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**Research article**

# Features of the communicative behavior of the personality of adolescents with different levels of suicidal risks when reality changes

**Anzhelika I. Luchinkina[1]✉, Ekaterina S. Rudenko[2]**
[1, 2] Crimean Engineering and Pedagogical University named after Fevzi Yakubov, Simferopol, Russian Federation

✉ a.luchinkina@kipu-rc.ru

**Abstract**: **Introduction**. The article analyzes the features of communicative behavior in the virtual space of adolescents with different levels of suicidal risk. For the first time, the study of the communicative behavior of the personality of adolescents with a high level of suicidal risks in real space when they are in social networks was carried out. Most studies prove that being in a virtual environment harms personal development. On account adolescence is a period of personality formation and is characterized by frequent mood swings, maximalism, and a desire to hold centre stage in the reference group, teenagers often find themselves in virtual space, thereby losing interest and communication skills in the real world, which leads to suicidal behavior. **Methods**. The study was conducted in real and virtual spaces. There 106 adolescents aged 14-16 took part in the ascertaining experiment. To identify groups of adolescents with increased suicidal risk in real space, the authors used the questionnaire of suicidal risk modified by T. N. Razuvaeva. To identify groups of adolescents with suicidal risk in virtual space, the authors used their own modification of the questionnaire by T. N. Razuvaeva. To study the communicative behavior of adolescents, the authors used the methods "Assessment of the level of sociability" (V. F. Ryakhovskii test) and "Diagnosis of communicative attitude" (by V. V. Boiko). **Results and discussion**. The authors identified changes in suicidal risk in adolescents when changing real space to virtual. They also analyzed the changes in the communicative characteristics of adolescents. It has been established that in the virtual space, the level of cruelty increases in most adolescents, and the vision of the environment acquires a negative connotation, which increases the level of suicidal risk among adolescents.

**Keywords**: adolescents, suicidal behavior, suicidal risk, communicative behavior, real space, virtual space, personality, internet communication, antisuicidal factor, communicative attitude

## Highlights:

➢ virtual communication is a special form of interaction between people that contributes to meeting their needs in the Internet space;

➢ the markers of virtual communication are communicative attitudes regarding communication in the Internet space, tolerance, communicative control, personal communication experience; virtual space catalyzes suicidal risk of adolescents;

➢ according to the subjective feelings of adolescents in the virtual space, the value of the anti-suicidal factor decreases, the level of open cruelty increases, and negative personal experience, grumbling, and veiled cruelty dominate among the communicative attitudes.

## Introduction

Teenage suicides in Russia over the past few years have been one of the leading causes of death at this age. Due to their lack of social experience, adolescents often find a radical solution to their problems – suicide. It should also be considered that the prevalence of adolescent depression has exceeded the 40% barrier – this can also lead to suicidal attempts.

Psychological analysis of the problem of suicidal behavior in adolescents has shown the need to study the communicative characteristics of this age group. Especially relevant is the study of communications during the transition of a teenager from the real to the virtual space, where a person has a large range of discretion and enjoys the anonymity, impunity, lack of control, and lack of boundaries inherent in the Internet space.

Uncontrolled access of adolescents to social networks, an imperfect regulatory framework for activities in the Internet space, and personal cognitive errors can lead to disruption of the virtual communication process and, as a consequence, to manifestations of suicidal behavior.

*The purpose of the article* is the peculiarities of the communicative behavior of the adolescents' personalities with different levels of suicidal risk when changing reality.

*The objects of an article:*
1. Identify groups of adolescents with increased suicidal risks in real space.
2. To analyze the dynamics of suicidal risks of adolescents during the transition from the real to the virtual space.
3. To analyze the peculiarities of changes in the communicative characteristics of adolescents when changing reality.

### *Review of publications on the research problem*

In the scientific literature, the earliest and most common definition of the phenomenon of virtual communication is the definition from the point of a technological approach. In this case, the emphasis is on actively developing modern technologies, information transfer speed and user convenience (Nazarchuk, 2008; Baeva, 2013, 2014; Bodalev, 2011; Mironov, 2006; Rassolov, 2009; Zhilkin, 2003; Karabin, 2009; Shcherbakov, 2008; Borisov, 2012; Khabermas, 2000; Yang, 2000; Kastel's, 2004; Kheizinga, 2011; Sokolov, 2003; Sobkin & Fedotova, 2021). But, despite

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the prevalence of this approach, it cannot satisfy the needs of the individual in communication, building warm relationships, as well as in recreation and self-expression.

