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STRESS RESISTANCE AS A FEATURE OF CHARACTER OF THE UKRAINIANS



ABSTRACT

The article discloses the peculiarities of stress resistance of the Ukrainian ethnicity. Has been analyzed the importance of the national character of Ukrainians as an important determinant of stress resistance. Also, the main features of the Ukrainian national character, which are related to stress resistance have been highlighted. The significance of the collective traumatic experience as a factor in increasing vulnerability to stress has been considered. The author includes sensitivity, cordocentrism, individualism, freedom-loving, intolerance to coercion and violence, hard work, antaeuism, and optimism to the features of the national character that are associated with stress resistance. Emphasis is placed on the positive or ambiguous relationship of selected features with stress resistance. A positive or ambiguous relationship of the selected features with stress resistance was noted. The propensity of Ukrainians to provide social support in crisis situations has been disclosed, which has a significant positive effect on the psychological well-being of large groups. In the opinion of the author, taking into account the previous and past historical experience of the Ukrainian ethnicity, collective trauma appears to be a growing problem, which has a long-term negative impact on psychological well-being and stress resistance



KEY WORDS

stress, stress resistance, psychological stress, national character, coping strategies, social support, collective trauma, early negative experience



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INTRODUCTION

Life in the conditions of war and other global crises requires consideration of stress resistance not only as a quality of an individual with their individual life path, but also of the people as a whole. This is especially true of Ukrainians, who are currently victims of genocide by the Russian Federation and are at the very epicentre of the largest-scale events of the 21st century.

Formulation of the problem. The phenomenon of psychological resistance to stress was studied mainly in the context of the adaptation potential of an individual and was practically not amenable to study at the level of large social groups and nations. The full-scale phase of the war launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine on February 24, 2022 once again makes us think about the stress resistance of Ukrainians, which characterizes not only psychological endurance in wartime, but also significantly affects psychological health in the post-war years.

This issue concerns not only the present, but also the past and future of the Ukrainian ethnic group, as the bearer of the national character. This determines its unique ways of responding, living and understanding the collective traumatic experience. Only in the last century are the years of the First World War, the struggle for independence of 1917-1921, the Holodomor (Terror-Famine) of

1932-1933, the years of the Second World War, the Soviet regime, the Chernobyl disaster of 1986, the revolutions of 1990, 2004 and 2013, the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2014, and its full-scale phase in 2022, etc. Unfortunately, the history of Ukraine is full of stressful events; nevertheless, the Ukrainian ethnic group over the centuries has shown extremely high adaptive capabilities and has preserved its identity.

Analysis of recent research and publications, emphasizing of unresolved parts of the general problem. Studying the sources related to our work, we encountered the problem of the practical absence of studies that would directly study the stress resistance of the Ukrainian ethnic group. In our case, this necessitated the analysis of numerous works not only from psychology, but also from other humanities, social and interdisciplinary fields. It is worth mentioning some of the works that are closely related to the phenomenon under study. The study of stress and stress resistance (Lazarus, & Folkman, 1986; Uchino, 2011; Nes, & Segerstrom, 2006), the study of the national character of Ukrainians (Potapchuk, 2013; Snizhko, 2010; Khamitov, Harmash, & Krylova, 2016), the study of the phenomenon of collective trauma (Hornostaii, 2021; Figley, 1999;), studies of early negative experiences (Liu et al., 2017; Kaplan & Gangestad, 2005; Dinkler et al., 2017).

Psychological research devoted to the study of the properties of ethnic groups requires strict adherence to scientific principles and ethics. Otherwise, they can easily become a means of disinformation.

We start from the assumption that all members of the genus *Homo Sapiens* have common mental predispositions. As follows, we consider all the psychological features of representatives of different ethnic groups to be determined by historical and cultural factors of development, which, in the end, are personified in the national character.



