

Meaning-in-Life Orientations in Adolescents with Different Cultural and Ethnic Characteristics

Elena M. Feshchenko^{1*}, Galina F. Golubeva¹, Valerii V. Spasennikov²,
Armine A. Khangaldyan¹

¹I. G. Petrovsky Bryansk State University, Bryansk, Russian Federation

²Bryansk State Technical University, Bryansk, Russian Federation

* Corresponding author: emfeshchenko@mail.ru

Abstract

Introduction. Socio-economic and political transformations change moral and ethical values directly. This study aims to identify the values and meanings in life in Armenian, Georgian, and Russian adolescents. **Methods.** The respondents (n = 69) were Russian, Armenian, and Georgian adolescents aged 14–15 years. Diagnostic tools: (1) the Meaning-in-Life Orientations test by D. A. Leontiev (MLO); (2) scale survey for Studying Ethnic Identity in Adolescents by O. L. Romanova; (3) the inventory for Studying the System of Life Meanings by V. Yu. Kotlyakov; and (4) the Cultural Value Orientations test by J. Townsend modified by L. G. Pochebut. Statistical analysis of the results was conducted using the Kruskal-Wallis H test. **Results.** The level of the sense of belonging to a specific ethnic group is higher in Georgian (85 %) adolescents, compared to Armenian (70 %) and Russian (60 %) adolescents. Georgian adolescents are more satisfied with self-realization, compared to Armenian and Russian adolescents. **Discussion.** The findings indicate that Georgian adolescents have a more pronounced indicator of meaningfulness of life, compared to Armenian and Russian adolescents. Russian adolescents emphasize the importance of using Russian in the communication process. Georgian adolescents see life as a means of self-realization and gaining a high social status more than Russian and Armenian adolescents. Compared to other groups, Armenian adolescents define meaning in life in terms of altruism and family well-being, while Russian adolescents are more interested in finding meaning in life and freedom. Georgian and Armenian adolescents are oriented toward the past, cultural and national traditions. Russian adolescents are

oriented toward the future, quick results in their activities, and are more characterized by the desire for freedom, autonomy, and material rewards.

Keywords

meaning-in-life orientations, cultural and ethnic characteristics, value- and meaning-related sphere, ethnic identity, ethnic socialization, civic and state identity, adolescence

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Introduction

The constant changes in the political, economic and social spheres of society make young people doubt about the validity of universally accepted values and encourage a change in perspective of the goals and meanings in life. Studying the issue of the orientation of adolescents toward their life purposes is one of the urgent issues since the social, economic and political changes taking place in the country and in the world directly change moral and ethical values. "The events that occurred after the collapse of the Soviet Union have demonstrated that modern consciousness is being transformed" (Demintseva, E., 2018, p. 3).

Cultural values have a sustainable and autonomous influence on society, determined by meaning-in-life orientations (Inglehart & Baker 2000). The intercultural differences of the young generation of migrants identified by the authors are part of the host country's national culture. National culture should be deliberately formed by educational institutions and the media. Problems relating to the teaching of migrant children, their socialization and adaptation to a foreign cultural environment, and the conflict-free coexistence of inter-ethnic interactions of adolescents with different cultural and ethnic characteristics are studied. The Crul & Shneider study (2009) points out that second and third generations of migrants tend to integrate and assimilate European culture traditions and values. A similar problem of full integration of first- and second-generation migrants into European countries has been the subject of a conceptual and empirical study by Fajth & Lessard-Ph (2022). Migrant children are more flexible and variable in choosing meaningful life values and can lose their ethnic identity (Levitt, 2009).

The interdisciplinary problem of studying the dynamics of change in attitudes, stereotypes, and meaning-in-life orientations in first-generation and subsequent generations of migrants and their children living in Russia has not received sufficient

attention. Few studies by Russian authors are related to the continuity of traditional family values and the social and financial well-being of immigrants and their children.

The attitudes of young immigrants to traditional family values, pre-marital romantic relationships under social networks and closer contact with representatives of the titular ethnic group have changed (Varshaver, Rocheva, & Ivanova, 2021). The distribution of children in elite educational institutions is determined not only by ethnicity but also by the social status and financial situation of their parents (Alexandrov, D., Ivaniushina, V., & Kazartseva, E., 2015).

The value-normative orientations outlined in the previous phases of the development of our society no longer provide a stable basis for the formation of conscious guidelines of life for modern adolescents (Spasennikov, 2021). In Russian society, there is a tendency to violate social spiritual unity, re-evaluate life priorities, and deform traditional moral standards and ethical attitudes.

