used to validate the original model and test the hypotheses.

**Results:** Only 27% of students tended towards deviant behavior (group 1), and 73% were normal students (group 2). The students in group 1 had a higher tendency to nonconformism ( $P \leq 0.01$ ), moderate inclination to addictive behavior ( $P \leq 0.01$ ), and more aggressive tendencies ( $P \leq 0.01$ ) compared to the students in group 2. Also, in the students in group 1, "present" and "past" times were described as joyful, light, real, close, calm, voluminous, bright, and active, but "future" time as passive, motionless, empty, little, flat, petty and narrow. In terms of value-semantic measurement of students' life concepts, the students prone to deviant behavior did not have meaningful purposes in the future that give life meaningfulness and direction.

**Discussion:** Based on the study findings, a higher tendency for nonconformism, addictive behavior, and aggressive tendencies was found in the students with a tendency to deviant behavior. Also, these students lack meaningful purposes in the future that give life meaning and direction, and they live for today or yesterday. It is suggested that the correctional and development work under a program aimed at the personal course of life concepts development reduce the students' inclination to deviant behavior.

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## Highlights

- In the students with a tendency to deviant behavior, a higher tendency to nonconformism, addictive behavior, and aggressive tendencies were found.
- Students prone to deviant behavior lack meaningful purposes in the future that give life meaning and direction. To a greater extent, they live for today or yesterday.
- A psychological correction program aims to develop personal notions about the life path, and appropriate corrective and developmental work will reduce the students' inclination to deviant behavior.

## Plain Language Summary

Recently, students' inclination to deviant behavior should be seriously considered because it has become a significant concern worldwide. This critical issue has not been documented. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the course of life concept development in students inclined to deviant behavior. Comparing the students with a tendency to deviant behavior and normal students, a higher tendency to nonconformism, moderate inclination to addictive behavior, and more aggressive tendencies were observed in the students with a tendency to deviant behavior. In terms of value-semantic measurement of students' life concepts, the students prone to deviant behavior lack meaningful purposes in the future that give life meaning and direction. The results showed that the correctional and development work under a program aimed at the personal course of life concepts development reduces the students' inclination to deviant behavior.

### 1. Introduction

Rapid and fundamental changes occur worldwide in the social reality and worldview at the social and individual consciousness level. It is assumed that mankind has exhausted the resources of its former existence [1-5]. Reality itself is becoming more and more deviant. Therefore, many scientists assume that reality should be studied instead of manifesting the traditional interest in rationality [6-10].

The person's understanding of his or her life path can be considered one of the tasks solved during personality development at the student age [11, 12]. A holistic view of life prospects can determine the harmonious and normative development of a student's personality [13, 14]. In the conception of the life path theory founder, S.L. Rubinshtejn, this notion is treated as the concrete personality formation history, where, in addition to external social factors, a significant place is taken by the individual's activity aimed at the individual's living space transforming [15, 16]. The subjective picture of the life path reflects the social development stages, and, in turn, the presence of a mature, holistic picture of the future and its stages characterizes a person as a subject of his or her life [7]. Furthermore, the person's life path problem understanding in psychology is supplemented in the life prospects category as a future life path, that

is, a holistic picture of "the future in a complex and contradictory interrelation of programmed and expected events with which a person associates his social value and individual meaning of life" [17].

Youth and students are the most sensitive group to social and psychological changes in modern society that actualizes the problem of correcting the tendency to deviant behavior in students [18, 19]. The phenomenon of deviance occupies a central position in social science topics. It may be linked to morality, social order, and social inequality. Its genesis has been traced to the 1940s and is credited to Merton (1938) and Sellin (1938), scholars of the Chicago School of Sociology. They defined deviance as a topic of analysis of socio-criminogenesis, a field that encompasses research in criminology, psychiatry, psychology, and sociology [20-24]. Despite the many works devoted to the deviations problem, this issue still needs to be more studied among the students inclined toward deviant behavior. Considering the qualitative analysis of the students' subjective notions about their life and readiness to act as the subject of life, it is possible to conduct correctional and preventive work with their tendency to deviation. Since students' inclination to deviant behavior has become a significant concern worldwide. Also, despite the studies in this field, no study has investigated the course of life concept development in students inclined toward deviant behavior; this study

was performed to investigate the course of life concept development in students inclined to deviant behavior.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### Study participants