PURPOSE

The purpose of the article is to study the stress resistance of the Ukrainian ethnic group in the context of its cultural and historical development and national character



METHODOLOGY

The original theoretical and methodological basis of the research was the proposition that stress resistance is a multi-level formation, the specificity of which at the level of large social groups and ethnic groups is determined by their cultural and historical development.



REVIEW and DISCUSSION

The essence of concepts “stress” and “stress resistance”. We consider stress and stress resistance as multi-level formations that have both a biological and a psychological component. So, according to the founder of the theory of stress – H. Selye, *stress* is a non-specific reaction (increased activity of the adrenal glands) in response to any infection (Selye, 1986, p. 692).

Speaking about *psychological stress*, R. Lazarus and S. Folkman (Lazarus, & Folkman, 1986, p. 63), define it as “a special relationship between a person and their environment, which, in their opinion, threatens

or suppresses their resources and, which endangers their well-being.”

As defined by the American Psychological Association (APA), *stress resilience* – is the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life circumstances, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioural flexibility and adaptation to external and internal demands.

To the problem of national character. Often, researchers reduce the concept of “national character” to a simple collection of various features and properties that are characteristic of a certain national community (Bahramov, 1973; Piren, 1996).

According to P. Hnatenko, *national character* is a collection of “social-psychological features (national-psychological guidelines, stereotypes) that are characteristic of the national community at a certain stage of development and are manifested in value attitudes towards the surrounding world, as well as in culture, traditions, customs, rituals” (Hnatenko, 1997, p. 6).

Nevertheless, we share the opinion of T. Potapchuk (Potapchuk, 2013) that such an understanding is simplified, because the national character is an integral system that forms an integrated unity, which, in turn, reflects the cultural and historical specifics of the development of the people. Moreover, the features themselves are universal for all peoples. Therefore, when it comes to the national character, one cannot talk about different “collections” of features, one must talk about the degree of expression, structure and specificity of their manifestation.

Some authors use the non-scientific term “national temperament”, indicating the genetic (in the biological sense) determination of ethnopsychological differences (Dashdamyrov, 1983), although as early as 1983, O. Leontiev questioned the feasibility of using such a quasi-scientific category, believing that such the concept is, most likely, a metaphor (Leontiev, 1983), as is the concept

of “national needs”. After all, the properties of higher nervous activity cannot be characteristics of the community (Potapchuk, 2013).

Numerous studies show that the national character is manifested not only in the activities of various social subjects, but also through the distinctiveness of the group picture of the world, dominant social attitudes, social norms, systems of moral requirements, instructions, forms of socialization, basic values, principles of education, peculiarities of communication, connection with the environment, through forms of organization of life, leisure, response to problem situations, recreation, etc. (Hrymych, 1991; Piren, 1996; Ponomarov, 1994; Stefanenko, 1999).

Specialties of the Ukrainian national character. Speaking about the specialties of the national character of Ukrainians, a small number of scientific psychological studies in this field draw attention to themselves. Most modern works mainly appeal to previously developed concepts (M. Kostomarov, O. Kulchytskyi, D. Chyzhevskyi, V. Yaniv, etc.), which do not meet the scientific requirements of today and de facto are in the field of cultural studies and philosophy. This, at a minimum, requires their critical reinterpretation and conducting an appropriate psychological study taking into account modern scientific standards.

Nevertheless, based on the analysis of available works in the psychological (Potapchuk, 2013; Kulchytskyi, 1949; Kyrychuk, 1994), philosophical (Chyzhevskyi, 1991; Kulchytskyi, 1995; Snizhko, 2010; Khamitov, 2016), cultural (Malaniuk, 1962; Donchenko, 2001; Polishchuk, 2002; Nelha, 1996; Burkovska, 2007), and religious studies (Kononenko, 2005; Lozko, 2009; Vashchenko, 1976; Richynskyi, 2000) traditions, we identified the main features of the Ukrainian national character, which, in our opinion, have a close connection with stress resistance. They include: sensitivity, emotionality, cordocentrism, individualism, freedom-loving,

intolerance to compulsion and violence, hard work, atheism, optimism. Below we will analyse the connection of these features with stress resistance.

