

YERKINBEKOVA MEIRIMGUL<sup>1</sup>, KULANOVA SANDUGASH<sup>1</sup>, APLASHOVA ARNA<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Q University (Almaty, Kazakhstan)

<sup>2</sup>Toraighyrov University (Pavlodar, Kazakhstan)

\*Address of correspondence: Arna Aplashova, Candidate of Psychological Sciences, Professor, Toraighyrov University, Lomov Str., 64, Pavlodar, 140006, Republic of Kazakhstan, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5736-6199>, E-mail address: [aplashova.arna@mail.ru](mailto:aplashova.arna@mail.ru)/Tel.:+77059873893

## Mechanisms for Building Empathy and Non-Violent Communication as a Factor in Bullying Prevention

### Abstract

*Introduction.* The article explores the role of empathy and non-violent communication as effective tools for preventing bullying in the educational environment. Key theoretical perspectives on these phenomena and their relation to school bullying are examined. *Methodology and Methods.* To test the proposed hypothesis, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was applied, including testing, focus group interviews, surveys, and a pedagogical experiment involving control and experimental groups. *Results.* The analysis revealed that the level of empathy tends to increase with age, while students who experienced bullying demonstrate lower communicative competence, reduced self-esteem, and inadequate self-reflection. A significant correlation was found between empathy, communication skills, and the tendency to adopt aggressive behavior patterns. The pedagogical experiment confirmed the effectiveness of the proposed mechanisms: in the experimental group, the frequency of bullying decreased, and higher levels of empathy and non-violent communication skills were observed. *Scientific novelty.* For the first time, the study substantiates the complex role of empathy and non-violent communication as interrelated factors in bullying prevention. *Practical significance.* The findings can be applied in educational programs aimed at developing non-violent interaction, enhancing psychological resilience, and fostering a safer and healthier school climate.

*Keywords:* empathy, non-violent communication, bullying, empathy formation, mechanisms of non-violent communication, school environment, students, teachers, parents.

**Introduction.** The relevance of the study is that in recent years in Kazakhstan, there has been a spread of bullying among adolescents and young people, which is accompanied by serious psychological consequences, expressed in depression, anxiety, suicidal thinking, and even its realization. Bullying, as a special type of persecution, hurts the emotional well-being of the participants of the conflict; such phenomena significantly reduce the quality of life of the persecuted, disrupt the development of good social ties, and, in general, create conditions for the development of various forms of aggression and violence against an individual. Based on this, the prevention of bullying becomes an important task of modern Kazakh society.

The problematic nature of this topic lies in the difficulty of identifying mechanisms for the formation of empathy and non-violent

communication, which could effectively prevent the emergence of conflict situations and aggressive behavior, both in general and bullying in particular. Despite the significant number of studies conducted in the field of psychology and pedagogy regarding bullying, many of its aspects remain insufficiently studied to date, which indicates the need for further study of this phenomenon. At the same time, this topic is especially important in the context of the development of modern technologies and social networks, which expand the opportunities for the development of easy communication and the simultaneous growth of bullying risks.

The scientific significance of the study of mechanisms for the formation of empathy and non-violent communication is determined by the need to develop effective methods

of bullying prevention, based on a deep understanding of the psychological and pedagogical processes occurring in groups created by modern children and adolescents. Science has established that it is empathy that allows us to better understand the feelings and experiences of another person, and thus contributes to the development of such important abilities as empathy and sympathy in a person or group of persons. This approach allows empathy to be considered an important factor in preventing conflict and aggression. While non-violent communication presents the skills of expressing one's emotions and needs more constructively, without the use of any threats, manipulation, and coercion, which indicates its important key role and place in bullying prevention measures.

The aim of the study is to identify and study the mechanisms of empathy formation and non-violent communication as factors of bullying prevention among schoolchildren.

To achieve the goal, the following tasks are planned to be accomplished:

1. Analyze existing scientific works that define theoretical approaches to the study of empathy, non-violent communication, and bullying.

2. To reveal the peculiarities of the manifestation of empathy and non-violent communication mechanisms in different age groups exposed and not exposed to bullying.

3. To determine the role of empathy and nonviolent communication in children and adolescents as anti-bullying factors.

4. Develop specific mechanisms to build empathy and non-violent communication for bullying prevention.

5. Establish links between empathy, nonviolent communication, and bullying prevention.

The novelty of the study is manifested in the following:

- integrated approach aimed at combining empirical material on various aspects of the problem of bullying of different age groups of students with modern scientific knowledge about the mechanisms of empathy formation and non-violent communication.

