

A.R. Yermentayeva¹, A.N. Kalzhanova¹

¹L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University,
Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan

(E-mail: erasem@mail.ru, anar.kalzhanova@bk.ru)

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE LEVEL OF ASSERTIVENESS AND PERSONAL VALUES OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Abstract

This article is devoted to the problem of studying the assertiveness and personal values of Kazakhstani students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, scientists from all over the world have noted a sharp increase in anxiety and stress associated with it, however, according to the sources available to us, studies have not been conducted in Kazakhstan regarding the level of assertiveness during the pandemic, as well as changes in personal values.

The purpose of the article is to study the impact of the pandemic on the level of assertiveness, as well as to determine the hierarchy of students' personal values during a pandemic.

To obtain the results, were used Rathus assertiveness scale which has high validity and reliability; socio-demographic data of respondents, a scale for assessing the impact of the pandemic on the educational process, as well as a scale of personal values were collected. The survey involved 220 respondents and answers were collected using Google Forms..

The results of the study showed an average degree of correlation between the level of assertiveness and the impact of the pandemic, meanwhile, 55% of the respondents had an average level of confidence, and the personal values of the respondents included three main factors: educational activities, family, health, which are leading in choosing a strategy of behavior.

Thus, it can be concluded that the average level of self-confidence in the Rathus scale indicates the presence assertiveness, but an insufficient level. Since an adequate level of assertiveness positively contributes to subjective psychological well-being and mental health of individual. Based on the results of a survey of personal values, it is possible to determine the primacy of the educational process, family and health of respondents during a pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, university students, assertiveness, coping strategy, personal values

А.Р. Ерментаяева¹, А.Н. Қалжанова¹

¹Л.Н.Гумилев атындағы Еуразия Ұлттық университеті,
Нұр-Сұлтан қаласы, Қазақстан

УНИВЕРСИТЕТ СТУДЕНТТЕРІНІҢ АССЕРТИВТІЛІК ДЕҢГЕЙІ МЕН ЖЕКЕ ҚҰНДЫЛЫҚТАРЫНА COVID-19 ПАНДЕМИЯСЫНЫҢ ӘСЕРІ

Аннотация

Берілген мақала COVID-19 пандемиясы кезінде қазақстандық студенттердің ассертивтілігі мен жеке құндылықтарын зерттеу мәселесіне арналған. Коронавирустық пандемия басталғаннан бері бүкіл әлемнің ғалымдары мазасыздық пен стресстің күрт жоғарылағанын атап өтті, алайда, бізге қолжетімді ақпарат көздеріне сүйенсек, Қазақстанда пандемия кезінде ассертивтілің деңгейіне, сондай-ақ жеке құндылықтардағы өзгерістерге қатысты зерттеулер жүргізілмеген.

Мақаланың мақсаты – пандемияның ассертивтілік деңгейіне әсерін зерттеу, сонымен қатар пандемия кезінде студенттердің жеке құндылықтарының иерархиясын анықтау.

Нәтижелерді алу үшін жоғары валидтілік пен сенімділікке ие Ратустың ассертивтілік шкаласы пайдаланылды; респонденттердің әлеуметтік-демографиялық деректері, пандемияның білім беру процесіне әсерін бағалау шкаласы, сондай-ақ жеке құндылықтар шкаласы бойынша ақпарат жиналды. Сауалнамаға 220 респондент қатысып, жауаптар Google Forms көмегімен жиналды.

Зерттеу нәтижелері ассертивтассертивтілік деңгейі мен пандемияның әсері арасындағы байланыстың орташа дәрежесін көрсетті, ал респонденттердің 55% - ында орташа ассертивтілік деңгейін көрсетті; респонденттердің жеке құндылықтары үш негізгі факторды қамтыды: білім беру қызметі, отбасы, денсаулық, бұл көрсеткіштер мінез-құлық стратегиясын таңдау кезінде жетекші болып табылады.

