

UDK 615.851:159.9:072.43:378

[https://doi.org/10.52058/2786-4952-2025-11\(57\)-2729-2737](https://doi.org/10.52058/2786-4952-2025-11(57)-2729-2737)

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PSYCHOEDUCATION AS A MEANS OF DEVELOPING SELF-CONTROL AND INCREASING STRESS RESISTANCE OF UKRAINIAN HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

Abstract. In today's conditions of full-scale war, Ukrainian higher education students find themselves in a double bind, where ordinary academic demands are combined with constant threat, anxiety, uncertainty, interruptions in the educational process, information pressure, losses or displacement. According to recent research, high rates of stress, anxiety, and depression have been observed among students at domestic higher education institutions over the more than three years of war. Such psycho-emotional stress without proper support not only harms the mental health of young people, but also affects academic performance, the ability to self-regulate, adapt to new forms of learning and social integration.

It is noted that in this context, psychoeducation - a purposeful educational process of transferring knowledge about stress mechanisms, self-regulation methods, conscious response skills and the development of internal resources - is an important means of developing self-control and increasing stress resistance. Psychoeducational practices can help students develop the ability to be aware of their emotions and bodily reactions, implement effective breathing regulation strategies, mindfulness approaches, and conscious behavioral choices in anxiety. Psychoeducation is an effective tool for young students in Ukraine because it helps them adapt to the context of war, prevent mental disorders, support the educational process and academic success, and develop life skills. At the same time, it is important to pay attention to the conditions for the effective implementation of psychoeducation in the context of Ukrainian higher education institutions, such as support from the administration, integration into the educational process, adaptation to realities, focus on resources and self-efficacy.

Keywords: mental health, psychological stress, regulation of emotional states, self-control, stress resistance, psychoeducation.

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ПСИХОЕДУКАЦІЯ ЯК ЗАСІБ РОЗВИТКУ САМОКОНТРОЛЯ ТА ПІДВИЩЕННЯ СТРЕСОСТІЙКОСТІ УКРАЇНСЬКИХ ЗДОБУВАЧІВ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ

Анотація. У сучасних умовах повномасштабної війни українські здобувачі вищої освіти опинилися у подвійній напрузі: з одного боку – звичайні академічні вимоги, з іншого – постійна загроза, тривожність, невизначеність, перерви в освітньому процесі, інформаційний тиск, втрати чи переселення. Згідно зі свіжими дослідженнями, серед студентів-вітчизняних закладів вищої освіти за більш як три роки війни спостерігаються високі показники стресу, тривоги і депресії. Така психоемоційна напруга без належного супроводу не лише шкодить психічному здоров'ю молоді, але й впливає на академічну успішність, здатність до саморегуляції, адаптацію до нових форм навчання та соціальну інтеграцію.

Зазначено, що у цьому контексті психоедукація - цілеспрямований освітній процес передачі знань про механізми стресу, методи саморегуляції, навички усвідомленого реагування та розвитку внутрішніх ресурсів - виступає важливим засобом розвитку самоконтролю та підвищення стресостійкості. Практики психоедукації можуть допомогти студентам розвивати здатність усвідомлювати свої емоції й тілесні реакції, впроваджувати ефективні стратегії дихальної регуляції, майндфулнес-підходи та свідомий вибір поведінки в умовах тривоги. Саме психоедукація є ефективним засобом для студентської молоді в Україні тому, що сприяє адаптації до контексту війни, профілактиці психічних порушень, підтримці освітнього процесу та академічної успішності, формування життєвих навичок. Водночас важливо звернути увагу на умови ефективної реалізації психоедукації в контексті українських вищих навчальних закладів такі як підтримка з боку адміністрації, інтеграція в освітній процес, адаптація до реалій, фокус на ресурсах і самоефективності.

Ключові слова: ментальне здоров'я, психологічний стрес, регуляція емоційних станів, самоконтроль, стресостійкість, психоедукація.

Problem statement. Considering the war in Ukraine, there has been a significant increase in the number of mental disorders, which is due to the impact of prolonged stress, traumatic events experienced, and socio-economic instability. Students are especially vulnerable, who are simultaneously going through a stage of professional formation and are forced to overcome additional difficulties caused by the war: forced relocation, financial hardship, uncertainty about their personal and professional future.

