



EDUCATION

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UDC:

A STUDY OF UKRAINIAN FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS' RESILIENCE AT THE STAGE OF ADAPTATION TO TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES UNDER MARTIAL LAW

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The article highlights the results of screening diagnostics of the level of resilience of first-year students in adapting to the educational environment of the university under martial law in Ukraine. This category of students represents the mental health risk group, due to simultaneous experience of the first crisis of professional development and the traumatic crisis of war. A survey (based on the criteria of the Four Dimensional Symptom Questionnaire), which preceded this study, determined that among the mental health disorders of freshmen, the leading place is occupied by symptoms of distress and somatization, combined with anxiety. This gave grounds for organizing a more in-depth study of the problem of preservation and strengthening the mental health of first-year students. Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-10) was used for screening diagnostics of the level of resilience. Using the method of obtaining normalized scores, the following levels of resilience in first-year students were determined: low (CD-RISC-10 ≤ 20), below average (20 > CD-RISC-10 ≤ 26), average (26 > CD-RISC-10 ≤ 30), above average (30 > CD-RISC-10 ≤ 34), high (CD-RISC-10 > 34). Results: over one third of the freshmen



(38%) had low rates of resilience. We consider it important in the future to investigate the correlation between the level of resilience of first-year students and their prevailing coping strategies, tolerance to ambiguity and fundamental personal characteristics that may affect the ability to cope with difficult circumstances (extroversion, friendliness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness to new experiences). This will allow to develop psychotherapeutic toolkit for the development of resiliency - mastering the skills of maintaining mental health in hardship and post-traumatic growth by own internal resources.

Key words: resilience, first-year students, adaptation to training and professional activities, martial law.

У статті висвітлюються результати скринінг-діагностики рівня резильєнтності першокурсників на етапі адаптації до освітнього середовища університету в воєнних умовах на території України. Дана категорія студентів, на нашу думку, відноситься до групи ризику погіршення психічного здоров'я через одночасне переживання першої кризи професійного розвитку та травмивної кризи війни. Дослідження охопило 84 першокурсників. Опитування (на основі критеріїв The Four Dimensional Symptom Questionnaire – 4DSQ), яке передувало цьому дослідженню, встановило, що серед відхилень психічного здоров'я першокурсників переважають симптоми дистресу та соматизації, які в окремих випадках поєднуються з проявами тривоги. Це дало підстави організувати більш поглиблене вивчення проблеми збереження і зміцнення психічного здоров'я першокурсників ЗВО під час професійного навчання в умовах воєнного стану. З метою скринінг-діагностики рівня резильєнтності студентів було використано Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-10). За допомогою методу отримання нормалізованих балів було визначено рівні резильєнтності першокурсників: низький ($CD-RISC-10 \leq 20$), нижче середнього ($20 > CD-RISC-10 \leq 26$, середній ($26 > CD-RISC-10 \leq 30$), вище середнього ($30 > CD-RISC-10 \leq 34$), високий ($CD-RISC-10 > 34$). Отримані результати засвідчили, що понад третини опитаних першокурсників (38%) мають низькі показники рівня розвитку резильєнтності. У майбутньому важливо дослідити кореляційні зв'язки між рівнем резильєнтності студентів-першокурсників на етапі адаптації до навчально-професійної діяльності в умовах воєнного стану та їх превалюючими копінг-стратегіями, рівнем толерантності до невизначеності та фундаментальними особистісними характеристиками, які можуть впливати на здатність впоратися із складними життєвими обставинами (екстраверсія, дружелюбність, добросовісність, емоційна стабільність та відкритість новому досвіду). Це дозволить розробити дієвий психотерапевтичний інструментарій для розвитку резильєнтності у студентів – опанування навичками збереження психічного здоров'я у складних обставинах і посттравматичного відновлення за рахунок власних внутрішніх ресурсів.

Ключові слова: резильєнтність, першокурсники, адаптація до навчально-професійної діяльності, воєнний стан.