Sensitivity and emotionality. Establishing a connection between emotionality and stress resistance is actually more difficult than it might seem. It is necessary to clearly know what is meant by this concept: whether it is the external manifestation of emotions, which is obviously more correlated with the culture of communication than stress resistance, or whether it is an objectively higher level of neuropsychological tension, which brings us back to the false concept of national temperament.

Therefore, in our opinion, it is more appropriate to talk about sensitivity, which reflects the specialties of perception, that is, greater attention to the social environment and empathy. This is seen as one of the indicators of a high level of emotional intelligence development (Mayer, & Salovey, 1997), which has been shown to be positively correlated with stress resistance (Yamani, Shahabi, & Haghani, 2014; Forushani, & Besharat, 2011; Ciarrochi, & Dean, 2002). However, it is clear that when talking about emotional intelligence, we have to take into account a complex of properties, and not just one.

Cordocentricity. This feature partially resonates with sensitivity, but it also emphasizes that existence is known, first of all, with the help of feelings and emotions, and not with thinking (Hnatiuk, 2010). This suggests more use of emotion-oriented coping, as opposed to problem-oriented coping.

Individualism, love of freedom, intolerance to coercion and violence. These features are combined into one group because, in our opinion, they reflect the values of a free person who strives to build his life independently. Researchers emphasize that these features are ambiguous: on the one hand, they have obvious advantages, and on the other hand, Ukrainian individualism has a

tendency to lead to self-centeredness, anarchy, disorganization, too much diversity of aspirations, which objectively hinders the formation of a strong state (Kulchytskyi, 1949; Malaniuk, 1962; Kyrychuk, 1994). The described features are not directly related to the stress resistance of an individual, but indirectly can make the Ukrainian nation as completely more vulnerable to internal and external stressors.

At the same time, it also indicates the predominance of the internal locus of control, which, however, acquires certain characteristics, namely the predominance of the internal locus of control at the level of private life with a gradual transition to the external locus of control at the collective level, including, if we talk about the state (Donchenko, 2001).

Diligence and persistence. It is often difficult for a Ukrainian to decide. However, having set something as a goal, considerable persistence is shown, which can even resemble stubbornness (Potapchuk, 2013). These features correspond to active coping strategies of behaviour.

Antheism. *Antheism* is understood as a wide range of attitudes and feelings: the cult of Mother Earth, the nurturing land; sacralization of the land on which the ancestors lived from time immemorial; falling in love with the nature of the native land (Great Ukrainian Encyclopaedia).

In our opinion, this phenomenon is closely related to the theory of child attachment (Bowlby, 1969; Verhage et al., 2016), according to which a child with a secure type of attachment is calmer and more confident when his mother is around, as well as in the case of experiencing distress perceives the mother as a source of security (Cassidy, & Shaver, 2016).

Therefore, it can be metaphorically said that the Ukrainian land is a great and kind mother for all its people. This, on the one hand, can lead to the fact that native lands are perceived as safe and comfortable, protect

from distress, but on the other hand, encroachment on these lands by the aggressor causes strong psychological pain, consolidation of society and self-sacrifice.

Optimism. In addition to the obvious benefits of optimism, such as improved mood and confidence, research shows its significant relationship with coping strategies (Ness, & Segerstrom, 2006). Optimism was found to be positively correlated with productive problem-solving strategies as well as managing one's own emotions; on the other hand, there is an inverse correlation with avoidance and ignoring coping strategies.

In addition, an optimistic mood increases the general resistance of the body in a stressful situation, speed up psychological and physical recovery (Brydon et al., 2009; Hulbert, & Morrison 2006).

Buffering of collective traumatic experience. Speaking about the stress resistance of the whole people, a special role should be given to the coping strategy, which is manifested in the search and provision of social support, which directly depends on the qualities of the social environment. These qualities include social integration, social resources, social adjustment, and others (Laireiter, & Baumann, 1988).