Russian authors such as I. V. Mikhalets, E. P. Belinskaya, Yu. D. Babaeva, A. E. Voiskunskii, A. I. Luchinkina, I. S. Luchinkina, A.V. Chistyakov, G. U. Soldatova, A. S. Tkhostov, etc. also studied virtual communication in psychology.

Thus, I. V. Mikhalets in his research considers "virtual communication" as a reality created with the help of digital technologies and creates a world of illusions and imitation of reality. The Internet space, in contrast to face-to-face interaction, according to the author, has several advantages, such as: the regularity of creating new acquaintances indefinitely; the absence of the need to take care of their appearance; concern about the impression you make on another person – which explains the growing popularity and demand for visiting the virtual space (Mikhalets, Volchkova, Filippova, 2016).

In the studies of E. I. Rasskazova, A. Sh. Tkhostov, attention is focused on predictors of delinquent behavior of a person in virtual space (Rasskazova et al., 2019).

G. U. Soldatova's works analyze the risks of digital socialization of Russian teenagers (Soldatova & Yarmina, 2019; Soldatova et al., 2020).

In her research, E. P. Belinskaya considers Internet communication as the creation of an unlimited number of variants of her own Self, which indicates the search for a network identity and the possibility of "games" with emotional states. The author notes that Internet communications have become a part of most types of person's professional activity, which form new self-organizational requirements for a person and provide an opportunity for gamification. Internet communication has a significant impact on the thinking and worldview of the individual, providing wide access to the norms and values of users and broadcasting models of social behavior (Belinskaya, 2002).

Yu. D. Babayeva and A. E. Voiskunskii consider virtual communication as an alternative to actual communication. In this case, the user of virtual communication has the opportunity not only to hide his feelings behind iconic forms of messages but also to simulate them, which gives these forms of communication great demand (Babaeva et al., 1986; Voiskunskii, 2010).

A. I. Luchinkina notes that the analysis of research on the problem of the difference between virtual communication and communication in an actual environment allows us to identify the following characteristics: polyphony, multiculturalism; hypertext and interactive Network capabilities; anonymity and distance; substitutive nature of communication (Luchinkina, 2012).

I. S. Luchinkina considers communication as a set and implementation of certain norms of an individual or a group of personalities in the process of interaction, which also contains an understanding of news content, which affects the communicative behavior of Internet users, including their perception and sharing of this information (Luchinkina, 2019).

We define virtual communication as a form of interaction between people that contributes to meeting various needs in the Internet space.

It should be noted that there are very few studies on virtual communication among adolescents with different levels of suicide risks. The works of A. I. Luchinkina are focused on the fact that the suicidal personality of a teenager in the virtual space is based on the properties and characteristics of an actual person and includes: beliefs and the level of instrumental competence of the individual; motives for being online; personal mythologems of adolescents (Luchinkina, 2017).

D. S. Isaev and K. V. Sherstnev, in their research, note that the suicidal behavior of adolescents is explained by the fact that they do not cope with the requirements and norms that society dictates

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to them, and they often do not keep up with the pace of life. In this regard, adolescents have a sense of personal inconsistency, which pushes them to suicidal behavior (Isaev, Sherstnev, 2000).

A. I. Luchinkina and I. S. Luchinkina noted that the leading cognitive distortions characteristic of suicides in virtual space at the group level are: framing, confirmation preconception, distortion in the assessment of homogeneity of members of another group, and at the personal level, the most pronounced are dichotomous thinking and catastrophization (Luchinkina, Luchinkina, 2019).

In addition, the researchers note that the conditions of unavailability of visual contact expand the possibilities of emotional response. For this reason, the choice of written forms of communication pursues the goal of separating the actual experience from the emotional response transmitted to the partner. This strategy of emotional behavior actualizes the search for various ways of expressing emotions that meet the goals and objectives of communication (Luchinkina, Luchinkina, 2019).

