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STUDY ON THE ASSERTIVENESS OF STUDENTS – FUTURE CIVIL SERVANTS

Sophia A. Gaponova¹, Natalya S. Kornilova²

¹ *Nizhny Novgorod State Pedagogical University named after Kozma Minin, Nizhny Novgorod, Russian Federation, sagap@mail.ru*

² *Nizhny Novgorod Institute of Management – Branch of RANEPa, Nizhny Novgorod, Russian Federation, nskorn@mail.ru*

Abstract. This article highlights the importance of studying and promoting assertive behavior in students, especially future civil servants. Their success today depends on adopting a proactive attitude, overcoming difficulties, and demonstrating emotional stability. Analysis of the scientific literature has shown that assertive behavior leads to improved personal effectiveness and prevents professional burnout, insecurity, and anxiety.

Assertive behavior is a specific way of acting that enables individuals to actively and consistently represent their interests and achieve goals, establish open communication, and acknowledge and appreciate the unique qualities of others.

Analysis of research results obtained by the following methods: “Investigation of the level of assertiveness” by V. Capponi, T. Novak, “Autonomy-dependence” questionnaire by G.S. Prygin, “Diagnostics of self-confidence” by B.D. Karvasarsky, shows that during higher education, students do not acquire the essential knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to develop a sufficiently high level of autonomy, self-confidence and, consequently, assertive behavior for their future professional activity.

The lack of positive progress in the measured indicators, and in some cases even a decline, suggests that assertive behavior is not sufficiently developed in students during their studies. This observation is evident in the core and elective courses of the «State and Local Government curriculum as listed in the standard training programs. Moreover, the results of the correlation analysis confirm this impression. In particular, there is a significant weakening of the correlation between autonomy and the correlation between “assertiveness and self-confidence.” This weakening means that students’ independence and sense of responsibility are decreasing, and the tendency to rely on external circumstances and the opinions of others is increasing.

Based on the obtained results, it is recommended to consider introducing additions to the university curriculum aimed at developing assertive behavior. The goal is to enable students – aspiring civil servants – to manage their emotional responses better, make thoughtful and balanced decisions, achieve their goals, and demonstrate self-confidence and independence. This development is expected to increase their effectiveness in interacting with citizens and colleagues and contribute to their success in their future roles as civil servants. This will ultimately lead to more effective interactions with citizens and colleagues.

Keywords: *assertiveness, assertive and manipulative behavior, self-confidence, autonomous and dependent behavior, students, civil servants*

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In the ever-changing modern world, effective interaction between people is a challenge. To promote successful interactions, individuals should take an active approach, maintain psychological balance in confrontations and difficulties, and seek cooperative solutions to overcome these obstacles. An important goal, therefore, is to develop individuals who are good team players, who listen actively, who communicate effectively, who take responsibility, who demonstrate self-confidence, and who show resilience and steadfastness in difficult and uncertain situations while demonstrating assertiveness – being direct, open, and respectful of others.

Assertiveness is the ability to persevere in achieving one's goals; a person's lifestyle; characteristic behavior under typical social conditions; attitude toward others and oneself; reconciliation or rejection of criticism; reconciliation with one's faults [1].

There are several approaches to defining assertiveness. For example, R. Mayi and R. Ulrich explain assertiveness in terms of the concept of perseverance. A. Lange and P. Jakubowski consider assertiveness as self-confidence. This position is continued by Russian psychologists V.G. Romek and A.M. Prikhodzhan – the latter adds assertiveness with the ability of self-actualization. K. Rudestam emphasizes that assertiveness prevents the manifestation of aggression.

Many researchers (J. Wolpe, A. Lazarus, A. Lange, P. Jakubowski, E. Salter, R. Alberty, M. Emons, S. Bishop, K. Rudestam, U. Peterman, and others) consider assertiveness to be the initiative side of the human being. It is characterized by self-confident behavior and a positive attitude toward oneself and others, as well as by disclosure of personal potential and responsibility for events.