In the works of Russian social psychologists Shamionov, Bocharova, and Nevsky (2021, p. 91), the hypothesis was verified that "indicators of life orientations and social identity categories are closely related to civic, protest and leisure activities". The authors showed that categories of social identity play an important role in expressing various forms of activity of older adolescents and young people in virtual and real environments.

The problem of finding meaning in life is an important part of the socialization process of adolescents. Adolescents actively form a worldview and ideas about life plans, self-determination in a profession. The study of the characteristics of meaning-in-life orientations among adolescents is extremely important to understand the direction of the development of society as a whole.

The modern Russian state is multi-ethnic and represents cultural diversity, original traditions, ethnocultural values, which have a direct influence on the development of the individual's value-related sphere and life orientations of modern adolescents. The work of Russian scientists focuses on the characteristics of the development of Russian national values and national identity in adolescence (Abakumova & Ermakov, 2003; Zinchenko & Shaigerova, 2019; Soldatova, Chigar'kova, & Ilyukhina, 2022, etc.). Understanding the forms and development patterns of modern adolescents can be achieved through an interdisciplinary study of their meaning-in-life orientations, the whole value- and meaning-related sphere, identifying specific and general features taking into account the influence of cultural and national characteristics and sociocultural spaces in which they develop (Bicherova, Golubeva, & Feshchenko, 2019; Dagbaeva, 2018; Zinchenko & Shaigerova, 2019; Roslyakova, 2022).

On the basis of the interdisciplinary synthesis of the views of Russian scientists, it is possible to describe the basic elements of the structure of cultural and ethnic characteristics, which constitute in themselves the components of the system (national consciousness, characteristics, interests, orientations, feelings, emotions, traditions, and habits) and their dynamic (functional) manifestations.

Russian sociocultural, regional, and ethnic studies address the main issues related to the study of the corporate ethnic culture of market consumer behavior (Berberyan, 2019; Volkov, Gurba & Guskov, 2022). In the work of Russian scientists, much less attention is paid to the construction of the value- and meaning-related context of life orientations of adolescents with different cultural and ethnic characteristics based on the development of traditional cultural values and norms of the Russian state civic identity.

The study hypothesis assumes that there are significant differences in the level of ethnic identity among Armenian, Georgian, and Russian adolescents, which are related to meaning-in-life orientations.

This study aims to identify the characteristics of meaning-in-life orientations in adolescents with different cultural and ethnic characteristics in the process of ethnic socialization.

Methods

Sample

The total number of adolescents who participated in the study was 69, including 23 Armenian, 28 Russian, and 18 Georgian adolescents aged 14-15 years. The empirical study was conducted at the Lyceum No. 27 named after the hero of the Soviet Union I. E. Kustov in Bryansk and in the public organizations of the Armenian Community and the Georgian Ethnocultural Community.

Diagnostic tools

The study used the following diagnostic tools to assess the value- and meaning-related sphere in adolescents of different ethnic groups:

- The Meaning-in-Life Orientations (MLO) test by D. A. Leontiev. The test contains the integral scale of General Meaningfulness of Life and 5 subscales - Life Goals (the presence of goals and plans for life); Life Process (the individual's satisfaction with the fullness of his/her life); Life Effectiveness (the individual's satisfaction with the results of his/her activity); Internal Locus of Control (confidence in individual abilities); External Locus of Control (confidence in individual life management ability).
- The scale survey for Studying Ethnic Identity in Adolescents by O. L. Romanova to determine self-identification of adolescents by understanding the characteristics of their ethnic groups.
- The inventory for Studying the System of Life Meanings by V. Yu. Kotlyakov.
- The Cultural Value Orientations test by J. Townsend (modified by L. G. Pochebut) to determine the main trends in the formation and development of the studied culture.

The reasons for these methodological tools were based on the use of valid standardized test methods (Golubeva, 2019), the concept of empirical research that takes into account ethnic socialization and generational continuity (Spasennikov, 2021), and the analysis of qualitative and quantitative measurements in psychological and educational research (Spasenniko & Morozova, 2020).

The statistical data processing was performed with the SPSS statistics program and the Kruskal-Wallis H test.

Results

Meaning-in-life orientations (MLO)

Table 1 presents the results of the meaning-in-life orientations study using the MLO test by D. A. Leontiev and the scores obtained for the high level of meaning-in-life orientations in adolescents.