According to M. Argyle (Argyle, 1990), social support reduces the impact of difficult situations on a person's mental health, contributing to the growth of self-esteem and self-confidence, preventing depression and anxiety, giving hope associated with expectations of such support in the future, and making a person less susceptible to stressful influences.

The relationship between social support and mortality from cardiovascular disease is well-studied (Hemingway, & Marmot, 1999; Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010).

The content of social support, as a rule, is determined by the objective causes of a difficult life situation. For example, when developing social support measures for

migrants, they rely on the hypothesis of a positive impact of interpersonal relationships on the mental health and successful adaptation of migrants. Within of this “buffer”, as it is called, hypothesis (Cohen, & McKay, 1984; Uchino et al., 2011), it is argued that the availability of interpersonal relationships, the variety and increase in the number of positive contacts, as well as the intensity of relationships are directly related to associated with an increase in psychological well-being and a decrease in the probability of somatic and mental diseases. The buffer hypothesis necessarily assumes the positivity of social support. In our opinion, these provisions are also valid for internally displaced and injured persons.

However, there is ample research that suggests the benefits and stress reduction of those who provide social support as well (Erturgut, & Erturgut, 2010; Poulin et al., 2013; Inagaki, & Orehek, 2017; Preston, 2017).

In this context, it is worth paying attention to the features of Ukrainians described above, because today’s realities have proven that Ukrainian individualism (or even egocentrism) is an adaptive phenomenon and very quickly public interests can become higher than individual ones, and not at the formal level, but at the personal level. It is enough to mention at least the number of volunteers during the attacks of the Russian Federation in 2013 and 2022, the activity and consolidation of the Ukrainian people on the territory of Ukraine and beyond, the number of internally displaced persons who were provided with housing and various support by the same ordinary citizens, charity, and of course, professional support from psychologists and social workers.

Considering the above, we believe that Ukrainians have great potential in providing social support and, accordingly, buffering stress. However, unfortunately, large-scale crisis events are often the catalyst for social

support and the abandoning of excessive individualism.

Collective traumas of the Ukrainian ethnic group. The problem of the collective trauma of the Ukrainian ethnic group requires separate consideration, since, as noted at the beginning, the history of Ukraine is full of traumatic events, which, as will be shown below, creates long-term negative consequences for stress resistance.

This problem has only recently come to the attention of scientists (Gagné, 1998; Kestenberg, 1980).

P. Hornostaii defines *collective trauma* as mental trauma received by a group of people of any number, up to an entire society, because of a social, person-caused or ecological disaster or criminal actions of political or other social subjects (Hornostaii, 2021, p. 104).

A characteristic feature of collective trauma is that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) also occurs in those individuals who were not directly victims of traumatic events (Bjornsson, 2020).

This is explained by the mechanism of secondary traumatization. *Secondary trauma* refers to “natural behaviours and emotions that arise as a result of learning about a traumatic event experienced by another person. It is the stress that occurs as a result of helping or wanting to help an injured person” (Figley, 1999, p.10).

Nowadays, the collective trauma of Ukrainians can become a much bigger problem than it was before, and it is not only about the scale of the war or the brutality of the Russian army, but also about the fact that this war is actually the first in history that has received such large-scale coverage and publicity. The increasing number of literatures suggests that 24-hour news cycles on various platforms about shocking events, inadvertently, significantly increase the effect of secondary traumatization (Holman et al., 2014; Hopwood & Schutte, 2017; Yeung, Lu, Wong, & Huynh, 2016).

Collective trauma is considered primarily as a social rather than a clinical phenomenon. Nevertheless, a number of studies confirm that traumatic events of various genesis can lead to long-term biological and mental changes. This especially applies to the early periods of the development of the human individual.

Thus, researching the effects of the Hunger Winter in the Netherlands revealed a double risk of developing schizophrenia, an increased frequency of developing schizotypal disorder, as well as defects of the nervous system in children born during this period (Walker, & Cicchetti, 2003; Brown, & Susser, 2008).

