

MENTAL HEALTH OF ADOLESCENTS IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

By Vladislav Kuchma, Russian national SHE coordinator

31st May 2021

At the turn of the XXth century, people faced with new challenges causing different forms of psychosocial maladjustment in significant groups of population. The most vulnerable groups are children and adolescents. The mental adolescent health is determined by a number of factors. The increase in risk factors affecting mental health in adolescents exacerbates their potential impact and negative consequences.

Factors increasing stress levels in teenagers:

high intensity of education (academic load);

infobesity or infoxication;

unhealthy lifestyle (lack of sleep, low physical activity, smoking, alcohol consumption);

Internet or social networks addictions;

lack of parental support;

low social & economic status of a family, social inequality;

bullying, including cyberbullying;

social isolation.

The extremely relevant reasons requiring research on mental health status in students are the following:

1. Crucial importance of adolescence in the formation of an adult personality;
2. Social significance of the mental health problem;
3. Increased prevalence of behavioral disorders and borderline personality disorders;
4. Hypodiagnosics of mental pathology.

Life satisfaction is one of the key aspects for adolescent mental well-being. According to international reports based on the Health Behavior in School-aged Children (HBSC) surveys, the majority of Russian adolescents are satisfied with their lives (about 80%) but, compared to adolescents from Western European countries, Russian adolescents demonstrated lower life satisfaction rates.

In recent decades, teachers and psychologists registered an increase in aggressive behavior in youth. According to international HBSC reports over the past twenty years (2001–2018), the number of Russian students regularly bullying others decreases from 17.5% to 10.7%, the percentage of children subjected to bullying remains the similar (15.7–18.8%). Compared to rural students, urban students are more aggressive (9.1% and 13.0% respectively). The number of both students regularly bullying others (15.7% in secondary school students and 5.7% in high school students) and victims of bullying (every third in grades 3–6, every sixth in grades 7–8, every fifteenth in grades 9–11) decreases with age. Aggressive behavior is more typical for boys than for girls (16.3% and 7.2% respectively). Children from families with low income become victims of bullying more often¹.

The number of bitter conflicts between teachers and students has significantly increased. Every second teacher faces with student threats at least once. Therewith, 5.8% noted that conflicts happened regularly. 42% of respondents underwent cyberbullying by offensive e-mails or posts in social media. The most common forms of student bullying towards teachers: teasing, applying nicknames, ignoring, discussing personal life publicly, nonverbal disdain demonstration

¹ Kuchma V.R., Sokolova S.B. Basic trends in behavioral health risks Health Risk Analysis. 2019;(2):4–13 https://www.elibrary.ru/download/elibrary_40882354_81386086.pdf

(by gestures or glances), intentional violation of discipline systematically, and refusal to follow teacher requests. 70% of teachers experienced all of the listed bullying forms².

The critical increase in infoxication in recent decades remains underestimated.

According to HBSC data, approximately one in five boys and one in six girls prefers to discuss one's problems with friends via online communication than in person. Based on the Social Media Disorder Scale, about 7% of Russian schoolchildren were classified as problematic social media users.

Every third girl and every fourth boy (31.0% and 24.7% respectively) reported online communication with close friends throughout the day. Alarming fact is that every tenth student had intensive Internet communication with random people firstly met online. We registered that approximately every fifth Russian student became a victim of cyberbullying in 2018.

According to long-term observational studies: 11–15% of adolescents participated in surveys needed a psychotherapist's consultation. 67% of students had borderline personality disorders (Table 1)³.

Table 1

**Prevalence of Border Mental Disorders
in the surveyed contingents of studying schools and colleges study 2017-2019**

	Forms of disorders	Schools (100)				Colleges (100)			Total:	
		a6c	P1	m1	p	a6c	P2	m2	a6c	P3
	<i>Neurotic circle disorders</i>									
1	Neurotic reactions	18	18,00	3,84	>0,05	20	20,00	4,00	38	19,0
2	Neurosis	18	18,00	3,84	>0,05	22	22,00	4,14	40	20,0
3	Neurosis-like conditions	0	0	0,00	-	4	4,00	-	4	2,00
	<i>Pathological disorders</i>									
4	Pathological reactions	13	13,00	3,36	<0,05	27	27,00	4,44	40	20,0
5	Personality Disorders	4	4,00	1,96	>0,05	5	5,00	2,18	9	4,50
6	Psychopathic conditions	0	0	0,00	-	4	4,00	-	4	2,00
	Total:	53	53,00	4,99	<0,01	82	82,00	3,84	135	67,5

Only 2% of students with borderline personality disorders consulted psychotherapists or neurologists. Thus, the overwhelming majority of students who needed professional help did not occur in medical records.

