

## INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS IN STUDENTS' ADAPTATION UNDER LONG-TERM STRESS

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### Summary

The article highlights the current problem of the influence of individual psychological factors on the process of adaptation of students in conditions of prolonged stress. Due to prolonged social and military upheavals, modern youth increasingly face psychological difficulties that complicate the process of learning, socialization and personal growth. Psychological factors such as anxiety, emotional stability, self-esteem, achievement motivation and the level of psychological resilience are studied. Considerable attention is paid to the analysis of coping strategies used by students in overcoming stressful situations, as well as the features of the formation of adaptive and maladaptive models of behavior. The presented results of the empirical study demonstrate that a high level of awareness, internal support and flexibility contributes to effective adaptation. It is shown that psychological support in an educational institution plays an important role in strengthening the internal resources of the individual. The potential of preventive programs for the development of stress resistance is also outlined. The author emphasizes the need to integrate psychoeducational activities into the educational space. The materials of the article may be useful to specialists in the field of educational psychology, teachers and higher education administration. Based on the data obtained, recommendations are formulated for practical psychologists on the prevention of maladjustment and support for the psych emotional state of students in conditions of instability and chronic stress.

**Key words:** individual psychological factors, adaptation, students, prolonged stress, stress resistance, coping strategies, psychological support.

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### 1. Introduction

Modern social realities, in particular, prolonged military aggression, economic instability, uncertainty of the future and changes in the educational environment, create a powerful psycho-emotional burden on students. Prolonged stress becomes a constant companion of young students, which significantly affects their psychological well-being, academic motivation, interpersonal interaction and overall quality of life. Adaptation in such conditions requires the presence of internal resources, which include individual psychological characteristics of the personality. The study of these factors allows us to better understand the mechanisms of overcoming difficulties, identify potential areas of vulnerability and develop effective strategies for supporting young people in times of crisis. The focus of scientific analysis is on such components as emotional stability, self-esteem, coping strategies, level of anxiety, motivation and psychological resilience.

**The purpose of the article:** to identify and analyze individual psychological factors that influence the adaptation of students in conditions of prolonged stress, in order to identify

support resources and form practical recommendations for maintaining the mental health of young students.

## 2. An overview of the main material

When analyzing the concept of mental resilience, it is impossible to avoid the phenomenon of stress, which is its immediate context and factor. In scientific and everyday discourse, the term "stress" is used extremely widely, but often without taking into account its complex nature and the stages of the body's reaction to stress-causing factors. The concept of "stress" comes from physics and originally meant tension, pressure or force applied to a system. This term was introduced into psychology and medicine by Hans Selye in 1926. The scientist defined stress as a non-specific reaction of the body to any requirements, calling this process a general adaptation syndrome or biological stress. According to his concept, this reaction is a universal response of the body to a wide range of stimuli, both physical and psycho-emotional. G. Selye identified three main stages of biological stress:

1. The stage of anxiety reaction – characterized by the mobilization of physiological and psychological resources: there is an increase in blood pressure, body temperature, increased emotional reactions and increased sensitivity to external stimuli.

2. The stage of resistance (adaptation) – at this stage the body relatively well withstands the effects of the main stressor, but becomes more vulnerable to other stimuli. Psychologically, it manifests itself in the stabilization of the emotional sphere and concentration on solving the problem situation.

3. The stage of exhaustion – occurs under the condition of prolonged or excessively intense exposure to the stressor. The body's protective mechanisms are exhausted, there is a violation of physiological functions, decreased motivation, a feeling of helplessness, absent-mindedness and emotional destabilization.

G. Selye emphasized that stress is not always negative. He distinguished the concepts of eustress (positive) and distress (negative), noting that in certain circumstances stress mobilizes a person's internal resources and promotes effective activity. In subsequent approaches, these concepts were simplified, and the term "stress" began to be associated exclusively with negative psycho-emotional states, and also began to be identified primarily with psychological, rather than biological, influence.

Everyday reality demonstrates that it is impossible to completely avoid stress. At the same time, the degree of its influence largely depends on the individual reaction of a person. It is important to realize that negative consequences are generated not by the fact of the presence of stress itself, but by an inadequate or maladaptive reaction to it.