High self-esteem as the main component of assertiveness is emphasized in the works of D. Geldard and K. Geldard, S. Coopersmith, A.S. Combs, S.S. Stewart, W.A. Lewis, and other scientists.

From the point of view of R.F. Rackos, assertiveness has two components: an external component, which includes the behavior of defending one's point of view and resolving conflict situations constructively, and an internal component, which, according to the scientist, is more important and includes reactions to external events [2].

C. Stein and G. Book consider assertiveness as three main components: 1) the ability to express feelings; 2) the ability to express beliefs and thoughts openly; 3) the ability to protect one's rights [3].

I.V. Grigorievskaya, agreeing with the opinions of foreign authors, also considers assertiveness as a multi-component aspect of personality, which includes openness to external knowledge, the ability to understand emotions, an internal motivation to solve problems, and self-confident behavior [4].

Russian scientists E.P. Nikitin and N.E. Kharlamenkova, as well as foreign researchers, believe that assertiveness is a certain ability of self-assertion [5].

According to I.V. Lebedeva, assertiveness is characterized as a mode of

action in which individuals actively and consistently represent their interests and openly state their goals and intentions, respecting the interests of others [6]. The basis of assertiveness lies in a fundamental sense of self-confidence, self-esteem, respect for others, attentiveness, responsiveness, and the ability to set personal boundaries, make decisions, and focus on one's own feelings and opinions [7]. From the perspective of S.S. Stepanov, assertiveness is seen as the ability to demonstrate appropriateness and adaptability by adjusting one's behavior to conform to accepted standards, norms, and rules [8].

Central to today's discussion is the idea that assertive people value their own wants and needs and those of others. Assertiveness enables us to pursue personal goals, promote essential professional qualities, and achieve favorable outcomes in our endeavors [6, 9]. Consequently, assertiveness can be viewed as a versatile and spontaneous approach to interactions that puts the individual's interests first. This is demonstrated by the ability to actively listen to others, understand them, and accept their point of view while providing well-reasoned responses to critical comments when needed [10].

In today's world, assertiveness is vital due to the increasing demands for professionalism and personal competitiveness. As challenges and difficulties become more frequent, there is a growing need to develop behavioral skills that promote success, proactivity, emotional resilience, and the ability to find optimal solutions to overcome obstacles.

With ever-increasing expectations, civil servants need to improve their performance, develop overall, and grow in different areas of their lives. While these trends aim to improve their duties' performance for the benefit of society and the state, they also present challenges. The pressure to meet these demands can lead to emotional burnout, insecurity, anxiety, chronic stress, and a lack of energy and resources for proactive action, especially in interpersonal interactions. To overcome these challenges, developing assertiveness skills is critical. By fostering assertiveness, civil servants can increase their effectiveness, providing an escape from critical situations and serving as a preventive measure against occupational burnout [11].

When civil servants are assertive in their interactions with citizens, it promotes self-development by motivating them to take responsibility for their decisions and actions. This leads to an expansion of personal freedom, integrity, autonomy, and proactive engagement, ultimately contributing to their professional growth. In addition, assertiveness enables civil servants to make decisions and act confidently in uncertain situations, thus realizing their full personal and intellectual potential [12].

N.G. Klimanova and her colleagues [13] found that civil servants prefer manipulative actions to assertiveness in stressful situations. This underscores the need to recognize better and apply assertive strategies that have proven more effective in dealing with challenges.

Civil servants who adopt a passive behavioral position become vulnerable to various manipulations and external influences from citizens and colleagues. When confronted with unreasonable demands, they lack the internal capacity to fight back and eventually give in contrary to their desires and beliefs. To cope

and hide their embarrassment and discomfort, the employee may resort to manipulative techniques or respond aggressively to aggression or criticism, even when valid. This passive behavior can lead to an unproductive work environment, hindering personal development and effectiveness.