In this context, the issue of preventing mental disorders among young, in particular students, becomes extremely important against the backdrop of modern

challenges - military, psychological, economic, and social. At the same time, it is important to take into account the lack of a sufficient number of available psychosocial services, the low level of awareness of mental health, as well as stigmatization, which still remains a significant barrier to timely seeking help.

Systemic support for youth should include not only individual psychological assistance, but also the creation of a safe educational environment, the development of mental well-being programs in universities, the activation of educational activities and the strengthening of self-help skills and psychological resilience. Ensuring the mental well-being of students is not only a step towards preserving the health of the nation, but also a necessary condition for the restoration and sustainable development of the state in the post-war period.

Analysis of recent studies and publications. Important aspects of the study of the mental state of Ukrainian youth in today's conditions and the possibility of preserving mental health by such Ukrainian and foreign scientists as I. Pinchuk, M. Polyviana, I. Feldman, N. Skokauskas, B. L. Leventhal, R. Goto, J. Fegert and others. The study “Mental Health of Adolescents Exposed to the War in Ukraine” (8096 adolescents, Ukraine and diaspora) showed that 32% had moderate or severe depressive state, 17.9% - moderate or severe anxiety, adolescents with experience of direct impact of war (bombing, resettlement) had a significantly higher risk of mental symptoms [1]. The study “Mental health of university students twenty months after the Russian full-scale war on Ukraine”, which studied the mental state of Ukrainian university students during the 20 months of the war, showed high rates of depression, anxiety, insomnia and PTSD symptoms, approximately every fifth student had moderate or severe symptoms, comorbid conditions were often encountered, namely depression, anxiety and sleep disorders occurring simultaneously [2]. The study “Mental health challenges and academic performance of Ukrainian university students during the war” (2025) focuses on the relationship between mental state and academic performance, so 85.8% of students had symptoms of depression; 66.1% had symptoms of anxiety, in addition, higher education institutions have a high level of need for screening studies, digital tools, group support [3]. The study “Impact of displacement on mental health in war-exposed Ukrainian population”, which investigated the specifics of the condition of the IDP contingent (displaced persons), showed a significant increase in the risk of mental disorders as a result of displacement, but proximity to the front does not always determine the worst condition - there were regions with high indicators, despite their remoteness [4, 5]. The publication “The impact of the war in Ukraine on the well-being of students” (2025) highlights the results of the study on how the war affects students not only in Ukraine, but also abroad (indirectly), the results show that fear, anxiety, and decreased well-being are found even in students who are not in the area of combat operations [6].

Psychoeducation allows you to increase the level of awareness of students about what stress is, how it manifests itself, what are the typical reactions of the body (anxiety, tension, sleep disturbances, concentration), and what resources can be

mobilized. For example, one of the scientific generalizations notes that an effective part of psychoeducation is teaching students methods of emotional self-regulation, in particular breathing exercises (4-7-8, square breathing), relaxation, mindfulness, cognitive restructuring, which allows the student to identify their own “triggers” of stress, recognize hints of overfatigue or overexertion, and apply exercises to reduce the risk of emotional breakdown or blockage [7]. Psychoeducation is also focused on strengthening self-control skills. Self-control here is understood as the ability to manage one’s emotions, thoughts, behavior, and physical reactions in a stressful situation. In a student audience in wartime, it is important to learn to successfully apply breathing techniques (which directly affect the autonomic nervous system), mindfulness practices that reduce reactivity and help restore attention and resource, as well as a conscious attitude to nutrition, sleep, and physical activity. The study of a combination of cognitive behavioral therapy techniques and mindfulness helped Ukrainian university students increase their “emotional resilience” indicators, when self-control becomes not just an abstract skill, but a specific system of ways to influence themselves, which minimizes the impact of stressors and increases adaptability [8]. Psychoeducation in a student group plays a key role in increasing stress resistance, as the ability not only to withstand adverse conditions, but also to recover, remain active, learn and build a perspective. In war, when the external situation is characterized by anxiety, instability, long periods of waiting or change, the development of internal resilience becomes a strategic task. Thus, studies indicate that among young people in Ukraine there is a high level of stress, anxiety, depression, and that is why the use of preventive, psychosocial interventions, in particular psychoeducation, is necessary. Psychoeducation stimulates the development of resource modalities (cognitive strategy, social support, emotional regulation) - which has been confirmed for Ukrainian students [3].