Table 1

Results of the meaning-in-life orientations study in adolescents of different ethnic groups (high level, %)

Scale	Mean	High score, n (%)
Russian adolescent (n = 28)		
Life Goals	32.8	n = 12 (44 %)
Fullness of Life	31.0	n = 12 (44 %)
Life Effectiveness	25.9	n = 11 (39 %)
Internal Locus of Control	23.4	n = 10 (35 %)
External Locus of Control	32.7	n = 15 (52 %)
General Meaningfulness of Life	104.9	n = 12 (43 %)

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Scale	Mean	High score, n (%)
Armenian adolescent (n = 23)		
Life Goals	33.0	n = 13 (55 %)
Fullness of Life	28.5	n = 11 (46 %)
Life Effectiveness	26.9	n = 10 (42 %)
Internal Locus of Control	21.6	n = 8 (36 %)
External Locus of Control	34.2	n = 13 (57 %)
General Meaningfulness of Life	107.5	n = 11 (47 %)
Georgian adolescent (n = 18)		
Life Goals	35.3	n = 9 (50 %)
Fullness of Life	32.5	n = 8 (44 %)
Life Effectiveness	27.5	n = 10 (56 %)
Internal Locus of Control	23.7	n = 7 (39 %)
External Locus of Control	36.0	n = 10 (56 %)
General Meaningfulness of Life	112.10	n = 9 (45 %)

About half of adolescents of different ethnic groups had high scores on the Life Goals scale, indicating the understanding and meaningfulness of these goals. The meaningfulness of goals is higher among Armenian adolescents (55%), compared to Georgian (50%) and Russian adolescents (44%).

In about half of the participants, the scores on the Fullness of Life scale showed a high level of interest and emotional fulfillment in life (44 % of Russian, 46 % of Armenian, and 44 % of Georgian adolescents). The subjects regard the process of life as interesting, emotionally rich, and meaningful.

A high degree of satisfaction with the results of life was found in 39 % of Russians, 42 % of Armenians, and 56 % of Georgian adolescents. This indicates that the adolescents positively assessed the period of their lives they had passed and were satisfied with their results and events in their lives.

In all three groups of adolescents (Russian, Armenian, and Georgian), we observed a predominance of high scores on the External Locus of Control scale over high scores on the Internal Locus of Control scale.

On the Internal Locus of Control scale, a high level was observed among 35 % of Russian adolescents, 36 % of Armenian adolescents and 39 % of Georgian adolescents. This could indicate that a third of the sampled young people have an idea of themselves as strong individuals with sufficient freedom of choice to build their lives according to their goals and ideas about the meaning of life.

A high level on the External Locus of Control scale was found in 52 % of Russian, 57 % of Armenian, and 56 % of Georgian adolescents. These respondents believe that a person has control of his/her life and the freedom to make decisions and execute them.

Among Russian, Armenian, and Georgian adolescents such scales as Life Goals, Fullness of Life, and External Locus of Control are the most pronounced. We can conclude that adolescent responders are generally able to make future plans and determine their goals in life. Adolescents define their past as interesting, emotional and full of events. We can assume that adolescents are independent, have enough freedom and responsibility and can choose a path of life in accordance with their goals and values. According to the MLO test, lower scores are observed in adolescents in such components of meaning-in-life orientations as Life Effectiveness and Internal Locus of Control.

Ethnic identity

Table 2 presents the results of studying ethnic identity in adolescents of different ethnic groups obtained using the scale survey for Studying Ethnic Identity in Adolescents by O. L. Romanova. Ethnic identity represents an individual's sense of belonging to a specific ethnic group, importance of a particular nationality, familiarization with the spiritual and material values of a specific ethnos.

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Table 2

The results of studying ethnic identity in Georgian, Armenian, and Russian adolescents (test by O. L. Romanova)

Characteristic	Level of ethnic identity								
	Georgian adolescents			Armenian adolescents			Russian adolescents		
	HL (%)	ML (%)	LL (%)	HL (%)	ML (%)	LL (%)	HL (%)	ML (%)	LL (%)
Sense of belonging to a specific ethnic group	85	10	5	70	15	15	60	20	20
Importance of nationality	20	45	35	30	55	15	45	35	20
Relationship between ethnic majority and minority groups	65	25	10	55	35	10	30	55	15
Use of a particular language	60	20	20	60	30	10	20	30	50

Note: HL - high level of ethnic identity; ML - average level of ethnic identity; LL - low level of ethnic identity

Armenian (70 %), Georgian (85 %), and Russian (60 %) adolescents have a high sense of belonging to their ethnic groups.