The ability to be assertive seems particularly important for civil servants, given the high demands of modern society. Civil servants are expected to possess a number of skills, including setting strategic goals, motivating employees, making independent decisions, thinking flexibly, analyzing emerging issues, demonstrating self-control and composure, encouraging constructive interactions, and taking into account the opinions of others, especially citizens [14]. As Mikhail Krivopal, head of the Management Academy of the Far Eastern Federal University, said, modern civil servants should show a genuine interest in their work and citizens, be able to build productive relationships with people, be customer-oriented, and have competencies in systemic thinking [15]. These qualities are consistent with the principles of assertiveness.

Fostering assertiveness in future civil servants during their university education can prevent manipulative or passive tendencies and improve their professional competence. This is supported by fostering the development of a mature personality in students, teaching social responsibility, defining values, promoting self-awareness and emotional control, and encouraging interest in professional communication and independence.

We believe that traditional higher education does not effectively promote students' assertiveness.

Our experimental work aims to study the level of assertiveness in students – future civil servants – taking the course “State and Local Government.”

The study was conducted at the Nizhny Novgorod Institute of Management, a Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration branch. The sample consisted of 240 students, including 150 girls and 90 boys, from the 1st, 3rd, and 4th (final) years of full-time education. To assess different aspects of assertiveness, we used different research methods:

- “Study of the assertiveness level” (V. Capponi, T. Novak), which determines the degree of assertiveness of the whole personality [16];

- “Autonomy-dependence” questionnaire (G.S. Prygin). The technique diagnoses the main types of students: “autonomous,” “dependent,” and “insecure” [17].

- “The Self-Consciousness Diagnosis” (B.D. Karvasarsky), a self-confidence scale. On one side of the scale is an insecure person, on the other is an aggressive person, and in the middle is a confident person with good communication skills [18].

The results were statistically processed using Student's t-criterion, χ^2 -homogeneity criterion, and Spearman correlation analysis [19].

A comparison of the study of assertiveness among undergraduate students in the dynamics from the 1st to the 4th year of study is shown in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1

Dynamics of Assertiveness Indicators in Students Studying “State and Municipal Management”

Indicators	Year of Study					
	1 ($M \pm m$)	3 ($M \pm m$)	4 ($M \pm m$)	p (1–3)	p (1–4)	p (3–4)
Assertiveness	5.58 ± 0.2	5.14 ± 0.25	5.23 ± 0.2	>0.05	>0.05	>0.05
Autonomy	10.2 ± 0.23	9.95 ± 0.28	8.35 ± 0.22	>0.05	≤ 0.01	≤ 0.01
Self-confidence	22.8 ± 0.7	19.84 ± 0.82	18.83 ± 0.57	≤ 0.01	≤ 0.01	>0.05

Note. M – arithmetic mean; m – mean error; p – probability of an error.

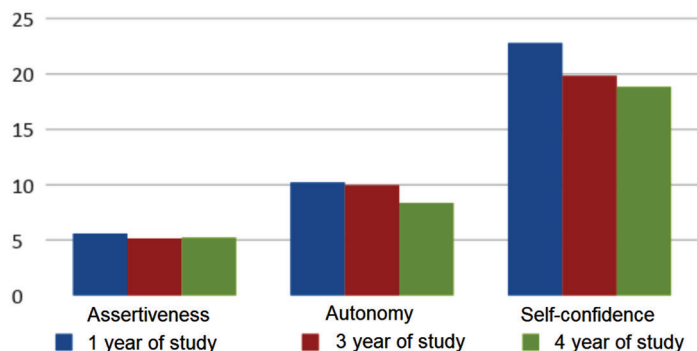


Fig. 1. Indicators of assertiveness, autonomy, and self-confidence in first, third, and fourth year students (mean values)

Table 1 and Figure 1 show that students in all years of study have an average assertiveness level between “4–6 points”. The authors interpret this level of assertiveness to mean that they are mainly assertive in typical situations. However, when the situation changes, their assertiveness tends to decrease. The study found no significant differences in average assertiveness scores based on Student’s t-criterion.

Figure 2 shows the results of the study on the dynamics of assertiveness indicators among 1st, 3rd, and 4th year students.