Осылайша, Ратус шкаласы бойынша өзіне деген сенімділіктің орташа деңгейі ассертивтіліктің болуын көрсетеді, бірақ жеткіліксіз деңгей болып есептеледі. Өйткені ассертивтіліктің жеткілікті деңгейі ғана адамның субъективті психологиялық әл-ауқатына және психикалық денсаулығына оң ықпал етеді. Жеке құндылықтарды зерттеу нәтижелеріне сүйене отырып, пандемия кезінде респонденттердің білім беру процесін, отбасы мен денсаулығын бірінші орынға қойғанын анықтауға болады.

Түйін сөздер: COVID-19, университет студенттері, ассертивтілік, копинг-стратегия, жеке құндылықтар

А.Р. Ерментаева¹, А.Н. Калжанова¹

*¹Евразийский Национальный университет им.Л.Н.Гумилева,
г. Нур-Султан, Казахстан*

ВЛИЯНИЕ ПАНДЕМИИ COVID-19 НА УРОВЕНЬ АССЕРТИВНОСТИ И ЛИЧНОСТНЫЕ ЦЕННОСТИ СТУДЕНТОВ УНИВЕРСИТЕТА

Аннотация

Данная статья посвящена проблеме изучения ассертивности и личностных ценностей казахстанских студентов в период пандемии COVID-19. С начала пандемии коронавируса ученые со всего мира отметили резкое повышение тревожности и стресса, однако, по данным доступных нам источников, в Казахстане не проводилось исследований относительно уровня ассертивности во время пандемии, а также изменений в личностных ценностях.

Цель статьи – изучить влияние пандемии на уровень ассертивности, а также определить иерархию личностных ценностей студентов во время пандемии.

Для получения результатов была использована шкала ассертивности Ратуса, обладающая высокой валидностью и надежностью; собрана информация по социально-демографическим данным респондентов, шкалам оценки влияния пандемии на образовательный процесс, а также шкалам личностных ценностей. В опросе приняли участие 220 респондентов, ответы были собраны с помощью Google Forms.

Результаты исследования показали среднюю степень взаимосвязи между уровнем ассертивности и влиянием пандемии, в то время как 55% респондентов показали средний уровень ассертивности; а личные ценности респондентов включали три основных фактора: образовательная деятельность, семья, здоровье, эти показатели являются ведущими при выборе стратегии поведения.

Таким образом, средний уровень уверенности в себе по шкале Ратуса свидетельствует о наличии ассертивности, но считается недостаточным уровнем. Ведь только адекватный уровень ассертивности положительно влияет на субъективное психологическое

благополучие и психическое здоровье личности. Основываясь на результатах исследования личных ценностей, можно определить, что во время пандемии респонденты ставили на первое место образовательный процесс, семью и здоровье.

Ключевые слова: COVID-19, студенты вузов, ассертивность, копинг-стратегия, личностные ценности

Introduction. Nowadays significant changes are taking place in the higher education system, which relate to all its spheres. However, the pandemic of coronavirus infection since the beginning of 2020 (COVID-19) made adjustments to the process of students professional training. COVID-19 is an emergency situation not only in the field of public health, being a threat to the physical and somatic health of the individual, but also to the psychological health of the population, and has also brought huge changes in the educational space, socio-economic and political spheres around the world. But due to the fact that the virus spread very quickly, there was urgent need to take emergency measures, which were implemented by limiting social contacts.

Thus, Kazakhstan has taken measures to prevent the spread of the virus by introducing a hybrid education format. This education format has been still maintained until recent period in many Kazakhstani universities. Undoubtedly, the introduction of this training format led to a decrease in the COVID-19 incidence rate, at the same time it became the main trigger of concerns about the process and quality of education, changes in personal values, and also led to stress and anxiety of students. According to the study of C. Wang, C. Pan, X. Wan et al. [1] conducted among schoolchildren and university students in China during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic showed an increased level of fear and anxiety. Another study conducted in Jordan conducted by A. Y. Naser, E. Z. Dahmash et al. [2] in 2020 showed that the level of anxiety among university students is higher than among medical professionals and the general population. Meanwhile, the key is that students need, due to their psychological characteristics, to develop both personally and professionally, overcoming stress and academic difficulties.