The importance of nationality is average among Armenian (55 %), Georgian (45 %), and Russian (35 %) adolescents; 65 % of Georgian, 55 % of Armenian and 30 % of Russian adolescents show a high understanding of the importance of relationships between ethnic majority and minority groups.

Meanings in life

Table 3 presents the results of studying the system of meanings in life in adolescents with different cultural and ethnic characteristics using the test by V. Yu. Kotlyakov.

Table 3

Results of studying the system of meanings in life in Georgian, Armenian, and Russian adolescents (test by V. Yu. Kotlyakov)

Category of meanings in life	Georgian adolescents (mean)	Armenian adolescents (mean)	Russian adolescents (mean)
Altruistic	19.2	10.6	18.6
Existential	18.9	18.6	11.2
Hedonistic	16.9	14.3	13.4
Self-realization	2.7	3.5	16.3
Status	4	14.2	15.6
Communicative	5	4.3	3.6
Family	2.5	2.1	16.7
Cognitive	14.5	16.1	16.1

The results presented in Table 3 enabled us to draw the following conclusions: such categories of meanings in life as altruistic and existential ones are weak in Georgian adolescents; hedonistic and cognitive meanings in life are adequately represented; meanings in life related to status, self-realization, communication, family, as well as cognitive meanings in life dominate.

Armenian adolescents have dominant categories of self-realization, communication, and family; altruism, status, and cognitive meanings in life are adequately represented; existential meanings in life are weak.

Russian adolescents have dominant categories of communicative meanings in life; altruistic meanings in life are weakly represented; meanings in life related to status, family, and self-realization as well as existential, hedonistic, and cognitive meanings in life are adequately represented.

Cultural value orientations

The results of the Cultural Value Orientations test by J. Townsend modified by L. G. Pochebut showed the following: (1) According to adolescents' ideas about the orientation of modern people when making decisions, about 60 % of Armenians, 57 % of Georgians, and 50 % of Russian adolescents indicated that modern people are oriented in their lives toward the present. The data presented indicate that adolescents of all ethnic groups are primarily focused on the present. (2) The results of the answers to the question, "In my culture, people believe that if they are not managed, they are likely to commit sudden acts" showed that the majority of Georgians (60 %), half of Armenians (53 %) and 60 % of Russian adolescents believe that if people are not managed in their culture, they can commit "bad" acts. (3) The results of the answers to the question, "In my culture, people consider the most important thing in their relationships..." are as follows: 47 % of Georgians and Russians, as well as 60 % of Armenian adolescents believe that the individuality and originality of the person are important in human relations. In addition, 36 % of Georgians, 40 % Armenians, and 30 % of Russian adolescents consider it important to have a large family in our society. Fewer respondents (17 % of Georgians, 13 % of Armenians, and 17 % of Russian adolescents) believe that a person's inheritance and origin are important when building relationships. (4) Adolescents with different cultural and ethnic characteristics, answering the question, "In my culture, people believe...", expressed their opinion as follows: 63 % of Georgians, 70 % of Armenians and 60 % of Russians believe that personal development has become the most important goal in modern life. Georgians (50 %), Armenians (53 %), and Russians (57 %) expressed the importance of practical activities and achievement in many areas of life.

Only 10 % of adolescents of all ethnic groups indicated that human existence itself is sufficient for life.

The orientation towards the past, commitment to traditions, interest in their history were revealed in 20 % of Armenians, 20 % of Georgians, and 27 % Russian adolescents. Such respondents pointed out the importance of family and kinship ties.

Comparison of groups

Table 4 shows the results of applying the Kruskal-Wallis H test for comparing the meaning-in-life orientations of teenagers of three groups (Armenians, Georgians, and Russians).

As Table 4 shows, there are significant differences in the following characteristics of the Meaning-in-Life Orientations (MLO) test by D. A. Leontiev:

- The Life Effectiveness scale ($H = 14.846$, at $p < 0.05$). Georgian adolescents perceive the results of their lives more productively than Russian and Armenian adolescents who are not very satisfied with the results of their lives.

- Statistical differences were found for the overall score of meaningfulness of life ($H = 13.147$, at $p = 0$). We can assume that Georgian adolescents have a more meaningful life, compared to Russians and Armenians.