So, we already see an extremely large “mental burden” among adolescents, among students the situation is even more critical than just “anxiety” - these are multiple disorders, fear, anxiety, decreased well-being are diagnosed even in students who are not in the territory of hostilities, mental health disorders have a direct impact on academic performance - and this issue should become strategic for educational institutions, the factors of influence are very multifaceted - not only direct combat impact, but also socio-economic, resettlement, losses, instability, which confirms the need for psychotherapeutic and preventive influences in the field of mental health. However, the implemented effective preventive and psychotherapeutic programs have not yet been systematized and developed in full, and do not fully cover everyone who needs them. Therefore, the issue of implementing effective psychotherapeutic mechanisms aimed at developing stress resistance through self-regulation remains relevant.

The aim of the article is to highlight the results of a study of the features of psychological stress among Ukrainian students during the war, as well as mechanisms for developing self-control and increasing stress resistance among young students, in particular through the implementation of psychoeducational classes.

Presentation of the main material. We analyzed changes in the mental state of students under martial law and assessed the effectiveness of psychoeducational interventions in the spring of 2025. We implemented an empirical study aimed at studying changes in the mental state of higher education students during the martial law period.

Participation in the study was completely voluntary, in compliance with ethical requirements - all respondents provided written informed consent to participate.

Four blank methods were used to collect empirical data, which allowed for a comprehensive assessment of: the level of anxiety and depressive symptoms; the ability to overcome difficulties (stress tolerance); the level of subjective satisfaction with the quality of life; a differentiated characteristic of the stress tolerance of the individual according to psychobiological, sociocultural and organizational-behavioral criteria.

Students of the National Pirogov Memorial Medical University, Vinnytsya, who studied full-time in various specialties, were involved in the study. A total of 238 students participated in the study, namely 177 women and 61 men, aged 17 to 25 years.

Inclusion criteria: age 17–25 years, full-time education, complaints of psycho-emotional state or need for professional support, consent to participate and signed informed consent. Exclusion criteria: established severe mental disorders, pronounced suicidal manifestations, as well as the presence of dependence on psychoactive substances requiring specialized treatment.

Information about the study was disseminated openly – through teachers and self-referrals. Individual interviews and pathopsychological examinations were conducted as needed to clarify the psycho-emotional status of the potential participant.

Psychoeducational classes were aimed at developing self-control and increasing stress resistance, and are an important component of psychological support in conditions of increased tension, uncertainty, or constant stress. Their main goal was to form awareness of one's emotions, bodily reactions, and behavioral patterns, as well as teach how to regulate one's internal state and reduce the impact of external stimuli on psychoemotional balance.

In the psychoeducation process, we paid special attention to mindfulness practices, which help focus attention on the present moment, without falling into the trap of automatic thoughts or anxious expectations. Mindfulness skills are formed through simple daily exercises, such as breathing meditations, observing sensations in the body, emotional states, and environmental sounds. This allows a person to restore contact with themselves, reducing overall tension and anxiety levels.

A key tool for self-regulation in the classes was also breathing exercises, which stabilize the internal state by slowing and deepening breathing, which directly affects the nervous system. Practices such as “4-7-8 breathing” or “square breathing” (inhale-pause-exhale-pause for 4 seconds) not only calm, but also gradually form the ability to quickly switch from reaction to reflection, from anxiety to clarity of thinking.

Another important element of our classes was the formation of skills for conscious food consumption. People often eat automatically, using food as a way to relieve tension or escape emotions. Conscious drinking/eating helps to return the body to a sense of limit, control, and balance. Participants learn to perceive food not only as a physical need, but as a resource for self-care: tasting slowly, paying attention to the texture, smell, and taste of the product, observing the body's reactions. This attitude to food supports overall stress resistance and teaches us to act not on impulse, but with understanding.

In general, psychoeducational classes on the development of self-control and stress resistance are not only information, but above all practice. Through the regular use of simple but effective techniques, a person acquires new habits of reaction: instead of tension - breathing, instead of emotional outburst - pause, instead of escape - awareness. This is the basis of psychological stability and the ability to be in touch with oneself even in difficult life circumstances.

The key results of the psychodiagnostic study before and after the psychoeducation course reflected the following:

None of the students showed a high level of anxiety or depression. Moderate levels were less common, and the average indicators in all groups (mixed, female, male) generally remained within the low values. However, after completing the course of psychoeducational classes aimed at developing self-control and stress management, a decrease in anxiety levels and depressive symptoms was recorded among all participants.