This study investigated the course of life concepts in students with a tendency to deviant behaviors. In the student sample, there is always a fraction of subjects with unformed “temporal” and “value-semantic” aspects of the course of life concepts that determine their tendency to deviant behavior. Such subjects’ inclusion in the group psychological correction program aimed at developing personal notions about the life path and appropriate correctional and developmental work will promote the reducing students’ inclination to deviant behavior. The study population was formed after asking teachers and parents to identify students with obviously aberrant behavior. The interviews were conducted with teachers and parents of students that exhibited deviant behavior. The students were asked to participate in an anonymous survey designed explicitly for this study.

The study was conducted at the Belgorod National State Research University during the 2019-2020 academic years. Considering the ethical issue of this study, the data were provided by Belgorod National State Research University and supervised using without the name of patients.

### Study design

For this empirical and experimental research, a set of traditional methods and classes of techniques were used, determined by theoretical provisions, subject matter, tasks, and study plan. In this study, observation, conversation, experiment, questionnaire, and test methods were used.

This experimental and empirical study was conducted in two stages. At the first stage of the study, 149 students of the Faculty of Psychology and the Faculty of Physical Culture aged 18 to 21 years were examined. In the sample formation and the choice of the experimental study design, the following strategies were used: real groups’ involvement and polar groups’ isolation and comparison. To perform this experiment, the structural correlation was used as a quasi-experimental design.

To determine the tendency toward deviant behavior, the following tools were used to achieve this goal: the questionnaire of a tendency to deviant behavior, its validity and reliability were confirmed in the study of Akhmetzyanova et al. [25], and the deviant behavior questionnaire of Robinson and Bennett that its validity and reliability was confirmed by them [26]. The Cronbach  $\alpha$  coefficient for each of the questionnaires was more than 0.7 for all variables, so the reliability of the data collection tool was acceptable. The semantic time difference was determined by changing the modified method of Vasserman et al. [27], the meaning of life-based on the study of Fegg et al. [28].

The second stage of the study is a forming experiment. The experimental and control groups of 20 people were selected from a group of students with the deviant behavior tendency formed at the first stage of the study, numbering 40 people (the distribution of subjects in groups was performed randomly). The experimental outline of the study is for two nonequivalent groups with testing before and after the influence. An independent variable was the correction program aimed at developing personal notions about the life path of students. The dependent variable is the qualities that make up the content of the “temporary” and “value-semantic” aspects of the subjects’ notions about the life path.

In this research, structural equation modeling with the help of the SmartPLS (partial least squares) method has been used to validate the original model and test the hypotheses. Statistical processing of the obtained data was conducted using the statistical system SPSS v. 16.0.  $P < 0.05$  was considered statistically significant.

## 3. Results

At the first stage of the study, using the method of “determining the tendency to deviant behavior” by A.N. Orel, we found that only 27% of students in the sample are characterized by a tendency to deviant behavior (group 1), and 73% are normal students (group 2). Figure 1 shows a detailed description of students’ inclination to one or another deviation.

Regarding the analysis results, it was revealed that on the scale of «propensity to overcome norms and rules,” the students prone to deviation presented a tendency to nonconformism (55.8 points), and ordinary students who were not prone to deviation had less tendency to nonconformism (42.1 points). The differences were statistically significant between subgroups of deviant and ordinary students ( $P \leq 0.01$ ).