Virtual communication provides an opportunity to satisfy the desire to communicate, whatever the territorial remoteness of users and their physical and emotional situation. When balancing the forms of communication (actual and virtual), the communicator gets the opportunity to increase the personal circle of communication and preserve the emotional component of social interaction.

From our point of view, the model of trajectories of suicidal behavior development in adolescence by J. Bridge deserves special attention. The scientist identified factors of pre-pubertal and pubertal stages of suicidal behavior (Bridge et al., 2006).

Researchers place attention on the fact that the elements of communicative behavior of adolescents are their communicative attitudes, formed through the experience of interaction, assessments, and feelings (Agosta, 2010; Davis, 2001).

Other scientists note that the markers of communication include the following: empathy as the ability to recognize the emotional state of another person in virtual space; reflection as a factor of understanding and recognizing one's own experiences based on reflection; tolerance as the ability to respect other people's boundaries; communicative control as a form of control over behavior in various life circumstances. Adolescents with high communicative control, according to M. Shneider, control themselves well enough in words and actions, are aware of the rules and norms of behavior, and try to adhere to them (Efimova, 2012; Goncharova, 2016; Gippenreiter, Falikman, 2009; Gulevich, 2007; Shneider, 2002; Il'in, 2009).

Thus, virtual communication of teenagers includes communicative attitudes, tolerance, communicative control, and personal communication experience.

## Methods

The study was conducted in real and virtual spaces. The essential method is an ascertaining experiment. In the first stage, with the help of a questionnaire on suicidal risk (modified by T. N. Razuvaeva) (Razuvaeva, 1993), groups of adolescents with increased suicidal risk in real and virtual spaces were identified. In the second stage, the peculiarities of changes in the communicative characteristics of adolescents during the change of reality were studied through the methods "Assessment of the level of sociability" (V. F. Ryakhovsky test) and "Diagnostics of the communicative attitude" (V. V. Boyko) (Ryakhovsky, 2005; Boyko, 2002).

## Results and Discussion

The study revealed that the level of suicidal risk in adolescents increases with the transition from reality to virtual space. When switching to virtual communication, the level of open cruelty

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increases in most of the respondents, and the attitude toward negative personal experiences, grumbling, and veiled cruelty significantly changes.

The study identified groups of adolescents with different levels of severity of suicide risks in real and virtual spaces. In real space, by virtue of the clustering procedure, 4 groups of respondents were identified (Fig. 1): two groups with a low level of antisuicidal factor and two groups with a high level of the antisuicidal factor.

**Figure 1**

*Distribution by groups with different levels of severity of suicidal risk in real space*
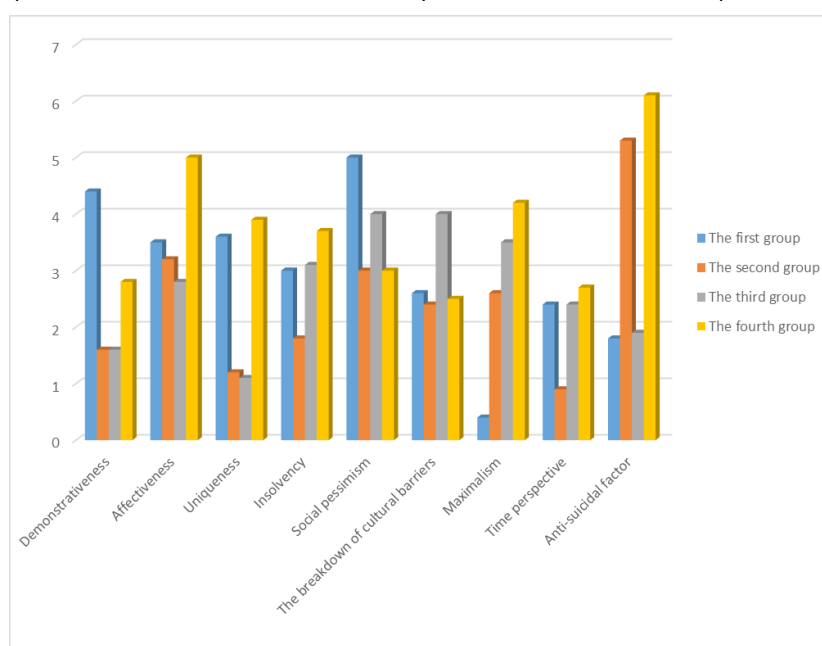


The first group of respondents (9 people) is adolescents with a low value of the anti-suicidal factor (demonstrative suiciders). They tend to be suicidal. These adolescents are demonstrative (the level of demonstrativeness is above average). It is expressed through actions performed in order to attract the attention of others (from loud laughter to demonstration of deep sadness). They tend to exaggerate social problems: "they don't like me", "friends should be different" (the level of social pessimism is high). More often they perceive themselves as a unique person.