Introduction

It should be taken into account that in recent years Ukrainian society has been in permanent crisis, associated with a sense of life in danger and uncertainty for a long time. This state is characteristic of the individual during war, inflation, political instability and



other global events (for example, the COVID-19 pandemic), which can disrupt the usual order of life in the long run. At the same time, each person goes through the path of personal formation in the conditions of polycrisis associated with the need to change one's life style, way of thinking, attitude to oneself, the world around and the main existential problems in order to meet the requirements of the new social situation of development.

Considering this, in the complex realities of Ukraine, in the conditions of military aggression by the Russian Federation, one of the urgent problems is the psychological support of the professional development of future specialists who have made a choice in favor of Ukrainian higher education institutions, especially at the stage of adaptation to the conditions of professional training during martial law, which, in our opinion, causes an increased risk of their mental health deviations.

In view of this, *the aim* of our study was to determine the characteristics of the resilience of first-year students of the Ukrainian higher education institution at the stage of adaptation to training and professional activities under martial law as a premise of maintaining mental health in difficult circumstances.

Literature Review

Often, the adaptation of applicants for the first level of higher education to the training and professional educational environment is understood as a comprehensive process in which psychological, social and biological factors participate. These factors in their interaction are:

1. reflect the training level for educational and extracurricular activities (conformity of the amount and level of knowledge, abilities and skills of the student with the needs of the educational process; professional orientation of the student, needs, values, social attitudes; student social activity);
2. characterize the development of individual adaptation abilities (level of social maturity; individual and personal characteristics of the development of mental processes; the level of motivational and reflexive knowledge of the individual, his/her subjective experience),
3. emphasize the role of pedagogical influence on the adaptation process, characterize the conditions of "learning and living" (the organization of the educational process itself - the schedule of classes, the sequence of subjects; satisfaction with interpersonal relations in the student group, equality of students for their formal social status: "student – student", "student – teacher", "student – administration", "student – social environment") (Androsovyh, 2015), etc.

From a psychological point of view, crisis life events, that is, such circumstances that create a potential or active threat to the satisfaction of the basic needs of the individual in the course of its development, have the most adverse impact on human health. In other words, the crisis is "a kind of reaction of the individual to situations that require him/her to change the way of being - the life style, way of thinking, attitude towards himself/herself, the world around him/her and the main existential problems" (Zlyvko, Lukomska, & Fedan, 2016). Thus, on the one hand, a sharp change in the social situation of the development of former graduates of general secondary education institutions and their acquisition of a new social status of the student can be considered as the first crisis period of professional development of the individual, which causes the need for restructuring the current mode of adaptive behavior and requires a certain time for this (Gonta & Bulgac, 2019; Fryer, 2017; Enes & Tahsin, 2016; Androsovyh, 2015; Nelson, Smith, & Clarke, 2012; et al.). On the other hand, a war catastrophically influences nations' health



and well-being (Ahmed, 2022; Murthy, Lakshminarayana, 2006; World Health Organization, 2001; Hobfoll et al., 1991; et al.), it is an example of traumatic events that go beyond normal human experience (traumatic crisis) and can "cause mental trauma or damage to the basic structures of the personality, affective and cognitive systems at all levels, starting with physiological mechanisms and ending with the general picture of the world and the image of Self" (Ulko, 2016).

At the same time, the presence of certain personal resources can significantly affect both adaptation to a difficult situation and coping with it and preventing its adverse consequences. Stability and self-regulation of the individual in difficult situations contribute to such psychosocial factors as active coping, optimism, the presence of goals, prosocial behavior, social support, and resiliency. Resilience as a phenomenon began to be mentioned in psychology from the 70s of the twentieth century. (Kireieva, Odnostalko, & Biron, 2020). It is understood as the ability of a person to return to a normal state after or during adversities (Fraser, Richman, & Galinsky, 1999); a dynamic process that leads to adaptation in conditions of significant adversity (Margalit & Idan, 2004); the opportunity to withstand the troubles, to go through the trauma of life (Connor, Davidson, 2003); healthy functioning after severe adverse events (Bonnano, 2008); a system-forming element in the structure of a resilient personality, a positive mental state that directs to adequate adaptation during adversity, and, at the same time, a resource through which the person chooses the appropriate type of coping (Kireieva et al., 2020).