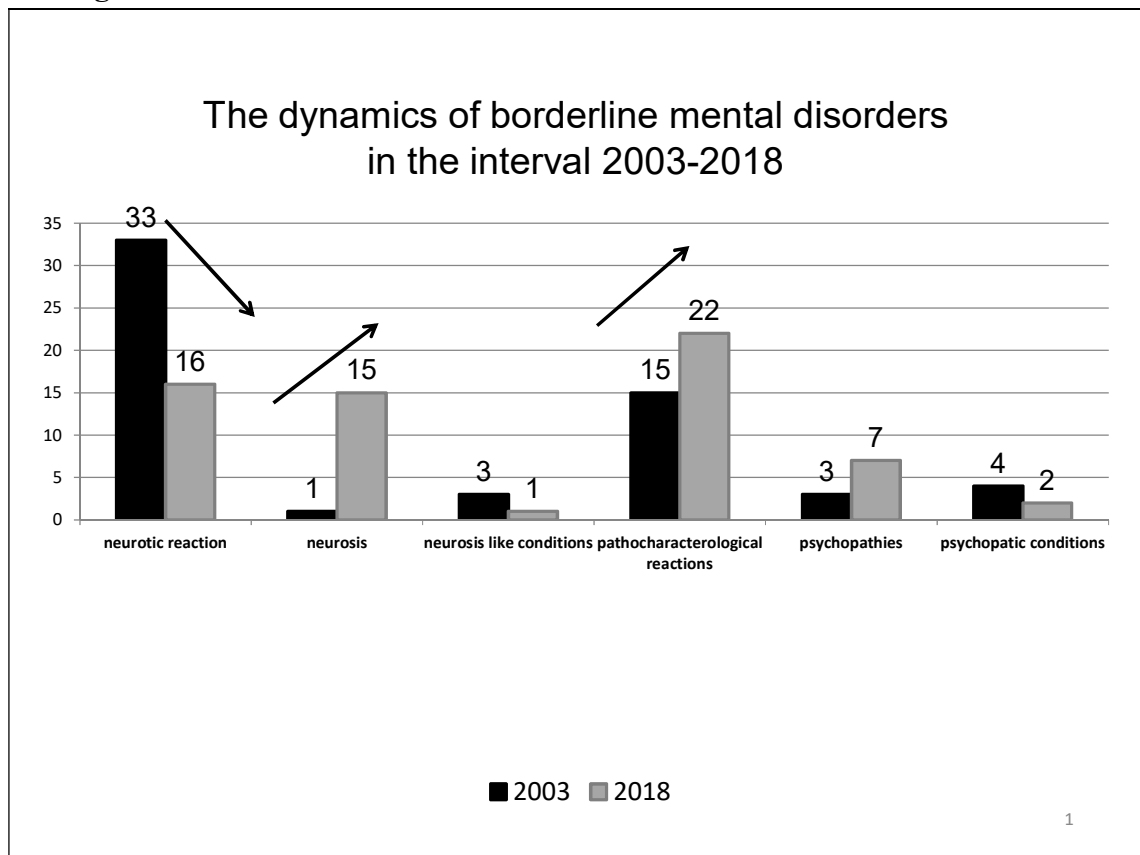
A comparative dynamics analysis on the indicators of individual forms of borderline personality disorders over last 16 years (2003–2018) demonstrated the following results: an increase in neuroses from 5% to 20%, increase in pathological behavioral reactions (behavioral disorders) from 12% to 20% (Figure 1). At the same time, the prevalence in neurotic reactions decreased significantly from 40% to 16%. We can conclude that recently we observe the

² Chernenko J., Saprykina D. The phenomenon of bullying in Russian schools: teachers as victims <https://cmd-journal.hse.ru/article/view/8075/8772>

³ Chubarovsky V.V., Labuteva I.S., Kuchma V.R. Border mental disorders in training teenagers: prevalence, risk factors, foundations of psychohygiene Russian pediatric journal (Russian journal). 2018;21(3) DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18821/1560-9561-2018-21-3-161-167>

pronounced transformation of premorbid neurotic disorders into neurosis and behavioral deviations.

Figure 1



The leading indicator for effectiveness of psychoprophylaxis is mental well-being.

Taking into account the social isolation associated with COVID-19 and the deterioration of mental health in children and adolescents during this period, we developed criteria for schools to assess the well-being of social environment and promote a model for a favorable social and psychological climate at an educational facility.