- development of practical tools, in the form of mechanisms for the formation of empathy and non-violent communication in educational institutions for the prevention of bullying, which contain innovative solutions for organizing more effective work with students, aimed at the active formation of competencies related to the development of empathy and the mastery of techniques of non-violent communication;

- the possibility of practical implementation of the findings of the study in the educational environment.

Hypothesis of the study: if empathy and training in non-violent forms of communication are increased, bullying among children can be significantly reduced.

The research methodology includes the use of qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis, testing, surveys, observations, and experimental research methods.

The study aims to improve the effectiveness of preventive measures aimed at reducing bullying in schools, and is important for both the theory and practice of education and upbringing of the younger generation.

**Materials and Methods.** The study is based on a comprehensive approach that combines different scientific directions, pedagogy, and psychology. The main objective of the research methodology is to form a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms of empathy and non-violent communication that can prevent bullying among schoolchildren of different ages. The basis of this research methodology is modern concepts of social and age psychology (George Mead's theory of social interaction, M. Rosenberg's concept of non-violent communication, modern models of interpersonal influence, S. Hohl's age psychology and others), according to which empathy and communication skills are the key factors that significantly reduce the risk of occurrence or cessation of bullying and violence.

Methodologically, this study is based on three main principles: comprehensiveness, as different levels of empathy and bullying phenomena are taken into account; dynamism, as the development of empathy and non-

violent communication skills in the process of a child's growing up is taken into account; practical orientation, as the study is aimed at developing specific recommendations for teachers and specialists working with children and adolescents, as well as for parents whose children have been bullied.

Diagnosis of the level of empathy by means of standardized tests, using the Davis Interpersonal Reactivity Scale IRI, processed by T.B. Koryagina, to assess such components as cognitive, emotional, and behavioral empathy. They make it possible to establish differences in empathy levels between groups of subjects of different ages and status in relation to bullying. Two groups of subjects were selected according to age, each with 42 subjects: (Group A - under 13 years old, Group B - 13-17 years old). This division was made in order to determine whether there are differences in the levels of empathy and communication between groups of children of different ages. Group C, which included 24 children who had been bullied, was also selected.

Assessment of communicative skills was carried out with the help of special diagnostic scales (Methodology "Personality Directionality in Communication" (PDC-A) (S.L. Bratchenko), conducted to establish the degree of mastery of techniques of non-violent communication, self-esteem, self-confidence, and ability to resolve conflicts, between groups of subjects of different ages and status in relation to bullying. The same groups of children participated.

Focus group survey with participation of experts, including school psychologists, teachers, parents, and bullied children, in order to reveal common patterns in relationships within classroom communities and how they perceive the causes of aggression and support measures against bullying. Focus group participants: school psychologists (3 persons), teachers (4 persons), parents (5 persons), and bullied children (5 persons). A total of 17 people participated in the survey. Targets: general patterns of attitudes observed within classroom communities, reasons for

aggression, and necessary support measures against bullying.

The modeling method was used in the development of practical tools, in the form of mechanisms for the formation of empathy and non-violent communication in educational institutions for the prevention of bullying. It contains innovative solutions for organizing more effective work with students, aimed at the active formation of competencies related to the development of empathy and mastering techniques of non-violent communication. They allow for reproducing, for example, a real situation of bullying, empathy, or communication in controlled conditions, with the help of game situations, role training, and computer simulations. This allows us to observe and study the processes of forming empathy and non-violent communication skills for the prevention of bullying, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed preventive measures more easily.

The pedagogical experiment, as a research method, is aimed at testing the hypothesis about the influence of mechanisms, in the form of active modern mechanisms aimed at reducing the level of bullying in secondary schools, through the development of empathy and responsible communication skills. Provided that in group C (noticed in bullying) were used activities, within the proposed mechanisms. The data of the experiment were subjected to comparative analysis to identify the effectiveness of the proposed mechanisms to reduce the frequency of bullying by increasing the level of empathy and non-violent communication skills.

Analytical analysis was carried out to draw conclusions and conclusion. Statistical methods were used for quantitative calculations and mean deviations.

The required ethical rules and regulations were followed in the conduct of the study.