It has also been proven that as a result of abuse and lack of care in early childhood, a number of neurobiological changes occur that lead to disturbances in the regulation of stress response, emotions, learning, and higher cognitive functions (Hinduja, & Patchin, 2017).

A study of electrical potentials of the brain in children with psychotraumatic experiences shows patterns of neural activation during tasks that require executive functions, similar to those observed in children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (Dinkler et al., 2017).

A traumatic experience in childhood leads to psychological disorders in adult life as well: anxiety, depression, suicidal behaviour, PTSD, drug addiction diseases, difficulties in intimate relationships, dissociative (traumatic) amnesia, somatization, etc. (Liu et al., 2017).

According to the Life History Theory (Del Giudice, Kaplan, & Gangestad, 2014; Kaplan, & Gangestad, 2005), a significant part of the listed disorders is actually an adaptive response of the organism.

The basic idea is that early life events, such as the sufficiency or insufficiency of biological and emotional resources, can form long-term changes in the body's adaptive reactions, that is, a kind of adjustment to life in specific conditions takes place. Accordingly,

the psyche, which develops in conditions of war or in other crisis situations, prepares for the fact that it will have to be in such conditions for the rest of its life, and therefore an intense and inadequate, from the point of view of the usual norm, stress reaction becomes its own norm for a specific individual life.

Thus, large-scale traumatic events create a number of factors that increase stress reactivity, as well as cause various psychological disorders at the level of both society as a whole and an individual in the long term. This obviously has a negative effect on stress resistance in general.



CONCLUSIONS

The high level of stress resistance of Ukrainians is evidenced by the presence of such features as the use of productive coping strategies, the predominance of the internal locus of control, a sufficient level of emotional intelligence development, a favourable psychological connection with the native land, and optimism.

One of the most effective coping strategies of Ukrainians is the tendency to provide social support, which creates a large-scale buffer effect for negative experiences. However, due to other features, such as excessive individualism and marginalization in national affairs, favourable conditions are created for the emergence of large-scale both internal and external stressors, as well as vulnerability to them. In other words, such stress resistance helps to deal with stressors that have already arisen more quickly than to see them in advance, which makes this strategy not quite effective in the emerging historical reality.

In addition, the influence of the collective traumatic experience, which has the property of far-reaching destructive effects, including increased vulnerability to stress, remains not fully understood. Given the events

of the present and the past, it is clear that the scale of this problem is not diminishing.

In our opinion, it is perspective to study the specialties of Ukrainians' experience of stressful events and ways of their successful adaptation.



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СТРЕСОСТІЙКІСТЬ ЯК МЕНТАЛЬНА ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКА УКРАЇНЦІВ

У статті розкрито особливості стресостійкості українського етносу. Проаналізовано значення національного характеру українців як важливої детермінанти стресостійкості. Також висвітлено основні риси українського національного характеру, які пов'язані зі стресостійкістю. Розглянуто значення колективного травматичного досвіду як чинника підвищення вразливості до стресу. До особливостей національного характеру, які пов'язані зі стресостійкістю, автор відносить чутливість, кордоцентризм, індивідуалізм, волелюбність, нетерпимість до примусу і насильства, працьовитість, антаєвизм, оптимізм до рис національного характеру, які пов'язані зі стресостійкістю. Акцент робиться на позитивному або неоднозначному взаємозв'язку обраних ознак зі стресостійкістю. Відзначено позитивне або неоднозначне співвідношення обраних ознак зі стресостійкістю. Розкрито схильність українців до надання соціальної підтримки в кризових ситуаціях, що суттєво позитивно позначається на психологічному благополуччі великих груп. На думку автора, з урахуванням попереднього та минулого історичного досвіду української етнічної приналежності колективна травма постає наростаючою проблемою, яка має довгостроковий негативний вплив на психологічне благополуччя та стресостійкість

Keywords:

стресостійкість, стресостійкість, психологічний стрес, національний характер, копінг-стратегії, соціальна підтримка, колективна травма, ранній негативний досвід