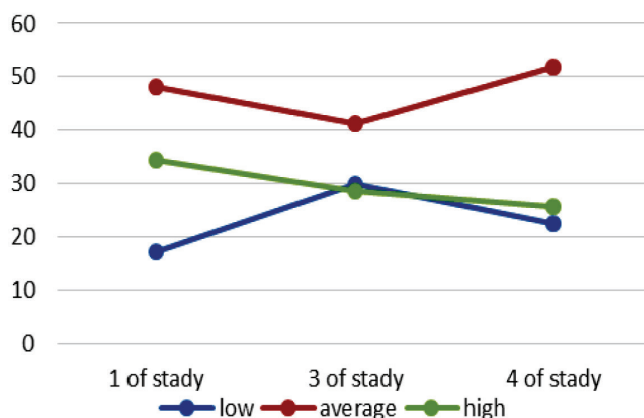


Fig. 2. Dynamics of self-assertion indicators in students from the 1st to the fourth year of study according to the degree of expression (%)

As can be seen in Fig. 2, students' assertiveness decreases significantly over the course of their studies. The percentage of students with a high level of assertiveness decreases from 34.5% in the first year to 25.8% in the fourth year. On the other hand, the number of students with low levels of assertiveness increases significantly, to 30% in the third year. The majority of students in all years of study have average levels of assertiveness, with the highest percentage in the fourth year of study at 51.7%.

Despite these differences between years of study, statistical analysis using the χ^2 -homogeneity criterion did not reveal significant evidence that students' assertiveness changed substantially throughout their studies or between courses in the curriculum. In other words, it appears that students' assertiveness does not change significantly over the course of their studies or between courses in the curriculum.

Based on the average indicators of autonomy dependence presented in Table 1 and Figure 1, this index shows a significant decrease as students progress from the first to the fourth year of study ($p \leq 0.01$). The most significant decrease occurs between the third and fourth years of study ($p \leq 0.01$). First and third-year students show "mixed" or uncertain behavior, with average indicators between 9 and 11 points. This means they show both autonomous and dependent behavior characteristics, making it difficult to classify them strictly as "autonomous" or "dependent." On the other hand, fourth-year students are more likely to show "dependent" behavior, as their average indicators are 8 points. This indicates a lack of persistence, determination, self-control, and independence in their learning activities. Instead, they tend to rely heavily on instructions, advice, and prompts from others.

It should be noted that a low level of autonomy or dependent behavior is highly undesirable for future civil servants. It may lead to indecisiveness and dependence on the opinions of others in the performance of professional duties. Such dependence on praise or punishment may hinder personal and professional development, which is undesirable in their future role as civil servants.

Figure 3 shows the results of the autonomy dependence survey based on 1st, 3rd, and 4th year students' scores, presented as percentages. The distribution of students across autonomy levels in the first and fourth years is remarkably consistent. Both are dominated by the average level, 39.5% in the first year and 38.2% in the fourth year.

The situation is different in the third year, where most students have a low level of autonomy (51.4%), while the smallest percentage have a high level of autonomy (18.6%). The use of the χ^2 -homogeneity criterion for the analysis of the results shows significant differences in this aspect between the third and fourth-year students ($p \leq 0.01$) and a remarkable trend between the first and third-year students ($p \leq 0.1$).

Regarding the mean scores for self-confidence presented in Table 1 and Figure 1, first-year students show significantly higher self-confidence than their third- and fourth-year peers ($p \leq 0.01$). Fourth-year students show a clear pattern in that they frequently admit to unsafe behaviors. Many of these final

year students, prospective civil servants, avoid challenges by avoiding important decisions or displaying an aggressive behavioral style. This may be due to their tendency to hide their own insecurities and dependencies while striving to assert themselves at the expense of others.