Observing changes in the field of health and education, it is difficult to assess the impact of the pandemic on the level of assertiveness of Kazakhstani students, as well as on factors influencing behavior change, without analyzing and studying data from other studies.

As mentioned above, during coronavirus pandemic, students feel fear and anxiety. Nevertheless, according to other researchers such as D. Ayhan, H. Seki Öz [3], the development of assertiveness helps to cope with this condition. Thus, assertiveness can positively affect self-esteem, problem-solving and decision-making processes, as well as academic and professional achievements. The appearance of the term “assertiveness” is associated with the work of A. Salter “Conditioned reflex therapy”, published in 1949. It should be mentioned that assertiveness in his theory was considered as a constructive way of interpersonal interaction.

A. Salter [4] defined assertiveness as a characteristic feature of a mentally healthy person. In this regard, assertiveness is an important social skill that contributes to personal well-being. Most definitions of assertiveness emphasize the direct expression of feelings, desires and thoughts in interpersonal contexts.

Assertiveness has long been recognized by researchers, clinicians and others as a desirable style of interpersonal communication and a necessary social skill. According to M. Landazabal [5] assertiveness is the core of interpersonal behavior and the basis of perceptual attitude. Assertiveness is also usually described as an honest and true expression of one's views, needs, desires and emotions without denying or infringing on the rights of others. Theoretical analysis of the literature shows that whether it is high-risk disputes, formal or informal negotiations, or everyday disagreements, assertiveness affects personal success and achievements. When a person does not know how to show assertiveness and it is not sufficiently developed, whether in a single case or constantly, this can lead to complex consequences, since it will be difficult for a person to build correct interpersonal relationships. Both lack of assertiveness and overconfidence can lead to difficulties. When a person shows an insufficient level of self-confidence with which

assertiveness is closely related, then it is impossible to satisfy one's own needs or there is a risk of lack of subjective well-being. If a person's self-confidence level is too high, then it is more difficult for him/her to determine his/her real capabilities from imaginary ones, and there is also a significant risk of the absence of any norms of behavior, and aggression is often observed. Many scientists in various fields have studied these dynamics in various forms, ranging from cooperative behavior to competitive behavior and from avoidance to aggression.

Assertiveness, according to H. Opatha & H. Opatha [6], can be evaluated as an expression of self-esteem. Assertiveness includes aspects of the speaker's self-esteem, self-expression and social relevance, and differs from both passive and aggressive communication style. In this regard, assertiveness during adolescence plays a key role in future social communication and personal relationships.

According to another scientist B. Hekmati [7], assertiveness plays an effective role in the prosperity of students' talent and the growth of their creativity. Therefore, N. Edwards et al. [8], in their study describe that many authors recognize assertive behavior as the most constructive method of communication in the educational process and its application in teaching practice increases not only the effectiveness of educational activities, but also has a positive educational impact on young people, accelerating the development of their valuable personal qualities.

Based on these theoretical materials, we can conclude that assertiveness can positively affect the level of subjective well-being of students, as well as the level of objective self-esteem, avoiding passive or aggressive behavior, especially in crisis situations such as a pandemic. Nevertheless, there remains the question of how students can cope with stressful situations due to the greater academic load, as well as solving everyday tasks.

Scientists suggest that the best way to cope with stressful situations is a "coping strategy". According to H. Kaviani et al. [9] cognitive behavioral strategies for coping with stress are the most effective methods of reducing stress. Students cannot avoid stressors; however, in coping strategies, their ability to adapt to requirements and how to cope with these stressors will be more important than the nature of the stress itself. The more appropriate coping methods are, the less damage stress causes. Coping strategy is a cognitive and behavioral effort made to overcome, tolerate, or reduce external and internal demands and conflicts between them. Thus, coping strategies can be useful for assessing students' stress, as well as for solving necessary academic tasks. Therefore, research on coping behavior is a certain factor for the development of students' assertiveness and maintaining resilience in various situations, including in such as a pandemic.