In this context, adaptation is considered as the ability of a subject to effectively overcome stress using functional coping strategies that ensure the preservation of mental well-being. Adaptive ways of overcoming stress include conscious response, rational assessment of the situation, active problem solving, and seeking support. In contrast, maladaptive strategies include denial of the stressor, avoidance, and the use of psychoactive substances to reduce emotional stress in the short term, which in the long term only increases behavioral disorganization.

Thus, the formation of mental resilience is a key task in the context of confronting chronic stress, and therefore an important area of psychological support in the educational environment, in particular in conditions of social crises and prolonged destabilizing circumstances.

During the stress response of the body, changes occur that can be classified into three main groups of indicators: physiological, psychological, and behavioral (Bardyn, 2021).

Physiological indicators include such manifestations as rapid heartbeat, dilated pupils, increased sweating, muscle tension in the arms, legs, and neck, dry mouth, tightness in the throat, psychomotor agitation, and alternating sensations of heat and cold. Such reactions are the result of activation of the sympathoadrenal system in response to the stressor.

Psychological indicators of stress include increased irritability, suspiciousness, hostility, feelings of unreasonable fear, anger attacks, apathy, depressive states, difficulty in making decisions, decreased self-esteem and cognitive impairment (thinking disorders) (Prokofieva, 2025).

Behavioral manifestations include increased excitability, nervous tics, impulsiveness, changes in appetite (anorexia or hyperphagia), sleep disorders (insomnia or hypersomnia), frequent emotional outbursts, increased conflict, decreased productivity, abuse of psychoactive substances (alcohol, tobacco) and even suicidal intentions. In response to the action of stressors, an individual engages a coping system – coping behavior, which is a conscious form of adaptation to a situation perceived as threatening. Unlike psychological defense, which operates mostly unconsciously, coping strategies are determined by choice and are aimed at actively reducing stress levels (Prokofieva, 2025: 286).

Coping strategies can be of different orientations. For example, cognitive coping involves searching for information about a stressful situation, analyzing ways to improve it or stabilize the emotional state. Coping strategies involve a direct response to the situation: changing circumstances, taking sedatives, physical activity, etc. At the same time, some people choose an escape-avoidance strategy, which is characterized by a lack of active response, which can potentially worsen the situation (Meshko, 2023).

Researchers pay special attention to maladaptive ways of coping with stress, including denial of the problem, avoidance of thoughts about the stressful situation, illusory satisfaction, and rationalization. Such strategies can temporarily reduce stress, but at the same time they deepen the problem and prevent a real solution to the situation.

Successful stress management is also possible through external support – turning to the social environment: friends, loved ones, a psychotherapist or a psychological help specialist. The presence of supportive social ties is considered one of the leading factors in maintaining mental health in conditions of prolonged stress (Oleś, 1993).

### **3. Individual psychological factors of personality adaptation to conditions of prolonged stress**

Personality adaptation to complicated life circumstances, in particular to the influence of prolonged stress, is a complex multi-level psychological process. It involves not only modification of external behavior, but also a deep transformation of the internal regulatory system aimed at preserving personal integrity, psycho-emotional stability and effective functioning in a changing environment.

In modern psychological theory, adaptation is considered as a dynamic system of interaction between the subject and the environment, which ensures the establishment of a balance between the requirements of the environment and the individual capabilities of the individual (Lazarus, 1966; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). Of particular relevance is the study of the adaptive resources of student youth, who combine a high level of personal and academic activity with increased vulnerability to psych traumatic influences of a social and existential nature. In conditions of social turbulence caused by military actions and general instability, individual psychological factors become crucial, determining the ability of the individual to effectively

adapt, while maintaining mental balance and vitality. According to modern empirical research (Leontiev, 2022; Stelmakh, 2023), such factors include:

- the level of self-esteem, which performs the function of regulating the emotional state, determines the degree of self-confidence and readiness to overcome difficulties;
- stress resistance, as a personality characteristic that allows you to maintain control over the situation and maintain productivity in difficult conditions;
- mental stability, which includes flexibility of thinking, the ability to mobilize internal resources, emotional self-regulation and psychological recovery after crisis situations;
- personal anxiety, which, at high levels, significantly complicates the adaptation process, reduces the effectiveness of coping strategies and can provoke the development of psychosomatic disorders;
- coping strategies are individual mechanisms for overcoming stress, including both conscious actions and unconscious forms of response. Depending on personal characteristics, strategies can be both constructive and destructive (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Students, being in a phase of constant personal formation, face a wide range of challenges every day – from intense academic workload to identity crises and social uncertainty. In conditions of martial law, these factors are even more acute, forming a permanent stressful background that requires students to have a high level of internal regulation and adaptability.

Thus, a systematic study of individual psychological determinants of adaptation in conditions of prolonged stress allows not only to more deeply understand the mechanisms of mental self-preservation, but also creates a theoretical and practical basis for the development of psycho-prophylactic, corrective programs aimed at supporting student youth in conditions of protracted crisis situations.

#### 4. Research results

To assess the stress resistance and social adaptation of students of higher education institutions, the following psychodiagnostic methods were used: Karen Lappert's test for determining mental stability, T. Holmes and R. Rage's stress resistance and social adaptation assessment method, C. Spielberger's personal anxiety research method, and T.V. Dembo's method, S.Ya. Rubinstein's (modified by A.M. Prykhozhan, adolescence and youth). The empirical study was conducted at the Open International University of Human Development "Ukraine". The study involved 60 students of the 1st-4th year of the specialty "Psychology" aged 18 to 23 years. The results of the study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

#### Results of the study using the method "Determination of stress resistance and social adaptation"

Respondents	Levels of stress resistance and social adaptation		
	Low level	Threshold level	High level
Indicators (%) of 1st year students	17	50	33
Indicators (%) of 2nd year students	12	59	29
Indicators (%) of 3rd year students	24	45	31
Indicators (%) of 4th year students	9	47	44

As can be seen from the presented data, the threshold level of stress resistance and social adaptation prevails in most respondents. Such students are characterized by a decrease in the

level of stress resistance with an increase in the number and severity of stressful situations. To overcome negative states, they are forced to concentrate a significant part of their own vital energy and resources, which can subsequently determine emotional and physical exhaustion. The results of the 3rd year students, 24% of whom, as a result of the study, have a low level of stress resistance, which indicates that they have a high level of stress load and a very low level of stress resistance, which is a signal of serious anxiety. Such individuals have a high probability of nervous exhaustion, and as a result, the appearance and development of various psychosomatic diseases. It is advisable for such students to take measures to avoid stressful situations and those areas of activity that may be associated with stress. In our opinion, the indicators of a high level of stress resistance and social adaptation in 44% of graduate students are optimistic. They are characterized by high stress resistance, a predominance of optimistic moods and attitudes. They can effectively function and interact in various social and professional spheres, as they demonstrate a minimal level of stress load.

The next technique that we used for empirical research is the Karen Lappert test for determining mental resilience. High levels of stress are less common in groups of 2–4 years, which indicates the positive impact of stress management skills. The average level of stress is inherent in most respondents, this may indicate that stress management skills help to avoid high levels of stress, maintaining it at an average level. Low levels of stress prevail in 1, 2 and 4 years, which is a positive indicator of the general stress resistance of young men. Stress management skills have a positive impact on young men's ability to cope with stress, reducing the number of high stress events and maintaining stress at low or moderate levels Table 2.