**Results.** The results of diagnostics of empathy level using the Davis interpersonal reactivity scale (IRI) in T.B. Koryagina's adaptation are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1***Diagnostic results of empathy level in two age groups*

Empathy component	Explanation	Group A	Group B	Group C
Cognitive	Average	S-38,5	S-42,1	32,6
	Mean deviation	SD - 5.3	SD - 4.9	SD = 6.4
Emotional	Average	S-35,7	S-39,4	29,1
	Mean deviation	SD - 6.1	SD - 5.2	SD = 7.3
Behavioral	Average	S-31,9	S-35,8	25,3
	Mean deviation	SD - 4.8	SD - 5.6	SD = 5.9

The values of the arithmetic mean (S) of the index and the standard deviation (SD) are established and reflect the results obtained in the volume of the three components of empathy (cognitive, emotional, and behavioral), which allows comparing the level of empathy between

them, highlighting the differences that depend on the age and life experience of the participants. The results of the diagnostics of communication skills in three groups of subjects of different ages and status in relation to bullying are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2***Results of communication skills assessment using the personality orientation in communication (POC-A) method*

Communication skills	Group A	Group B	Group C
Mastery of communication techniques			
Average score	29,4	33,2	23,8
Standard deviation	4,6	3,8	5,2
Self-esteem			
Average score	32,7	36,1	27,5
standard deviation	5,1	4,3	6,4
Self-confidence			
Average score	31,3	34,9	25,1
standard deviation	4,9	4,1	5,6
Ability to resolve conflicts			
Average score	28,9	32,6	22,3
standard deviation	4,5	3,9	5,4

Mastery of communication techniques, self-esteem, self-confidence, and ability to resolve conflicts are higher for group B, medium for group A, and low for group C, characterized by bullying manifestations.

Overall results of the focus group survey: all participants identified such causes of aggression and bullying in the school environment as lack of empathy and self-regulation skills of aggressors; problems of family upbringing, lack of attention and care on the part of parents and at school on the part of teachers; social climate in the classroom based on passive approval

of cruel treatment of individual children; lack of adequate response from the administration and teachers to the first signs of bullying in a particular child; influence on children of information from the Internet and social networks, which creates an idealized image of the child as a victim of bullying.

Classroom community reactions and attitudes towards bullying: most teachers noted that it is difficult to identify signs of bullying early because of children's closed nature and fear of seeking help from teachers or parents; students admitted that they are often afraid to

report incidents of violence to adults for fear of more violence and retaliation from their abusers; parents noted underestimating the danger and not taking children's problems seriously, especially those involved in bullying. In addition, some teachers indicated a lack of professional skills to understand, intervene, and deal with bullying situations promptly.

Psychologists have identified a comprehensive approach to ensure effective anti-bullying measures among bullying children, parents, and teachers. Such approach, in their opinion, includes: regular special lessons and talks on good attitude and inadmissibility of aggression; formation of a culture of mutual help and support among classmates from primary school; professional development of teachers in bullying prevention; activation of parental control and raising their awareness about the child's behavior in social networks and in general when he/she is out of home; creation of a special anti-bullying committee at school, with mandatory participation of parents, teachers and students. Thus, the focus group survey showed a general interest in bullying prevention efforts and emphasized the need for systematic training, interaction, and joint search for ways to address the problem of bullying.

Innovative mechanisms for the formation of empathy and non-violent communication in educational institutions as a prevention of bullying have been developed. They represent an integrated system of organizational and pedagogical innovations aimed at the development of empathy skills, communicative competencies of non-violent communication in students. The distinctive feature of this approach is that it combines traditional elements of educational activities with modern technologies:

1. Interactive diagnostic and remedial tools are offered to conduct regular tests and questionnaires to identify students' level of empathy and non-violent communication skills. Monitoring results are used for individual work with those who need additional support.

2. A crucial component of the mechanism is the creation of public participation platforms to discuss problems arising from bullying (open seminars, theme days, online discussions, self-help groups).

3. Using digital technologies to engage today's youth, who spend a significant part of their time in the digital space. Within their framework, they propose to create special content and mobile applications, with games, communication simulations, and webinars, aimed at building empathy skills and positive communication habits.

4. Pedagogical support of psychologists and teachers specially trained in anti-bullying programs, as a team of professionals able to promptly intervene in potentially dangerous situations and propose preventive measures.

5. Integration of "School of Health and Well-being" courses and classes into the curriculum as an important element of the mechanism aimed at physical and psycho-emotional health improvement of schoolchildren, which allows developing children's attentiveness to their own condition and mood (sports activities, yoga classes, breathing practices, relaxation).