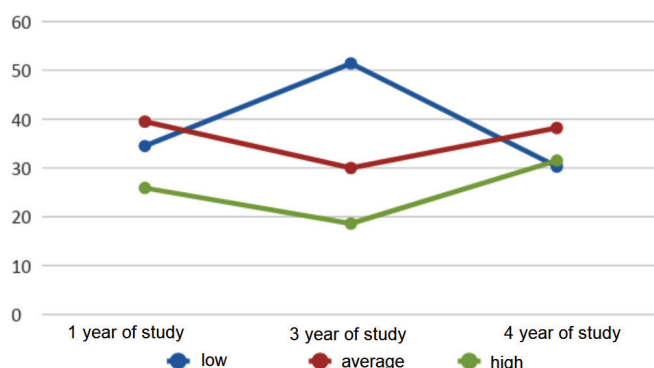


Fig. 3. Dynamics of the autonomy-dependence indicator in students from the first to the fourth course according to the degree of expression (%)

Figure 4 shows the results of the study on self-confidence based on the developmental stages in 1st, 3rd, and 4th year students.

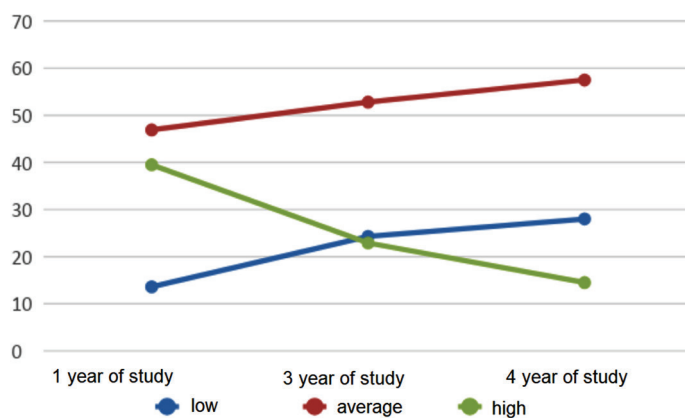


Fig. 4. Dynamics of the self-confidence indicator in students from the first to the fourth year of study according to the degree of expression (%)

As can be seen in Figure 4, the highest percentage of students in all years of study have average self-confidence. Moreover, there is a remarkable decrease in the percentage of students with high self-confidence indicators, decreasing from 39.5% in the first year to 22.9% in the third year and 14.5% in the fourth year. At the same time, the percentage of students with low self-confidence increases from 13.6% in the first year to 24.3% in the third year and peaks at 28% in the fourth year. The χ^2 -homogeneity criterion for the analysis shows statistically significant differences in the distribution of students across this indicator between the first and third years ($p \leq 0.05$) and between the first and fourth years ($p \leq 0.01$). However, no significant differences were found between the third and fourth years.

The changes in assertiveness indicators and certain distributions of scores among students might be related to their university life. In the first year, students may be excited about starting university, which leads to more independence and confidence. As they approach graduation, the decrease in autonomy and self-confidence could be due to uncertainty about future jobs and concern about fulfilling job responsibilities as a civil servant.

The correlation analysis of the relationships between the studied indicators and the creation of the correlation pleiad based on them yielded data that we consider interesting (Table 2, Fig. 5).

Statistically significant correlation coefficients are highlighted in Table 2: $p \leq 0.0005$.

Table 2

Correlations between indicators of assertiveness, autonomy, and self-confidence in first, third, and fourth-year students

Indicators	1st-year			3rd-year			4th-year		
	Assert.	Auto.	Conf.	Assert.	Auto.	Conf.	Assert.	Auto.	Conf.
Assertiveness		0,355	0,712		0,089	0,467		–0,095	0,462
Autonomy			0,411			0,001			–0,129
Self-confidence									