Table 4

Statistical analysis of the results of the meaning-in-life orientations study among adolescents of three groups (Armenians, Georgians, and Russians).

Diagnostic tools	Georgian adolescents (mean)	Armenian adolescents (mean)	Russian adolescents (mean)	H test	Significance level
Meaning-in-Life Orientations (MLO) test by D. A. Leontiev					
Goals	35.3	33.0	32.8	2.625	0.269
Process	32.5	28.5	31.0	1.028	0.598
Effectiveness	27.5	26.9	25.9	14.846	0.029
Internal Locus of Control	23.7	21.6	23.4	0.681	0.712
External Locus of Control	36.0	34.2	32.7	1.291	0.524
	112.10	107.5	104.9	13.147	.000
Scale survey for Studying Ethnic Identity in Adolescents by O. L. Romanova					
Sense of belonging to a specific ethnic group	1.37	1.44	1.17	1.971	.578
Importance of nationality	4.41	5.5	3.62	5.164	.160
Relationship between ethnic majority and minority groups	4.52	2.17	1.64	4.932	.177
Use of a particular language	4.5	5.1	5.63	6.798	.033

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Diagnostic tools	Georgian adolescents (mean)	Armenian adolescents (mean)	Russian adolescents (mean)	H test	Significance level
Inventory for Studying the System of Life Meanings by V. Yu. Kotlyakov					
Altruistic	19.2	10.6	18.6	6.832	.035
Existential	18.9	18.6	11.2	7.961	.011
Hedonistic	16.9	14.3	13.4	4.972	.290
Self-realization	2.7	3.5	16.3	8.728	.016
Status	4	14.2	15.6	11.012	.026
Communication skills	5	4.3	3.6	6.084	.193
Family	2.5	2.1	16.7	4.462	.047
Cognitive	14.5	16.1	16.1	5.890	.207
Cultural Value Orientations test by J. Townsend (modified by L. G. Pochebut)					
Traditional culture	1.7	1.65	1.0	5.967	0.049
Modern culture	2.3	2.3	2.3	0.120	0.942
Dynamically developing culture	1.0	0.91	1.8	12.644	0.002

Significant differences were found for the Use of a Particular Language scale (test by O. L. Romanova) ($H = 6.798$, at $p < 0.05$). Russian adolescents indicated that in communication with others, they need to use their mother tongue more than Georgian and Armenian adolescents.

According to the inventory for Studying the System of Life Meanings by V. Yu. Kotlyakov, we revealed differences in such scales as Altruistic Meanings in Life ($H = 6.832$, at $p < 0.05$), Existential Meanings in Life ($H = 7.961$, at $p < 0.05$), Self-Realization ($H = 8.728$, at $p < 0.05$), Status-Related Meanings in Life ($H = 11.012$, at $p < 0.05$) and Family-Related Meanings in Life ($H = 4.462$, at $p < 0.05$). Unlike other respondents, Georgian adolescents were more concerned with self-realization and achieving a high status in society. Armenian adolescents saw more importance in altruism and family well-being,

compared to other ethnic groups. Russian teenagers were more interested in finding the meaning of life and freedom.

Additionally, significant differences were found on the Traditional Culture scale ($H = 5.967$, at $p < 0.05$) of the Cultural Value Orientations test by J. Townsend modified by L.G. Pochebut). The data obtained indicate that Georgian and Armenian adolescents were more interested in the past, followed traditions, and the history of their countries. Unlike Russian adolescents, the subjects of these groups place great importance on the traditional nature of family role relationships, family ties and religious orientations.

Significant differences were also found on the Dynamically Developing Culture scale ($H = 12.644$, at $p < 0.01$). Therefore, Russian adolescents were more focused on the future and quick results. They are characterized by a desire for freedom, autonomy, and fast material rewards.

Discussion

The results of the empirical study of meaning-in-life orientations in adolescents with different cultural and ethnic characteristics are consistent with the theoretical provisions and conclusions of a few studies of migrant ethnocultural traditions in the works by Aleksandrov, Ivanishina, and Kazartseva (2015); Dementseva (2018); Varshaver, Rocheva, and Ivanova (2021). Our study enables us to supplement the scientific results of other authors on the successful socialization of migrants. It was shown that the priority of teaching adolescents from migrant families is to develop the cultural and patriotic norms and values of the Russian state, first and foremost, as well as to develop spiritual and moral education, the formation of a sense of belonging to their ethnic group.