At the beginning of the study, the participants had a wide range of stress resistance levels - from low to high. In the mixed group and among girls, the indicators were mainly low, but after the interventions they moved to the average level. In the male group, both dimensions demonstrated a stable average level, but also with positive dynamics of absolute values. In general, the effectiveness of practical exercises in developing stress resistance is noted.

All groups showed a wide range of levels of life satisfaction, from very low to very high. Individual indicators also improved throughout the course, indicating a positive impact of the training on subjective perceptions of quality of life.

A differentiated assessment of stress resistance was carried out according to psychobiological, organizational-behavioral, and social criteria.

The psychobiological criterion turned out to be the most stable among all groups. Most participants had a high or medium adaptive level, which indicates good endurance to psychophysical stress, presumably due to a sufficient level of endorphins and hormonal balance. Only 22 people had a low or non-adaptive level. Positive dynamics were also recorded within the groups after completing the course.

Organizational-behavioral criterion The indicators varied at all levels in each group. The average values fluctuated within the medium adaptive level. Individual indicators improved after the classes. This criterion is associated with the ability to act rationally under stress, logically analyze situations, persuade, and resolve conflicts.

Recommendation: strengthen the training of logical-critical thinking, assertiveness, and communication strategies within psychoeducational activities.

Social criterion The entire scale of levels in mixed, female and male groups was also revealed. The average indicators were at the medium adaptive level in mixed and female groups. In the male group, the average indicator remained at a low or maladaptive level, although individual growth was observed. This indicator is associated with the level of psychological culture, communicative intelligence, the ability to sublimation and assertiveness, therefore, within the framework of corrective work, it is advisable to focus on the development of these social and communicative skills to increase resilience.

In view of the above, it is advisable to highlight several arguments why psychoeducation is an effective tool for young students in Ukraine.

Higher education students in a state of war face specific stressors - constant air alarms, changes in the format of education, increased information overload, direct or intermediate trauma. Psychoeducation can be adapted to these circumstances, providing relevant knowledge and resources.

Familiarization with the mechanisms of stress, learning about alarm or exhaustion signals, timely self-regulation can prevent the transition to more complex states (depression, post-traumatic stress disorder).

Stress, anxiety, sleep disturbances, concentration negatively affect learning and the formation of competencies. Increasing stress resistance and self-control through psychoeducation contributes to better adaptation to educational conditions, fewer absences, better participation in the educational environment.

Skills in self-regulation, mindfulness, breathing techniques, conscious eating, and planning are not only help in a crisis, but also a lifelong resource that allows young people to be more flexible, more responsible for themselves, and more effective in their professional lives.

At the same time, it is important to pay attention to the conditions for the effective implementation of psychoeducation in the context of Ukrainian higher education institutions.

Support from the administration consists in the fact that the university should recognize the mental health of students as a priority, create systems for early identification of needs, regular monitoring of students' condition, and introduce psychoeducational modules.

Integration of psychoeducation into the educational process means that such activities should not be just episodic training, but should become a systemic component of educational culture in the form of lectures, seminars, group discussions, online resources, and mini-modules.

Adaptation to realities is another important aspect in view of the military context. Therefore, it is worth considering such features as an irregular study schedule, mixed forms (online/offline), increased anxiety, and security restrictions. Psychoeducational materials should be flexible, available online, have elements of self-help, and be sensitive to traumatic experiences.

The focus in the process of corrective work should be on resources and self-efficacy, instead of just "diagnosing problems", approaches should be built that emphasize the student's resource potential - his ability to recover, support himself, and make active choices, such as models aimed at the modalities "cognitive strategy" and "social support", which were developed in groups of Ukrainian students.

In summary, psychoeducation in wartime conditions for student youth in Ukraine is a strategically important means of increasing their ability to self-control and stress resistance. It helps young people not only to survive difficult circumstances, but also to form stable internal adaptation skills, maintain learning and development activity.

Conclusions. The mental state of students during the war is characterized by an increased level of anxiety, emotional exhaustion and the need for stability and psychological support. Psychoeducational classes aimed at developing self-control and increasing stress resistance are an important component of psychological support in conditions of increased tension, uncertainty or constant stress. Therefore, the implementation of psychotherapeutic support for students during the war, namely psychoeducational programs aimed at developing self-control and increasing stress resistance, is extremely appropriate, as it contributes to the preservation of mental health, adaptation to stressful conditions and increasing academic success. Taking into account the modern context, integrating psychoeducation into the educational process and focusing on the student's resources are key conditions for the success of such initiatives.

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