The second group (66 people) is adolescents with a value of the anti-suicidal factor above the average. These adolescents are not prone to suicidal behavior. They have average and below average values on the following scales: "demonstrativeness", "affectiveness", "uniqueness", "insolvency", "social pessimism", "the breakdown of cultural barriers", "maximalism", "time perspective", "anti-suicidal factor".

It is noteworthy that there is more than 57% of adolescents with such indicators in the sample.

The third group (12 people) is silent suiciders. They are adolescents with a low value of the anti-suicidal factor. They tend to be suicidal. Unlike adolescents of the first group, they are not prone to affects and demonstrative behavior, nor consider themselves as "unique". However,

they have a negative concept of the world around them. The group is prone to the cultivation of death: they collect various stories about suicide; they participate in groups where there is a death cult. The adolescents tend to be maximalist.

The fourth group (19 people) is adolescents with a high value of the anti-suicidal factor. They are prone to affect, up to the loss of control over emotions. They have confidence in their uniqueness. Maximalism is common for them. At the same time, their attitude toward the surrounding world is favorable. They try to comply with norms and rules of public life.

To identify the tendency to suicidal behavior in the virtual space, the same questionnaire was conducted, but with the modified instruction: "All the statements proposed to you relate to your life and activities in the virtual space ...". It is important to note that the survey was conducted mainly in the virtual space through Google Forms. The results of the study are shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Distribution by groups with different levels of intensity of suicidal risks in the virtual space*
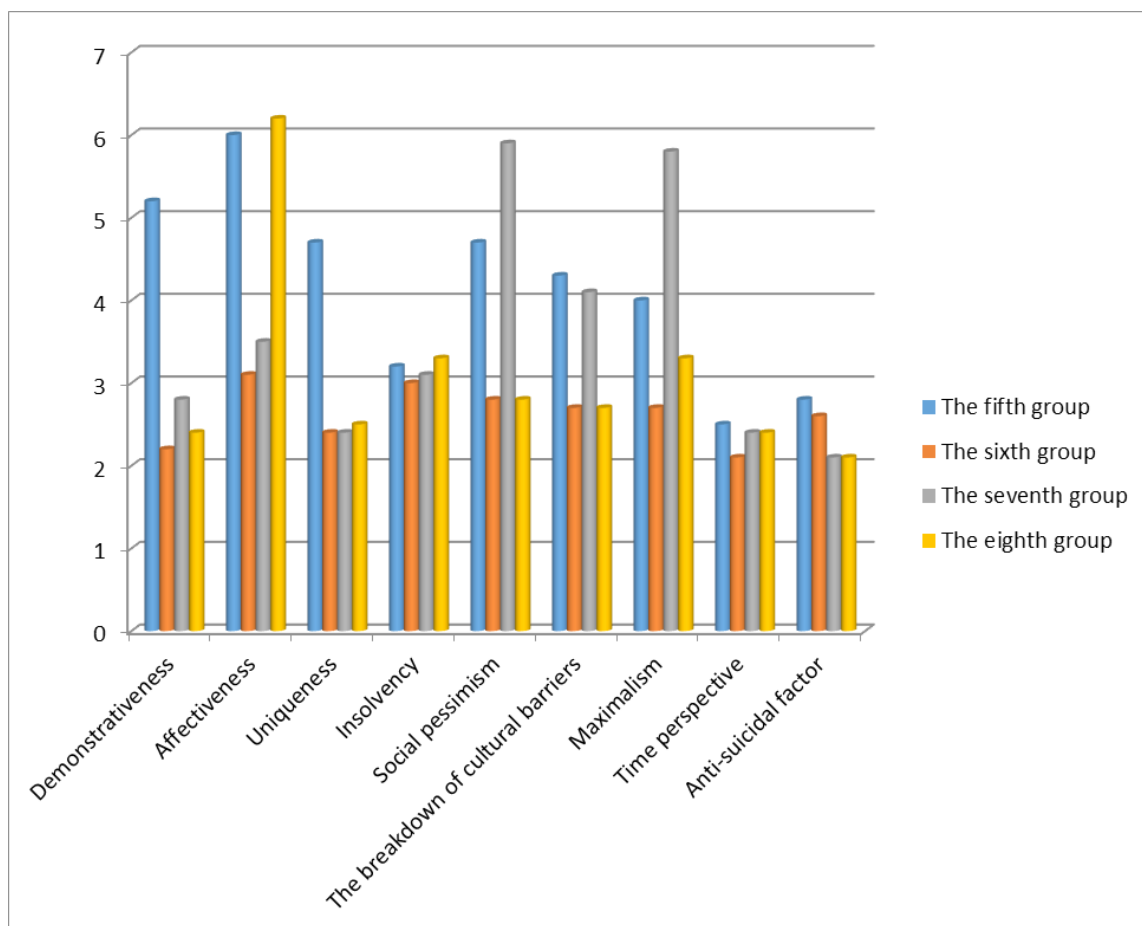