6. Parent-school partnership, where parents have a special role to play, as they have access to counselling and specialized resources that enable them to accompany their child in times of crisis or communication difficulties in a more competent manner.

In the course of the experiment, separate mechanisms of empathy building and non-violent communication at school were used to prevent bullying. At the same time, each of the specific mechanisms has a clear functionality and can be easily integrated into the structure of a regular school. Let us describe some of them:

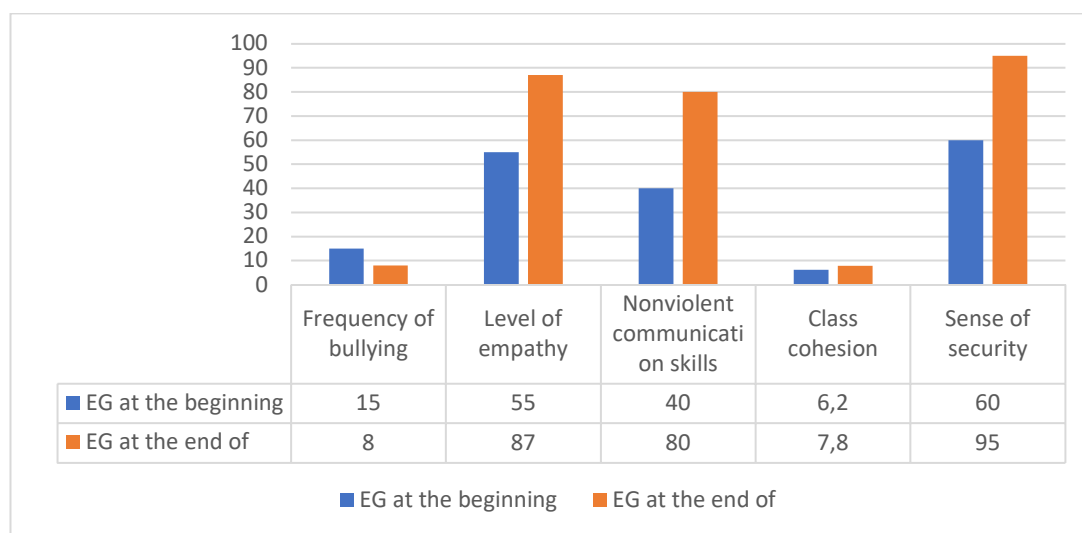
1. Empathy laboratory, a room with equipment and materials for active training. It is based on the principles of immersive immersion in the emotional states of other people and practicing the skills of understanding and empathy. Students in small groups worked on tasks such as "Mood Picture", "Gratitude Diary", and "Blind Games". Result: they increase the level of empathy, learn to understand the feelings of others, form stable habits of polite communication, and respond to emerging conflicts.

2. Empathy patrols are created on the principles of involving pupils in joint protection of psychological comfort and supporting each

other in difficult situations. For this purpose, teams of 3-4 pupils are formed, who are assigned to be responsible for a specific area of the school or a disadvantaged class. Their task is to monitor the atmosphere, suppress any manifestations of bullying, and promote friendly communication. Every day, the duty officers make notes on incidents and send reports to the psychologist. The result: all children feel a sense of security, and those involved feel a real benefit from their participation in such a mechanism. Through regular changes of personnel, everyone can be trained in responsibility and sensitivity.

3. Peace negotiators, working on the principle of resolving conflicts through diplomatic negotiations, joint discussions, and agreements. A mediation room has been created, where any student can apply for a solution to a conflict. Result: voluntary decisions are made; conditions for hidden resentments and hostility are minimized; the daily life of the school is characterized by a culture of only constructive communication. The results of the pedagogical experiment in group C (n =24) are reflected according to Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
*Results of comparative analysis*



The frequency of bullying, by episodes per month, in Group C decreased by 45%. The level of empathy, as measured by the percentage of children surveyed, increased by 32%. Nonviolent communication skills increased by 40%. Class cohesion increased by 25%. Sense of safety increased by 35%.

**Discussion.** Drawing on the conducted study, this paper examines mechanisms for cultivating empathy and non-violent communication (NVC) as key factors in bullying prevention within educational settings. The findings highlight the beneficial effects of enhanced empathy and NVC competencies in reducing bullying incidents, especially when implemented through a comprehensive approach involving students, teachers, parents, and the wider community.