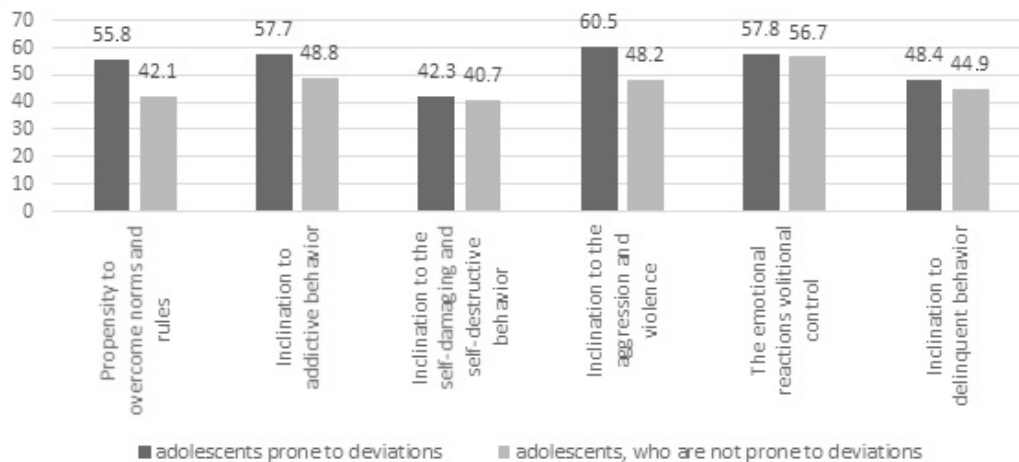


Figure 1. Indicators of students' predisposition to deviation invariants (in points, average values)

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On the scale of "inclination to addictive behavior," the following results were obtained. Students of group 1 have a moderate inclination to addictive behavior (57.7 points), while normal students got 48.8 points. Differences were significant ( $P \leq 0.01$ ).

On the scale of "inclination to the self-damaging and self-destructive behavior" in students, results within the normal range are revealed. Students in group 1 inclined the self-damaging and self-destructive behavior (42.3 points), and those in group 2 inclined the self-damaging and self-destructive behavior by 40.7 points. No significant difference was observed between group 1 and group 2 in this regard ( $P > 0.05$ ).

Aggressive tendencies were revealed among students of group 1 (60.5 points), who are characterized by an aggressive orientation in communication with a tendency to solve problems through violence, a tendency to use the humiliation of a communication partner as a means of stabilizing self-esteem, and the presence of sadistic tendencies. This behavior was observed less in the students of group 2 (48.2 points) ( $P \leq 0.01$ ). It is important to note that some aggressiveness is a normal feature of the student age.

There was no significant difference between group 1 and group 2 in terms of delinquent trends among students (48.4 points for students prone to deviant behavior and 44.9 for non-prone students) ( $P > 0.05$ ).

The analysis of the course of life concepts in students inclined to deviant behavior showed the following results. In the course of studying the experiences of the past, present, and future time by students who are prone to deviant behavior, we found that, when

evaluating the past time, positive indicators were obtained on factors of "time activity" (an average value past time=3), "emotional tone of time" (an average value past time=2), "time value" (an average value past time=1), "time structure" (an average value past time=1), "the sense of time" (an average value past time=1), indicating that the past time for such students is positive. Such time can be joyful, light, real, close, calm, voluminous, bright, and active.

When assessing the "present" time, positive indicators were obtained on factors of "time activity" (an average value present time=4), "emotional tone of time" (an average value present time=6), "time value" (an average value present time=3), "time structure" (an average value present time=3), "the sense of time" (an average value present time=1), indicating that the present time can be described as joyful, light, voluminous and bright.

When assessing the "future" time, negative indicators were obtained on factors of "time activity" (an average value present time=-5), "emotional tone of time" (an average value present time=-5), "time value" (an average value present time=-4), "time structure" (an average value present time=-3), "the sense of time" (an average value present time=-2), indicating that students see the future time as passive, motionless, empty, little, flat, petty and narrow.

The value-semantic measurement of students' life concepts was investigated using the meaning of life evaluation test (MLE, D.A. Leont'ev). Students prone to deviant behavior do not have meaningful purposes in the future that give life meaning and direction. To a greater extent, they live for today or yesterday. Stu-

dents are subjectively dissatisfied with their life period and believe that they are not self-realized enough (life score is 24 points). They hardly believe in their strengths and the ability to control the events of their lives (locus-self is 20.4 points).

#### 4. Discussion

To the best of our knowledge, this study was the first study in the field of students' deviant behavior which has evaluated the course of life concept development among the students inclined toward deviant behavior. Many studies in this field have assessed the causes and types of deviant behavior among the youth inclined to deviant behavior. In his study, Rebellow determined the factors influencing deviant behavior among adolescents and reported that features like the educational system, family and parenting, peers, and social support system play a pivotal role in influencing the behaviors of the adolescents [29]. Also, Dullas et al. found that personality trait-agreeableness is the best predictor of deviant behavior among adolescents [24]. Nevertheless, no study has evaluated the course of life concept development among the students inclined to deviant behavior. Therefore, since there was no similar study to our research for comparison, the results of the current study were presented.