Due to the clustering procedure, 4 groups of respondents were also identified according to their levels of suicidal risk in the virtual space (Fig. 2). It bears mentioning that all respondents have the low level of the anti-suicidal factor in the virtual space.

The fifth group of respondents (8 people) is adolescents with a tendency to suicidal behavior in order to achieve understanding and attention from the environment. They try to achieve this through demonstrativeness and affectiveness, when emotions dominate intellectual abilities and the degree of control over the situation is significantly reduced (the level of demonstrativeness and affectiveness is above average). Adolescents of this group differ from other groups of respondents in the virtual space by perceiving themselves as an exceptionally unique and peculiar personality. This special aspect also contributes to suicidal behavior in the way that adolescents try to find a way out of a difficult situation not in a socially acceptable way, but by committing suicide (the level of uniqueness is close to the maximum value).

The sixth group (40 people) is adolescents with values below the average on all scales. This suggests that this group is not characterized by increased emotionality, faith in themselves as an exceptionally unique person. There is no inclination to maximalism and propaganda of the cult of death. There is no inclination to maximalism and propaganda of the cult of death. However, the average level of social pessimism explains this situation by the fact that such teenagers tend to be self-absorbed, to see the world around them in gloomy colors and obey their own negative concept of society. The low level of the anti-suicidal factor only emphasizes the ability of this group of adolescents in the virtual space to engage in suicidal behavior, since seeing the world in negative tones negatively affects life satisfaction and the ability to hope for the best. Generally, in moments of despair, such adolescents lose control over intellectual literacy, therefore emotions and negative internal attitudes begin to prevail (the level of affectiveness is below average, but it stands out at the level of other scales).

The seventh group (35 people) is adolescents who also have a negative concept of the world around them, however, unlike the respondents of the sixth group, there is an increased level of maximalism (above average). It indicates a tendency to extremes, which manifest themselves in any demands, beliefs and expectations. This special aspect, combined with social pessimism and a low level of the anti-suicidal factor, creates a high probability of committing suicidal behavior, since the "this way or no way" attitude is an auxiliary element in inflicting suicidal actions on oneself.

The eighth group (23 people) is adolescents who have identical indicators with the sixth group. These teenagers have a feature of losing control of their mind, when the emotional state comes to the fore, and the risk of inconsiderate actions increases. A negative view of the world, combined with affectivity, creates fertile ground for an adolescent to commit suicide. A low indicator of the anti-suicidal factor only makes it more likely that a teenager will take this action in relation to themselves.

The study revealed significant differences between the groups in some parameters of virtual communication (Fig. 3).

It was revealed that there are significant differences between the level of manifestation of communicative attitudes in groups with increased suicidal risks in real and virtual space.