Diagnostics of empathy level in two age groups and group C. Cognitive empathy scores were higher in the older age group B, thus showing a tendency to become more aware of other people’s thoughts and intentions with age. Younger participants (group A) showed less ability to recognize others’ states and attitudes consciously. The mean emotional empathy score was also higher in children from the older age group, indicating that they have a greater sensitivity to the emotions of others and a greater desire to maintain emotional contact with people in their environment. Younger children are less likely to actively respond to the emotional states of others. The level of the behavioral component of empathy showed a similar distribution between the groups, as older students showed a greater tendency to show help and support to

people around them compared to younger ones, which is associated with their accumulated experience of socialization and personal growth. Group C (children seen in bullying) has all components of empathy (cognitive, emotional, and behavioral) significantly below the mean values of the other groups, which supports the assumption of a negative relationship between low levels of empathy and a high likelihood of participating in acts of bullying. They have a very low level of cognitive empathy, which indicates a weak understanding and non-acceptance of other people's point of view, limited ability to recognize the motives and feelings of others. While the insufficient level of emotional empathy demonstrates in such children indifference to the feelings of others, low sensitivity to emotional signals, and one can say almost a complete lack of desire to support the victims. Behavioral empathy in this group is also insignificant, which indicates that children probably lack the desire to help and support those around them, and their inability and unwillingness to build conflict-free relationships with peers.

Summarizing the results of diagnostics of the level of empathy, we can conclude that the general level of empathy increases with age, which reflects the positive dynamics in the emotional and social development of adolescents. For example, Espejo-Siles et al. (2020) reported that moral disengagement and low empathy significantly predicted aggressive behavior, aligning with the present study's findings that children with lower empathy levels are more likely to engage in bullying. Similarly, Longobardi et al. (2020) provide additional support by demonstrating that empathy and defending behaviors play crucial roles in reducing bullying within school contexts. At the same time, the noted difference in indicators indicates the presence of significant reserves in the work on the development of empathy and communicative skills in both groups, especially in the younger age group. It is these that should be the object of bullying prevention efforts. At the same time, a clear correlation between the level of empathy and involvement in bullying was found. Low empathy indicators point to the

involvement of children in destructive forms of behavior. Thus, the findings support the interim hypothesis that low levels of empathy significantly increase the risk of involvement in bullying. The findings indicate the advisability of including targeted developmental interventions to strengthen empathy and non-violent communication skills among the younger group, and especially among adolescents with low empathy scores.

The study underscores the importance of teaching non-violent communication (NVC) skills. These findings align with those of Nasti et al. (2023), who showed that NVC enables students to articulate their needs and resolve conflicts peacefully, thereby reducing aggression. The significance of such communication training is further supported by Deng et al. (2021), who found that fostering empathy encourages bystander intervention in bullying situations, thus reinforcing the value of intervention-focused approaches. Analysis of the results of diagnostics of the level of communicative communication showed that the overall average score of communicative skills in the younger group was: low level of mastery of techniques of non-violent communication (30.5 points); moderately expressed sense of self-respect (average self-esteem index - 32.7); unstable indicators of self-esteem and self-confidence (31.3); insufficient development of conflict resolution skills (28.9), which indicates that they have weak skills of peaceful settlement of disagreements). Group B children: the overall average score of communication skills is 34.2, which indicates a higher level of mastery of non-violent communication techniques; the average score of self-esteem is 36.1, which indicates a pronounced respect for one's personality. Self-confidence is good, as the stability of self-esteem and self-confidence is 34.9; the ability to resolve conflicts is 32.6, which characterizes developed skills to resolve conflicts without aggression. Group C: the overall average score of communication skills is 24.7, indicating very low non-violent communication skills; average self-esteem is severely underestimated, as they have no sense of their own value (the score was only 27.5); self-confidence (25.1),

corresponding to extremely low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence; conflict resolution ability (22.3), as children's extreme inadequacy in resolving disputes and avoiding conflicts.