Research on coping behavior has been widely conducted in recent years in international psychology. Lazarus and Folkman [10] considered stress as an interactive process between a person and his/her environment, in which the impact of stressful events on physical and psychological well-being is determined by coping. Based on this widespread transactional approach, the coping strategy would be determined by cognitive and behavioral efforts undertaken in response to external or internal demands that a person considers a threat to his well-being. Despite more than 400 documented coping strategies, they are usually divided into two main types: approach strategies (also called active) and evasion (or withdrawal) strategies. The approach strategies involve cognitive and behavioral mechanisms aimed at an active response to a stressor, a direct change in the problem (primary control) or related negative emotions (secondary control). This category includes strategies such as planning, performing specific actions, seeking support (instrumental and emotional), positive reassessment of the situation or acceptance. Avoidance strategies include cognitive and behavioral mechanisms used to evade a stressful situation, such as distraction, denial, and wishful thinking. However, questions about the role of situational factors and personal attitudes in choosing a coping strategy remain debatable.

Thus, we can say for sure that the coping strategy helps to cope with stressful situations, but the question arises about what else can serve as a mechanism for dealing with stress, for the

development of assertiveness, as well as what cultural and personal values come to the fore during emergencies.

It is the value orientations that determine the features and nature of a person's relationship with the surrounding reality and to a certain extent determine the features of her behavior. Therefore, when studying the peculiarities of the formation of a student's personality, first of all, it is necessary to take into account the moments that influence the process of forming his/her value orientations.

The most essential needs of the individual, determining its orientation, are the needs for communication, for knowledge, for recognition from other people, for friendship, love, work, the need to take a worthy place in the team. Each person is characterized by a unique combination of needs, which, however, do not have the same social value.

A huge amount of research in psychology, pedagogy, and physiology is devoted to the influence of natural abilities and inclinations on the productivity of development and learning. Even more research in psychology, pedagogy, ethics and aesthetics is devoted to the influence of culture, society, pedagogical techniques and methods on the productivity of human development and learning. The argument about who is right here and what is more in a person - the influence of internal inclinations and abilities or the environment and methods of education - is unproductive. It should be recognized that both are right [11, p.87].

According to the data that were taken from an Internet source that shows the results of different scientists research works on culture and psychology. It describes the relationship between personal values related to culture and society, as well as assertiveness.

According to the results of their research, members of societies with a high level of assertiveness value competition and success. They set big goals and are focused only on results. Personal qualities, family, relationships are relegated to the background. However, this category of people appreciates the true expression of thoughts and feelings. In contrast, they take representatives of a society with a low level of assertiveness due to high gender egalitarianism. In this category of culture, personal values are focused on building warm relationships, where cooperation is more important than the manifestation of true emotions [12]. Here we can clearly say that common cultural values influence the formation of personal values. Thus, in our study, the key factor is to determine the level of assertiveness, as well as to identify which personal values influence respondents in a pandemic of COVID-19.

Materials and methods.

Participants

To assess the impact of assertive behavior on the academic success of students, an experimental study was conducted with students of 1-4 courses of various specialties. The study was conducted in the winter semester of the 2021-2022 academic year. The number of respondents consisted of 220 students from various universities of Kazakhstan who agreed to voluntary participation and also gave informed consent to participate in the study. All students are persons over the age of 18 who, by law, can independently decide to participate in the survey. 127- 1st year students, 41-2nd year students, 49- third year students, 3-fourth year students, among them 196 bachelor degree students, 23 undergraduates and 1 doctoral student. The average age of the respondents is ± 19 , 137 are women, 83 are men.

Tools

Google forms were used to collect data and results on measuring the level of assertiveness, as well as socio-demographic data, which included information about gender, life values, and data on the impact of COVID-19 on the learning process etc.

Rathus assertiveness schedule (1973).