The present study's data indicate that the future time is regarded negatively by such students. Lack of hope, low behavioral activity, and life activity motivation can contribute to the depressive states development. Sometimes, time seems sad, dingy, alarming, gray, and dark. Such "time" can be described as passive, motionless, empty, little, flat, petty, and narrow. Such students see the present and past time as joyful, light, real, close, calm, voluminous, bright, and active. Subject groups prone to deviant behavior live for today or yesterday. Their behavior is characterized by the absence of purposes for the future, which gives life meaning, direction, and temporal perspective. They feel satisfied with their life in the present, the whole meaning of which is given by memories of the past. They do not believe in their power to control the events of their lives. They believe that they lack sufficient freedom of choice. They think that life cannot be consciously controlled and it is pointless to make any plans for the future. This sample is more focused on the past or present times. Subjects have conformal attitudes, and they tend to follow stereotypes and generally accepted norms of behavior. They are not inclined to escape tendencies, they do not accept violence as a means of solving problems, and they can control the emotional sphere.

Our results confirm the need to develop a program for correcting notions about the life path of students inclined to deviant behavior.

After completing the course of group corrective training in the experimental group, we conducted a control examination of the student's life path notions temporal component in both groups. In the experimental group, on the factor of "emotional tone of time," significant changes were obtained in assessing the past, present, and future time. This finding indicates that students have changed their emotional attitude to all lifetime intervals, which causes acceptance and more constructive planning of their life paths.

In the experimental group, on the factor of "time value," significant changes were obtained in the present time assessment. After the experimental influence, the subjects' notions about life in the present have become more favorable: time is perceived as longer, large, voluminous, wide, and deep. In addition, significant differences were determined on "the sense of time" factor. After the corrective influence, the students' notions about the perceptibility of life in the present have become more favorable: time is perceived as more real, close, and open.

Assessment of the value-semantic measurement of life concepts after the correction program showed the following changes. After an experimental impact, it was detected that in the "result" and "self-control locus" scales parameters, significant changes had taken place. After the training group work, students have begun to experience greater satisfaction from the "lived period of life," and their perception of themselves as strong personality have strengthened.

On the "life conciseness" scale indicators, higher values were in the experimental group (103.5 average points), and in the control group, they were 103.2 points. On the "purposes" scale, there were no statistically significant differences (the average value in the experimental group was 31.3 average points and in the control group -31). On the "process" scale, higher values were revealed in the control group, -31.3 average points, and the experimental group, -30.1. On the "locus of control-life" scale, there were no statistically significant differences (average values in the experimental group are 31 points and in the control group -30.9).

The next step was analyzing changes in the student's inclination to deviant behavior intensity. According to the results of the empirical test data processing after exposure, students revealed minor changes on all scales. Note that the experimental group is characterized by unidirectional changes to reduce the intensity of the value. In the control group, such changes are insignificant in separate scales but generally remain

unchanged. Significant differences were detected on the parameters of the scales: “inclination to the self-damaging and self-destructive behavior” and “inclination to the aggression and violence.” Thus, we can state the presence of a tendency to reduce the deviant behavior risk, which is confirmed (although partially) by the final testing results.

The strength of the present study was that it is the first study in the field of students’ deviant behavior, which has evaluated the course of life concept development among the students inclined to deviant behavior. The study findings can be helpful for future studies in this regard. The present study’s limitation is the low sample size. It is recommended that future studies be performed on the larger population.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the study findings, a higher tendency to nonconformism, addictive behavior, and aggressive tendencies were found in the students with a tendency to deviant behavior. Also, these students lack meaningful purposes in the future that give life meaning and direction, and they live for today or yesterday. It is suggested that the correctional and development work under a program aimed at the personal course of life concepts development reduce the students’ inclination to deviant behavior.

## Ethical Considerations

### Compliance with ethical guidelines

All ethical principles were considered in this article. The participants were informed of the purpose of the research and its implementation stages. They were also assured about the confidentiality of their information and were free to leave the study whenever they wished, and if desired, the research results would be available to them. The signed informed consent was obtained from all participants.

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### Authors' contributions

All authors equally contributed to preparing this article.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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