In the study of meaning-in-life orientations of adolescents with different cultural and ethnic characteristics, the following characteristics were revealed:

- The general level of meaningfulness of life is the same for adolescents of all ethnic groups.
- Interest in life among Georgian and Armenian adolescents is higher than among Russian adolescents.
- Among Georgian adolescents, the dominant categories of life meanings are status, self-realization, family, as well as communicative and cognitive meanings in life.
- Among Armenian adolescents, the dominant categories of life meanings are self-realization, family, as well as communicative meanings in life.
- Among Russian adolescents, the dominant categories of life meanings are status, self-realization, family, as well as communicative and existential meanings in life.

Differences in the meaning-in-life orientations in adolescents with different cultural and ethnic characteristics are as follows:

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- Georgian adolescents are more satisfied with self-realization than Armenians and Russians.
- Georgian adolescents have higher scores of meaningfulness of life compared to Armenian and Russian adolescents.
- Russian adolescents note the importance of using the Russian language in the process of communication.
- In contrast to other respondents, Georgian adolescents view the meaning of life more in self-realization and in achieving a high social status.
- Armenian adolescents define the meaning of life in altruism and family well-being to a greater extent, compared to other groups of adolescents.
- Russian adolescents are more interested in finding the meaning of life and freedom.
- Georgian and Armenian adolescents are oriented toward the past, adhere to cultural and national traditions.
- Russian adolescents are focused on the future and achieving quick results in their activities.
- Russian adolescents are more likely to strive for freedom, autonomy and material reward.

The successful ethnic socialization of Armenian, Georgian, and Russian adolescents is related to the need to take into account the sense of belonging to the ethnic group, the meaning-in-life system, cultural and ethnic characteristics, as well as the development of cultural, state, civic, and patriotic norms and values.

Conclusion

The theoretical conclusion of this study is that there are differences in the level of expression of ethnic identity among Armenian, Georgian, and Russian adolescents determined by meaning-in-life orientations, ethnic and cultural traditions and ethnic identity.

Based on the empirical results obtained, we conclude that in educational activities of educational and cultural institutions, special attention should be paid to the implementation of ethnic socialization programs for the development of the values and meanings of adolescents, taking into account their cultural and ethnic characteristics. This will not only enable adolescents to realize their life situations, to determine their personal attitudes toward the world's values, to formulate the main future-related tasks, but to develop a respectful attitude towards the cultural and national traditions and values of other peoples, as well as the cultural, civic and patriotic norms and values of the Russian state.

A promising direction for further research is to study the problem of strengthening the civic identity of modern teenagers in order to further strengthen Russian society,

eliminating destructive manifestations of ethnic egoism, ethnic indifference, ethnic fanaticism, national and religious extremism.

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Author Contribution

Elena Mikhailovna Feshchenko developed the research methodology, selected diagnostic tools, and contributed to secondary data processing (25%).

Galina Fedorovna Golubeva overviewed the relevant literature, formulated conclusions, and prepared the final version of the text of the manuscript (25%).

Valerii Valentinovich Spasennikov contributed to the research design, formulated the concept, subject, and hypothesis of the study (25%).

Armine Armenovna Khangaldyan analyzed the relevant literature, contributed to primary data collection and processing (25%).

Author Details

Elena Mikhailovna Feshchenko – Cand. Sci. (Psychology), Associate Professor, I. G. Petrovsky Bryansk State University, Bryansk, Russian Federation; Author ID: 839365; ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3791-5162>; e-mail: emfeshchenko@mail.ru

Galina Fedorovna Golubeva – Cand. Sci. (Psychology), Associate Professor, I. G. Petrovsky Bryansk State University, Bryansk, Russian Federation; Author ID: 299769; ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7906-6779>; e-mail: golubeva.galya2012@yandex.ru

Valerii Valentinovich Spasennikov – Dr. Sci. (Psychology), Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Bryansk State Technical University, Editor-in-Chief of the Ergodesign journal, Bryansk, Russian Federation; Scopus Author ID: 6507-1966-32, WoS Researcher ID: G-2314-2016; RSCI Author ID: 1524-9224; ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4378-3426>

Armine Armenovna Khangaldyan – master, Department of General and Professional Psychology, I. G. Petrovsky Bryansk State University, Bryansk, Russian Federation. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-7811-9436>; e-mail: akhangaldyan@icloud.com

Conflict of Interest Information

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.