The study's finding that empathy increases with age is consistent with conclusions drawn by other scholars, such as Trach et al. (2023), who similarly observed that older students tend to exhibit higher levels of empathy. This has important implications for designing interventions targeting younger children, who may not yet have fully developed empathy or communication skills. Having summarized all the findings on the assessment of communication skills, we can say that children from group C demonstrate the lowest level of communication skills, the lowest self-esteem, and the lowest self-confidence, which may explain their tendency to use aggressive forms of communication and the emergence of such indicators as bullying. Older students have better communication skills and the ability to resolve conflicts peacefully, which may serve as a barrier to the emergence of bullying in their environment. Younger children are not yet prepared with the required communication skills and therefore need special training and lessons to develop effective communication and anti-bullying skills. While children who are exposed to bullying should be monitored to ensure that they develop proper communication skills. As the overall picture of available communication skills confirms a direct link between the presence of non-violent communication skills and the need to protect them from being involved in bullying incidents against some people.

As a result of the discussion based on the focus group materials, a common position was formulated, expressed in a common interest to prevent bullying, and the need for systematic training on measures to prevent bullying, interaction, and joint search for ways to solve the problem of bullying was emphasized. At the same time, the importance of fostering in all children a sense of special responsibility for their behavior, developing an active attitude towards injustice and rejection of violence and threats in all their forms, was identified as a necessary condition for the prevention of

bullying. Special attention was paid to the issues of fostering tolerance, developing non-violent communication skills, and improving the climate in the classroom and between classes. The participants expressed the opinion that the work should be carried out jointly by all parties of the educational process: teachers, students, school administration, and parents.

The proposed innovative mechanisms for building empathy and non-violent communication in educational institutions as a prevention of bullying really work; they are simple to implement and require a minimum of resources. They require only a little equipment, a small number of trained personnel, and a small amount of time. Some of the proposed schemes, but in a different format, have proven effects, so tested in pilot programs of foreign schools and confirmed by our experiment. The mechanisms under consideration are designed for mass application; they are suitable for almost any type of school, at its different levels.

The data of the pedagogical experiment and the results of comparative analysis confirmed the effectiveness of the proposed mechanisms, which led in group C to a noticeable decrease in the frequency of bullying, an increase in the level of empathy and the formation of non-violent communication skills among students in the experimental group and confirmed the hypothesis put forward.

The research presents several practical mechanisms, such as empathy labs and peace negotiators, to cultivate empathy and non-violent communication. These approaches align with broader trends in bullying prevention, including those examined by Boboc and Damaševičius (2024), who explored innovative strategies such as the use of extended reality to address bullying in educational settings. Thus, we can say that this study has significant theoretical and practical significance and implications for bullying prevention. The main development trends should be defined as the growth of interest in emotional intelligence, the use of effective tools to increase the level of empathy and communication skills, the creation of supportive communities, and others. The main prospects are defined as: development of



interdisciplinary research; increasing the role of parents and teachers; integration of mediation methods into the school system. Consequences of the research should be considered: reduction of bullying cases in schools, increase of self-esteem and confidence of students, improvement of psychological atmosphere in educational institutions, and growth of general life satisfaction of children during their school years.

**Conclusion.** The new integrated innovative approach has shown real results. It is important to realize that in order to use the proposed mechanisms, it is important to provide not only a fundamental basis for bullying prevention, but also an applied orientation to really increase the level of empathy and communication skills of today's students. Within the framework of the proposed mechanisms, it is shown that in order to solve the existing problems regarding bullying,

it is necessary to create more comfortable conditions for children for successful learning and full development of personality. On this basis, the main idea of the proposed measures is to organically combine time-tested pedagogical techniques with advanced technologies and methods that promote the development of empathy and non-violent communication skills. The proposed mechanisms combine classical teaching methods with innovative tools, with the active involvement of students, parents, the school, and the community. In addition, the data obtained have a high potential for practical application and allow the development of effective strategies for combating negative phenomena in adolescence and open up opportunities for further study of mechanisms for preventing aggression and building a healthier society in Kazakhstan based on mutual understanding and respect.

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#### Information about authors

**Yerkinbekova** Meirimgul, candidate of psychological sciences, associate professor, “Q” University, ORCID: 0000-0002-8351-4546, email: [erkinbekova.m@q.edu.kz](mailto:erkinbekova.m@q.edu.kz)

**Kulanova** Sandugash, candidate of philological sciences, associate professor, “Q” University, ORCID ID: 0009-0007-2887-602X, email: [kulanova.s@q.edu.kz](mailto:kulanova.s@q.edu.kz)

**Aplashova** Arna, candidate of psychological sciences, professor, Toraihyrov University, ORCID: 0000-0002-5736-6199, email: [aplashova.arna@mail.ru](mailto:aplashova.arna@mail.ru)