Table 2

**Distribution of Mental Resilience Test Scores Karen Lappert**

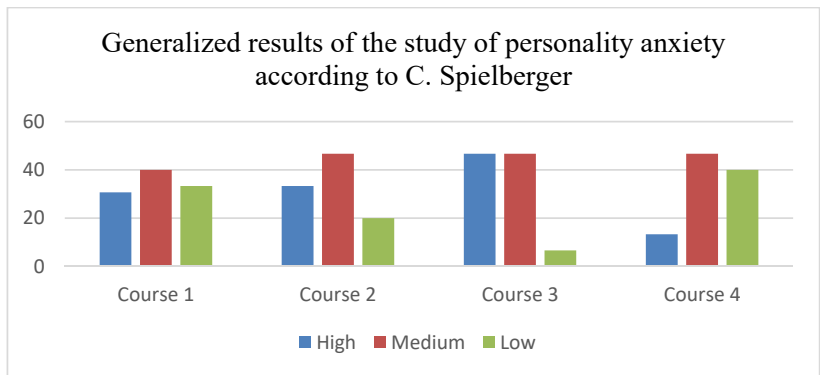
Stress levels	Results of 4th year students		Results of 3rd year students		Results of 2nd year students		Results of 1st year students	
	the number of persons	%	the number of persons	%	the number of persons	%	the number of persons	%
Low	8	53,3	3	20	6	40	6	40
Medium	5	33,3	6	40	7	46,6	6	40
High	2	13,4	6	40	2	13,4	3	20

Using the methodology of studying personal anxiety by C. Spielberger, we obtained the following results, which are illustrated in Figure 1.

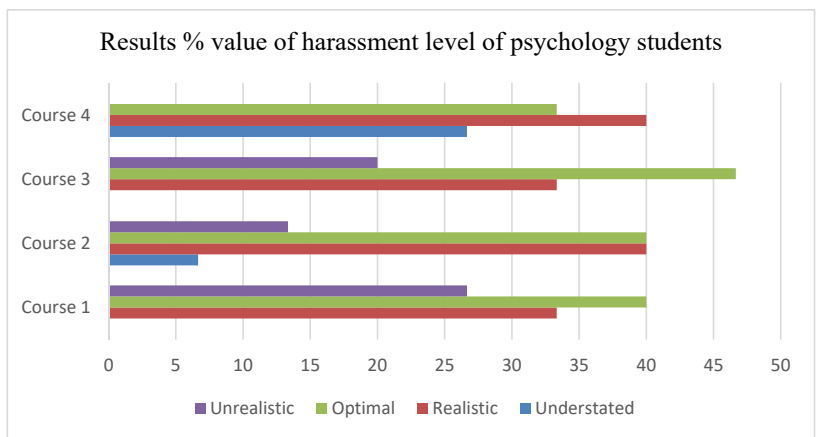
Comparative data indicate that under martial law, the level of personal anxiety among students has increased significantly. In particular, there is an increase in the proportion of those with medium and high levels of personal anxiety. Most students now demonstrate a medium level of anxiety, which indicates a general tendency to increase anxiety among young people in conditions of prolonged stress.

According to the results of an empirical study using the method of T. Dembo-S. Rubinstein in the modification of A. M. Prykhozhan to determine the self-esteem of students-psychologists, it allows us to determine three key parameters of self-esteem: growth, realism and stability. The results obtained are structured in the form of a diagram (See Figure 2 and 3).

As can be seen from Figure 2, out of 60 subjects who participated in the study of the features of self-esteem development, 11 people were found to have an unrealistic (overestimated) level of self-esteem, and 3 people were found to have a low level of self-esteem, and



**Fig. 1. Levels of personal anxiety of respondents**



**Fig. 2. Results of % value of self-esteem of psychology students according to the method of T. Dembo – S. Rubinshtein**

the remaining 46 people had a realistic level of self-esteem. The results obtained indicate that a significant part of young people have an adequate idea of themselves, although in some cases there are deviations towards both overestimated and underestimated self-esteem, which requires further analysis and, if necessary, psych correction. It should be noted that the success of choosing a profession depends on the level of self-esteem: if the level of aspirations is overestimated, then the chosen profession, in the end, disappoints. Low self-esteem also negatively affects the choice of a profession and the development of the personality. The visual results of the obtained data regarding the level of harassment of the subjects are presented in the form (See Fig. 3).