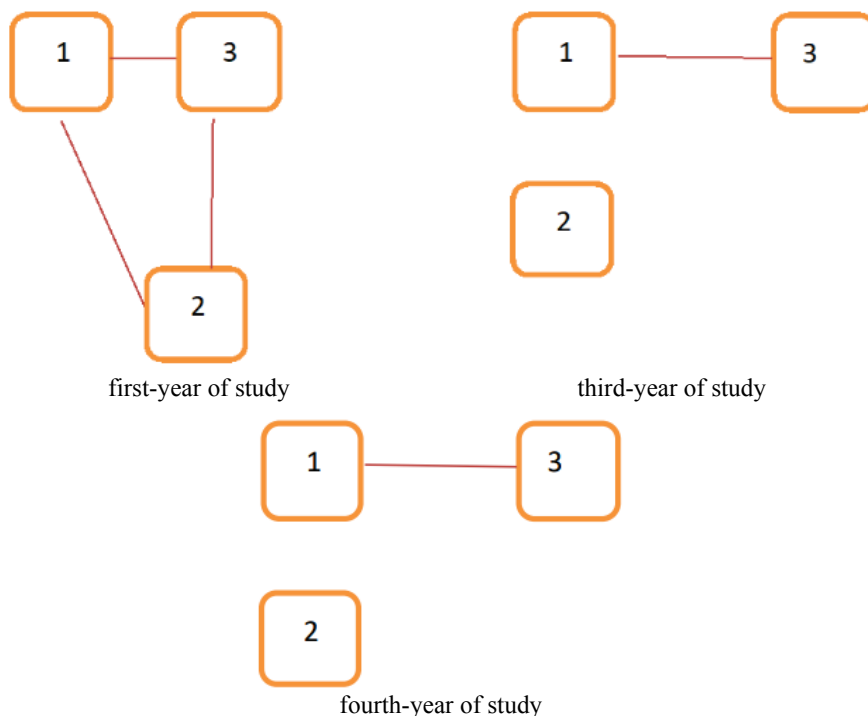


Fig. 5. Correlation pleiadi showing the relationships between the indicators of assertiveness, autonomy, and self-confidence among Year 1, Year 3, and Year 4 students. Indicators: 1 – assertiveness; 2 – autonomy; 3 – self-confidence. The distance between the cells with the number of indicators characterizes the strength of the relationship: the smaller the distance, the stronger (closer) the connection

As shown in Table 2 and Fig. 5, there are positive correlations between all aspects in the first year of the study. This indicates that students' self-confidence and autonomy increase when they have more self-confidence. In other words, they become more independent, regulate their actions independently, and take responsibility for their actions.

However, these relationships change in the third and fourth years of study. The relationship between autonomy and the "assertiveness-self-confidence" correlation becomes less strong. This could indicate that independence and responsibility are decreasing, and students rely more on circumstances and people around them. The strength of the link between assertiveness and self-confidence also decreases over time. In the first year, this relationship is strong ($r = 0.712$), but in the third and fourth years, it becomes moderately strong ($r = 0.467$ and $r = 0.462$, respectively).

However, these correlations change in the third and fourth years of study. The relationship between autonomy and the "assertiveness-self-confidence" correlation becomes less strong. This could indicate decreased independence and responsibility as students rely more on circumstances and the people around them. The strength of the link between assertiveness and self-confidence also decreases over time. In the first year, this relationship is strong ($r = 0.712$), but in the third and fourth years, it becomes moderately strong ($r = 0.467$ and $r = 0.462$, respectively). These results support our earlier conclusions: Initial excitement about starting university most likely subsides in the third year. Students face challenges related to their academic and personal lives and uncertainty about their future. These factors contribute to a decrease in assertiveness among senior students.

The results of the study support our hypothesis and highlight that students are not developing the necessary knowledge, skills, and qualities that lead to a strong sense of autonomy, self-confidence, and, ultimately, assertiveness that are critical to their future careers. The lack of positive progress and negative change in the aspects studied suggests that university subjects related to "State and Municipal Management" are ineffective in promoting assertiveness. This is also supported by the results of the correlation analysis: The weaker links between autonomy and the "assertiveness – self-confidence" correlation among third- and fourth-year students imply less independence, less sense of responsibility, and more dependence on circumstances and people around them.

We believe that a promising approach to promoting assertiveness in undergraduates might be incorporating practical exercises into the curriculum of psychology courses. This particular program could help improve the current situation and equip future state and local government employees with the skills to manage their emotions, make thoughtful decisions, interact skillfully with citizens and colleagues, achieve goals, and demonstrate self-confidence.