In real space, in groups of adolescents with high suicidal risks, the most pronounced negative communicative attitude is open cruelty ($T_{emp} = 2,267$ at $\rho < 0,05$), in the 3rd group it is negative personal experience ($T_{emp} = 2,013$ at $\rho < 0,05$). At the same time, when switching to virtual communication, the level of open cruelty increases in the majority of respondents ($T_{emp} = 2,907$ at $\rho < 0,01$), the attitude towards negative personal experience ($T_{emp} = 2,117$ at $\rho < 0,05$), grumbling ($T_{emp} = 3,027$ at $\rho < 0,01$), veiled cruelty ($T_{emp} = 2,932$ at $\rho < 0,01$) changes significantly.

**Figure 3**

*Features of virtual communication in groups with different suicidal risks*
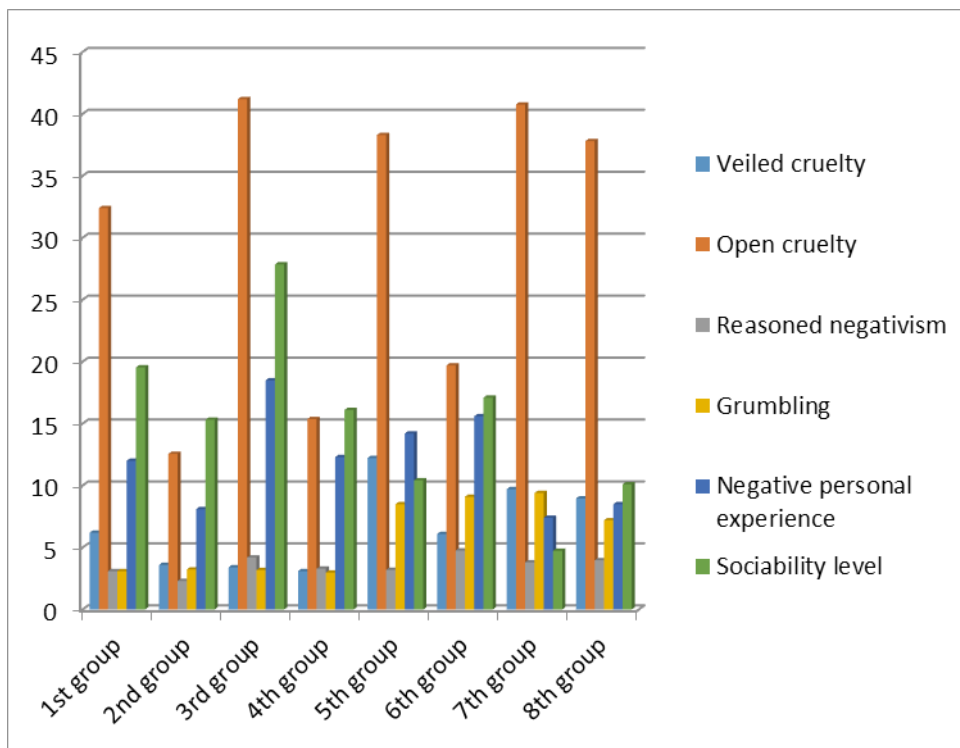


### *Conclusion*

1. The study made it possible to identify groups of adolescents with different suicidal risks in real and virtual space.

2. The active increasing in the tendency to suicidal risk in the virtual space has been empirically discovered.

3. In the course of virtual communication in adolescents, the value of the anti-suicidal factor decreases and the level of manifestation of individual negative communication attitudes increases: open cruelty, negative personal experience, grumbling, veiled cruelty.

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**Author contribution statement**
**Anzhelika Il'inichna Luchinkina** - the theoretical part of the article, the data analysis.
**Ekaterina Sergeevna Rudenko** – conducting the research, the literature review.

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## Author information

**Anzhelika Il'inichna Luchinkina** – Dr. Habil. Psychology, Associate Professor, first vice-rector, Academy of Vocational Training of the State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Education of the Republic of Crimea «Crimean Engineering and Pedagogical University named after Fevzi Yakubov», Simferopol, the Russian Federation; Scopus Author ID: 57221193516, SPIN-code: 7248-6625, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1687-9649; e-mail: a.luchinkina@kipu-rc.ru

**Ekaterina Sergeevna Rudenko** – methodologist, Academy of Vocational Training of the State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Education of the Republic of Crimea «Crimean Engineering and Pedagogical University named after Fevzi Yakubov», Simferopol, the Russian Federation; ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0148-2705; e-mail: ekaterina-kusova18@mail.ru

## Conflict of interest information

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.