In the first year, the optimal level of demands prevails (40%), as well as a significant proportion of students with a realistic level (33.34%). At the same time, an unrealistically high level of demands was found in 26.66% of respondents, which may be associated with excessive expectations of one's own capabilities with minimal experience. Understated demands were not recorded. In the second year, the situation remains similar: realistic and optimal levels are observed in 40% of the studied, unrealistic demands decrease to 13.34%, and underestimated

ones increase slightly (6.66%), which may indicate the first manifestations of a more critical self-assessment in the learning process.

Third-year students have the highest indicator of the optimal level of demands (46.66%) among all courses. The realistic level is 33.34%, the unrealistic level is 20%, and the underestimated level is absent. This structure indicates the gradual formation of an adequate idea of oneself and one's own capabilities.

In contrast, fourth-year students observe a decrease in the level of unrealistic demands to 0%, which may be a sign of mature self-esteem. The realistic level remains at 40%, the optimal level is 33.34%, while the underestimated level is demonstrated by 26.66% of the studied subjects. This may indicate fatigue, loss of confidence or the influence of stress factors during the period of completion of studies.

In general, it can be noted that with age and training experience, students tend to be more realistic in assessing their own capabilities and reduce the proportion of individuals with an unrealistic level of demands. At the same time, at the final stages of training, the risk of forming underestimated demands is recorded, which requires psychological support.

### **5. Recommendations for supporting the adaptation of students in conditions of prolonged stress**

In order to maintain mental health, ensure emotional stability and increase the adaptability of students in conditions of prolonged stress, it is advisable to consider the following practical recommendations:

1. Stimulating adaptive coping strategies:
  - Planning a solution to the problem as a conscious cognitive strategy aimed at analyzing the situation and developing a clear sequence of actions.
  - Positive reappraisal of the situation – the ability to find opportunities for personal growth in a difficult experience.
  - Seeking social support – turning to friends, family, teachers or psychological help specialists.
  - Self-control – developing emotional regulation skills, the ability to restrain impulsive emotional reactions.
2. Formation of a task-oriented coping style:
  - This style involves the active inclusion of cognitive and behavioral resources of the individual for purposeful activity to overcome the stressor. Its effectiveness increases in conditions when the situation is under control.
  - In the event of an impossibility of immediate influence on the situation (for example, waiting for the results of a medical examination), it is important to provide psycho-emotional relief and prevent frustration by redirecting energy to meaningful activities.
3. Strengthening individual adaptation resources:
  - Increasing self-efficacy – forming in students self-confidence, the ability to cope with difficulties.
  - Developing self-regulation skills, in particular breathing techniques, relaxation, emotional self-observation.
  - Previous experience in overcoming difficult situations should be considered as a valuable resource that can be internalized as a survival strategy.
4. Applying mindfulness practices:



- Regular practice of conscious presence in the present moment helps reduce anxiety, symptoms of depression, and psycho-emotional exhaustion.

- Mindfulness techniques help to focus, reduce reactivity to external stimuli, and improve the general psychophysiological state.

5. Preventing the use of maladaptive strategies:

- Potentially harmful strategies include: avoiding the problem, distancing, self-blame, substance use, and compulsive behavior (overeating, gambling, gadget addiction, etc.).

- Although the use of such strategies provides a temporary reduction in emotional stress, in the long term it leads to a deepening of maladaptation, the development of addictions, anxiety, and affective disorders.

6. Expanding the resource base of education seekers:

- Promoting access to material, social, and psychological resources.

- Developing problem-solving skills, the ability to make decisions, and be responsible for one's own actions.

- Creating conditions in educational institutions for systemic psychological support, crisis counseling and preventive work with students. These recommendations can be the basis for the implementation of an institutional program to support the mental health of students in conditions of martial law, prolonged stress and social turbulence.

## 6. Conclusions

The results of the analysis show that individual psychological factors play an important role in the process of adapting students to conditions of prolonged stress. It was determined that the adaptive capabilities of the individual largely depend on the level of emotional stability, the development of coping strategies, self-esteem and the ability to reflect. At the same time, it was found that vulnerability to maladaptive manifestations increases in conditions of insufficient support, chronic emotional stress and low motivation for self-preservation. The results obtained can be used to develop preventive and corrective programs for psychological support of students in conditions of prolonged stress.

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