Method

As a result of our previous survey (questionnaire "My Well-Being", based on the criteria for the Four Dimensional Symptom Questionnaire - 4DSQ) of future specialists in the field of special and inclusive education at the stage of adaptation to professional training in the modern realities of Ukraine, it can be stated that in the absence of depressive symptoms among the deviations of mental health of this category of persons, the leading place is occupied by symptoms of distress (asthenia, increased worry, decreased mood, restless sleep and mental stress) and somatization (headache), which in some cases are combined with manifestations of anxiety (anxiety/panic attacks, fear of disgrace in front of others) (Afuzova, Naydonova, Krotenko, 2022). The results obtained can be considered the basis for an in-depth study of the problem of preservation and promotion of mental health of first-year students at a higher education institution during professional training under martial law.

Further research was carried out within the framework of the project "Development of Resilience of First-Level Higher Education Students in the Conditions of Military Conflict on the Territory of Ukraine", funded by the Ukrainian Educational Research Association with the support of the European Educational Research Association. According to our *hypothesis*, the contemporary reality (the combination of permanent crisis and polycrisis, layered on each other), in which students begin vocational training in Ukraine, affects the decrease in the ability of future specialists to withstand life adversities and can be considered as a potential risk to their mental well-being.

Participants

Thus, freshmen who have started vocational training under martial law can be considered one of the most vulnerable categories of the population of Ukraine. Their experience of both existential and traumatic crises decreases their ability to socio-psychological adaptation. The study was conducted in early October 2022 among first-year full-time students of Dragomanov Ukrainian State University, who study in the specialties



016 Special Education and 053 Psychology (Special, Clinical). At the beginning of the 2022-2023 academic year, there were 127 such students, of which 84 freshmen took part in the survey. The vast majority of respondents (95.2%) were female, and only 4.8% were male. The age of respondents ranged from 17 to 18 years.

Data collection

For screening diagnostics of the level of resilience of first-year students, we chose the Ukrainian-language version of Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale or CD-RISC-10 (adaptation – Shkolina et al., 2020). CD-RISC measures resilience as a function of five interrelated components: personal competence; positive acceptance of change and secure relationships; trust/tolerance of negative affect; control; spiritual influences (Kireieva et al., 2020). According to Gonzalez, Moore, Newton, & Galli (2016), the ten-position scale is psychometrically higher compared to the one-dimensional scale of 25 items.

In our study, we comply with all ethical standards. Participation in the study was voluntary. All respondents before the survey were informed about the study and agreed to processing of the results. The study was conducted via the Internet using the Google form that reflected the statements of the CD-RISC-10. The time of the survey was not limited or fixed. Statistical processing of data was carried out using the methods of mathematical statistics.

Results

Note that none of the participants received an overall minimum (0 points) and maximum (40 points) score on the CD-RISC-10 scale. Our sample is characterized by mean value 27.6 and standard deviation 5.35. The minimum value in the sample of first-year students was 6 points, and the maximum - 38 points.

To determine the level of resilience in Ukrainian first-year students, we carried out a procedure for standardizing raw CD-RISC-10 scores, because such norms for this age category (17-18 years) were not determined for this scale. For this, the method of obtaining normalized scores was used (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Conversion of Raw Scores to Normalized Scores (Five-Point Scale)

From	To	Score
min	20	1 (Low level)
20	26	2 (Below average level)
26	30	3 (Average level)
30	34	4 (Above average level)
34	40	5 (High level)

Determining the characteristics of the resilience of first-year students showed us descriptive statistics of our sample: the mean value of the resilience indicator is 27.5, the standard deviation is 5.42.

Persons with a high level of resilience, as a rule, are ready to overcome any difficult situation, they are able to distribute and use resources, they are active, persistent, resourceful, develop a flexible strategy of behavior, are able to "take a hit" (Odnostalko, 2020). According to the results obtained, we found that among first-year students who began vocational training under martial law, with a high level of resilience only 6%, and