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Information about the author:

Sophia A. Gaponova, Doctor of Psychological Sciences, Professor, Leading Researcher of the Nizhny Novgorod State Pedagogical University named after Kozma Minin (Ulyanov Street, 1, Nizhny Novgorod, Russian Federation, 603000).

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1526-4378>

E-mail: sagap@mail.ru

Natalya S. Kornilova, Senior Lecturer. Nizhny Novgorod Institute of Management – Branch of RANEPA (Gagarin Ave., 46, Nizhny Novgorod, Russian Federation, 603950).

E-mail: nskorn@mail.ru

ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ АССЕРТИВНОГО ПОВЕДЕНИЯ СТУДЕНТОВ – БУДУЩИХ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫХ СЛУЖАЩИХ

**София Александровна Гапонова¹,
Наталья Сергеевна Корнилова²**

¹ *Нижегородский государственный педагогический университет
им. Козьмы Минина, Нижний Новгород, Россия, sagar@mail.ru*

² *Нижегородский институт управления – филиал РАНХиГС,
Нижний Новгород, Россия, nskorn@mail.ru*

Аннотация. В статье показана необходимость изучения и дальнейшего формирования асертивного поведения студентов – будущих государственных служащих, деятельность которых в современных условиях строится на умении достигать успеха и позиционировать активную жизненную позицию, находить варианты устранения трудностей, проявлять эмоциональную устойчивость. Анализ научной литературы показал, что асертивное поведение приводит к повышению личной эффективности, является профилактикой профессионального выгорания, состояния неуверенности и тревожности.

Асертивное поведение представляет собой определенный способ действий, который позволяет активно и последовательно отстаивать свои и интересы и достигать целей, открыто выстраивать общение, относится с уважением к индивидуальным особенностям окружающих.

На основании анализа результатов исследования, полученных по методикам: «Исследование уровня асертивности» В. Каппони, Т. Новак, Опросник «Автономности-зависимости», Г.С. Прыгин, «Диагностика уверенности в себе», Карвасарский Б.Д., были сделаны выводы о том, что во время обучения в вузе студенты не приобретают необходимых знаний, навыков и умений, которые способствуют формированию достаточно высокого уровня автономности, уверенности, и, в конечном итоге, асертивного поведения для успешного осуществления будущей профессиональной деятельности.

Отсутствие позитивной динамики по исследуемым показателям, более того, негативная динамика, дают возможность утверждать, что во время обучения в вузе на занятиях по дисциплинам основной и вариативной частей учебного плана направления подготовки «Государственное и муниципальное управление», заложенных в стандартных образовательных программах асертивное поведение не формируется. Об этом же говорят и результаты корреляционного анализа между исследуемыми показателями: распад связей между автономностью и связкой «асертивность – уверенность в себе», что можно рассматривать как снижение самостоятельности, ответственности и повышение зависимости от обстоятельств и окружающих людей.

Полученные результаты позволяют рекомендовать внесение дополнений в учебные программы вуза, которые будут включать в рамках психологических дисциплин практические занятия, направленные на формирование асертивного поведения. В результате предполагается, что студенты – будущие государственные служащие смогут лучше контролировать свои эмоциональные реакции, обдуманно и взвешенно

принимать решения, достигать поставленных целей, демонстрировать уверенность и независимость поведения, что в итоге приведет к повышению эффективности взаимодействия с гражданами и коллегами.

Ключевые слова: *ассертивность, ассертивное и манипулятивное поведение, уверенность в себе, автономное и зависимое поведение, студенты, государственные служащие*

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Информация об авторе:

Гапонова София Александровна, доктор психологических наук, профессор, ведущий научный сотрудник, Нижегородский государственный педагогический университет им. Козьмы Минина (ул. Ульянова, 1, Нижний Новгород, Россия, 603000).

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1526-4378>

E-mail: sagap@mail.ru

Корнилова Наталья Сергеевна, старший преподаватель, Нижегородский институт управления – филиал РАНХиГС (пр. Гагарина, 46, Нижний Новгород, Россия, 603950).

E-mail: nskorn@mail.ru

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