Rathus assertiveness schedule (RAS) was developed in 1973 by S. Rathus, a member of the American Psychological Association and author of popular psychology textbooks. This method was designed to measure a person's level of assertiveness and has shown high reliability and

validity. Designed for people aged 18 and over without restrictions on education, profession and social status.

Test instructions.

The RAS consists of 30 statements that describe different types of behavior. There are five response options for each question, ranging from “very characteristic to me” to “very uncharacteristic”. Each answer corresponds to a certain number of points with a positive or negative value. Their sum is the percentage of confidence.

Interpretation of test results

To add 72 to the sum of the points of the first part and subtract the sum of the points of the second part.

0-24 points: extremely unconfident

Insecure people are quiet and shy. Avoid direct gaze and succumb to difficulties. They try not to discuss problems or make important decisions. Do not speak directly about their desires. Another manifestation of insecurity is aggression, when a person tries to assert him/herself at the expense of others. He/she is illegible in expressions: can offend, get personal.

25-48 points: more unconfident than confident

For such people, opinion of others is important. They are afraid of being rejected, so they do not express their opinions out loud. This is due to low self-esteem and the inability to express thoughts and feelings.

49-72 points: average degree of confidence

A person shows determination in some matters, but he/she still needs to work on his/her self-esteem.

73-96 points: confident

Such a person realizes that he/she has the necessary qualities to achieve goals. Takes responsibility for his/her decisions, therefore he/she is not afraid to make mistakes. He/she knows how to express thoughts and feelings, so easily finds common ground with others. Demonstrates respect for him/herself and others in communication.

97-120 points: overconfident

Such people do not feel fear, therefore they often behave recklessly and risky. For example, a person underestimates the risk to his/her health and is sure that alcohol and nicotine will not harm him/her. Overconfident people are dismissive of others and that makes difficult to build relationships with others.

Results and discussion. According to the primary data, 236 respondents participated in our study, but when processing the results, the answers of some respondents were incomplete and could not be reliable, so we selected 220 respondents who answered all the questions and indicated all the necessary data for our study. Table 1 shows several items that consist of categories such as gender, year of study and the impact of the pandemic on the educational process.

Categories1	Categories2	N(%)
Gender	Male	83(37,7)
	Female	137(62,3)
Got sick with COVID-19	Yes	20(9)
	No	200(91)
Believe that the pandemic has affected the educational process	Yes	52(23,6)
	No	168(76,4)
Year of study	First	127(57,7)
	Second	41(18,6)
	Third	49(22,3)

Table 1. General information

As this table shows (Table 1), out of 220 respondents, females make up 62.3 %, and males only 37.7%. We also see from this table that the number of respondents who recovered from coronavirus is only 9%, however, we must also take into account the year of study of students, since the number of first-year students is 57.7% and many respondents cannot fully assess the impact of the pandemic on the educational process at the university. Below is a table (Table 2), which shows the scale of the impact of the pandemic on the educational process, we have the highest result on average, which is 47.7%, this result may indicate that the pandemic partially affected the educational process, but not significantly. Thus, we have an average degree of relationship between the impact of the pandemic and the level of assertiveness of the respondents.

degree of influence from min(1) to max(5)	N(%)
1	31(14)
2	28(12,8)
3	105(47,7)
4	35(15,9)
5	21(9,6)
Total	220(100)

Table 2. Pandemic impact degree scale

The results of the given table (Table 3) show the level of students' assertiveness by scales and by gender. As we can see in Table 2 there are 5 indicator scales, according to the first scale "extremely unconfident" we have 0 respondents, which indicates that there is no extremely low level of assertive behavior. The next scale "more unconfident than confident" is 14% of respondents, 87,1 % of them are female and only 12.9% of them are male, which is justified by the theory that women are less assertive than men. According to the "mid degree of confidence" scale, the percentage of male is 39.7%, and female 60.3% of the total number of respondents, this indicator indicates that representatives with this result have a partial idea of assertiveness, but it is not sufficiently developed, so it can occasionally manifest itself depending on the environment. Next we have scores on the "confident" scale, which corresponds to the ideal level of assertiveness, where people can clearly express their desires and feelings in the correct form, while not offending or violating the personal boundaries of other people. As we can see there, the total percentage of respondents is only 29.5%. The "overconfident" scale scored only 1.5%.