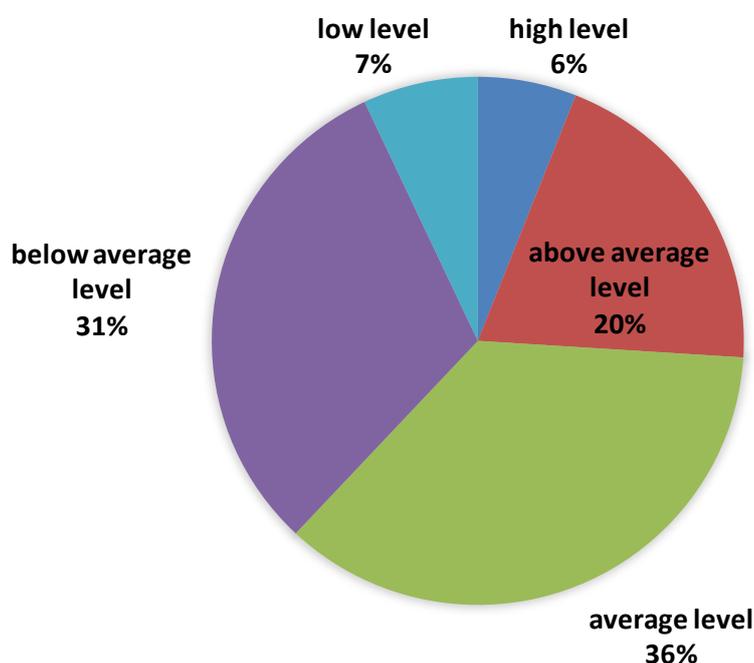


20% of first-year students who participated in the survey have a level of resilience above average.

Future specialists in the field of special education and special psychology at the stage of adaptation to the educational environment of a higher education institution have an average level of resilience (36%). An acceptance of the situation, focus on potential solutions are common to these freshmen, they can take responsibility for their own lives, they are active, able to regulate their own emotions and resources (Odnostalko, 2020).

Figure 1.

The level of resilience of first-course students of Dragomanov Ukrainian State University at the stage of adaptation to training and professional activities under martial law



But, if we take into account first-year students with a level of resilience below average (31%) and a low level (7%) of development of this psychological phenomenon, there will be more than a third of them. This level of resiliency is reflected in the reduced ability to influence a difficult/atypical situation, loss of own resources, difficulties in solving new challenges and issues of life, difficulties in adaptation (Odnostalko, 2020).

Discussion

As the results of the study demonstrate, 38% of first-course students do not have mental health preservation and maintenance skills, which is confirmed by low rates of their level of resilience. We did not find similar studies by either Ukrainian or foreign researchers, only in the study of Shamne (2018) it was noted that at the stage of adaptation to the learning conditions in higher education, 23% of freshmen demonstrated stress tolerance at a level below average. Instead, the problem of the development of resilience under martial law, critical ambiguity and tension in modern society is recognized throughout the world. Significant correlation links have been identified between resilience and emotional intelligence, defense mechanisms, self-esteem and confidence in their effectiveness, positive relationships with others, type of attachment and nature of early child-parent relationships, etc. (Lazos, 2018). Accordingly, the next stage of our research will be to determine the



correlations between the level of resilience of first-year full-time students at the stage of adaptation to training and professional activities under martial law and their prevailing coping strategies, level of tolerance for ambiguity and fundamental personality characteristics that we believe affect the ability to cope with difficult life circumstances (extraversion, friendliness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness to new experience). The obtained results can be laid out on the basis of an effective psychotherapeutic technology for the development of resiliency in this category of students for mastering the skills of preserving mental health in difficult circumstances and post-traumatic growth by own internal resources.

The limitations of the study. The results of the study can be extended exclusively to Ukrainian first-year students who began professional training under martial law. The obtained results could be influenced by the fact that in conditions of limited contact in the academic community of Ukraine, due to the escalation of the military conflict, the survey covered freshmen of only one university. Also, the study did not take into account the factor of location of students (in Ukraine or abroad).

Conclusion

The results of the study, combined with a deficit of similar representative data, emphasize the relevance of the problem chosen for the study and confirm our hypothesis of a decrease in the level of ability to resist the difficult circumstances of life among first-year students who began vocational training in the conditions of the martial law. Deepening through further research the idea of the "weak" points of resilience of Ukrainian first-course students at the stage of adaptation to the conditions of study in higher education, we will get the key to developing an effective strategy for their psychological support in such difficult life circumstances.

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