Results of Rathus assertiveness schedule	Categories	N(%)	Total number of respondents N(%)
extremely unconfident	Male	0(0)	0
	Female	0(0)	
more unconfident than confident	Male	4(12,9)	31(14)
	Female	27(87,1)	
mid degree of confidence	Male	48(39,7)	121(55)
	Female	73(60,3)	
confident	Male	29(44,6)	65(29,5)
	Female	36(55,4)	
overconfident	Male	2(66,7)	3(1,5)

	Female	1(33,3)	
Total		Male-83(37,7) Female-137(62,3)	220(100)

Table 3. Results of Rathus assertiveness schedule

Based on these results, we can conclude that most students of Kazakhstani universities have general concepts of assertiveness and self-confidence; however, to form a full-fledged confident behavior, additional measures can be taken as seminars and trainings on assertiveness formation. From the other hand, it may also be due to the impact of the pandemic, when restrictions were assumed on social contacts, health problems, and the financial situation of both the respondents themselves and their relatives.

According to the results of a survey of students (Chart 1), where they could choose several personal values that affect their behavior, we can see that in first place we have both educational activities and family, that is, they have properties for the respondents equally, in second place we have health, in third place we have the financial situation of the respondents and culture in society, which are also of great importance for the respondents.

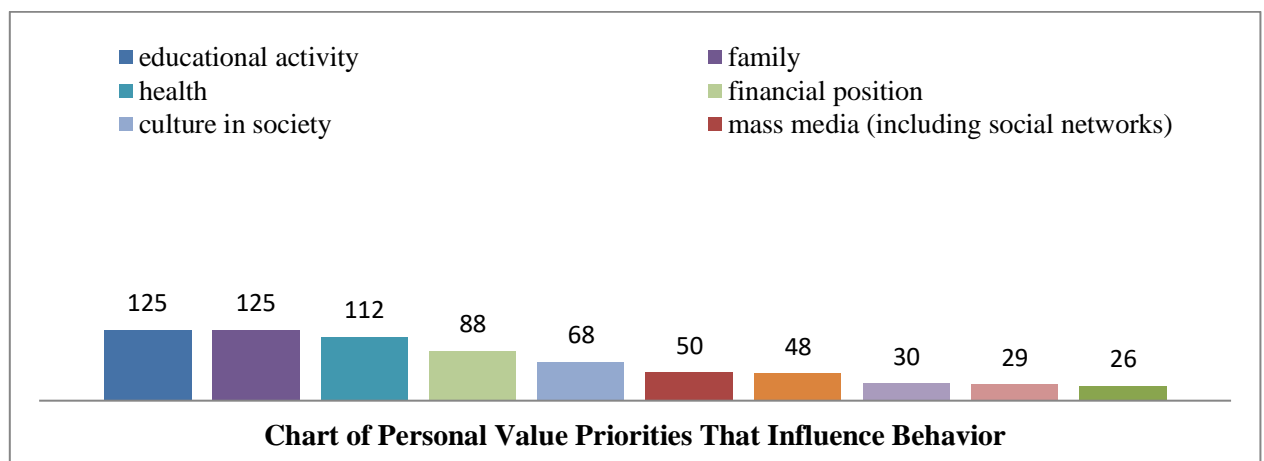


Chart 1. Personal value priorities that influence behavior

Conclusion. Thus, we can conclude that there is mid impact of the pandemic on the level of assertiveness of university students, however, according to the chosen personal values, a hierarchy was visible at the top of which were both educational activities, family, and health, and only after that the financial situation and the rest. Also, according to the results obtained, it can be concluded that in order to increase the level of students' assertiveness, it is necessary to conduct trainings and training courses. In addition, a detailed study of the relationship between the impact of the pandemic and the level of students' assertiveness can be carried out by interviewing an equal number of respondents from the first to the fourth year of study.

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