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PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: FACTORS AND CONDITIONS FOR ENSURING IT

Background. *The article examines the phenomenon of psychological well-being among foreign university students and examines the factors affecting it.*

Methods. *The theoretical analysis of sources and generalization.*

Results. *Factors of psychological well-being of foreign students during crises (pandemic 19) and conditions for mitigating the negative impact of forced social isolation are analyzed.*

Conclusions. *It is assumed that in the situation of forced migration of foreign students and their departure from Ukraine after the start of a full-scale war, the role of social support plays a key role in the psychological well-being of foreign students.*

Keywords: *academic engagement, international students, psychological well-being, social networks, social support, university studies.*

Background

The growing trend of global mobility has led to an increase in the number of international students studying at universities around the world. In particular, statistics show that before the start of the full-scale war, 15 to 20 thousand foreign students came to Ukraine every year, and in early 2023, 51,676 foreign students were studying at Ukrainian universities. However, after 24 February 2022, Ukrainian higher education institutions lost almost 20,000 foreign students who transferred to universities in other countries. 60,000 foreign students continue to study at Ukrainian higher education institutions online. At the same time, experts believe that "the problem of their return to Ukraine will be quite acute, especially in the regions that have suffered significant damage from the Russian military aggression. Their share in the most popular higher education institutions in Kharkiv, Odesa, Zaporizhzhia and Dnipro regions alone is 15 % of all foreign students" (Shevchuk, I., & Shevchuk, A., 2022).

Researchers tend to believe that international students are the most vulnerable social group in terms of psychological well-being and life satisfaction. The assumption is that the level of satisfaction and psychological well-being of international students who studied at Ukrainian universities before the outbreak of full-scale war has undergone significant changes. First of all, we are talking about the peculiarities of the complex process of social adaptation of foreign students to the new socio-cultural environment of the country, with its economic, socio-cultural, psychological, geographical, and climatic factors. This adaptation occurs gradually, is characterised by stages, and is determined by the levels of development of the individual's adaptive mechanisms (Dovgod'ko, 2023). According to studies, foreign students had a positive tendency to adapt to living and studying conditions in Ukraine. Thus, according to the study of A.O. Sheiko, the process of educational socialisation is accompanied by a gradual increase in the level of adaptability of foreign students, those with medium and high levels of adaptability in their senior years demonstrate a positive attitude towards other people, the ability to compromise, openness and "a generally high level of psychological well-being" (Shejko, 2019). Instead, the situation of war in Ukraine, mass migration, transition to online learning, lack of or obstacles to direct communication have disrupted the processes of academic engagement of international students (which has a positive and significant relationship with academic achievement and persistence (Evans, & Tragant, 2020), which is likely to lead to a

decrease in academic motivation, and in general to a critical point of discontinuation.

Analysis of recent research and publications. War destroys the established forms of human existence, makes adjustments to the understanding and sense of psychological well-being. According to Ukrainian researcher T. Titarenko, it "destroys basic feelings of safety, security, stability, predictability, provoking tectonic changes in the processes of life, self-realisation, life-creation, which sooner or later are experienced by both direct and indirect participants in traumatic events" (Titarenko, 2018). Over the past two years, Ukrainian researchers in the fields of psychology, sociology, and social work have focused on finding new adaptation strategies to overcome crises of personal and social well-being in war. The focus is on human personal resources, including "the restoration of human interests based on the ability to make an existential choice of good, the ultimate manifestation of which is love, manifested in the ability to sincerely care" (Moskalec', 2022). "strengthening of resilience, the ability to build effective social interaction and find optimal ways of self-development and self-realisation of the individual" (Kondratjuk, 2022); "psychocorrection of the emotional sphere by changing the focus of subpersonalities" (Gruzyns'ka, 2022), etc. Among various others, the factor of participation, meaningful activity, in particular volunteering, which "helps to reduce stress and avoid feelings of loneliness" is highlighted (Chuiko, Shkuro, & Golotenko, 2022, p. 167). The analysed focuses actually represent the components of psychological well-being, and, accordingly, their cultivation is a condition and means of achieving it.

An important issue in this regard is the search for factors to preserve and maintain the psychological well-being of foreign students as a factor of motivation for educational activities, continuing education at Ukrainian universities and interest in obtaining education.

The purpose of the article is to reflectively analyse the research on the psychological well-being of international students at university, with further generalisation of the characteristic features and formulation of hypotheses on the identification of factors of psychological well-being of international students in Ukrainian universities.

Methods

analysis, synthesis and generalisation of published materials on the phenomenon under study, which made it possible to characterise the main factors of psychological well-being of foreign students studying at universities around the world. Predictive analysis – for identifying ways

to study the psychological well-being of foreign students in the conditions of studying at Ukrainian universities.

Results

The problem of psychological well-being is not new for psychological science. Back in Aristotle's time, the phenomenon of "well-being" was of interest to philosophers, historians, writers, and teachers. Aristotle himself singled out "goods" as physical (health, strength, etc.), external (fame, success, wealth, etc.) and spiritual (sharpness of mind, moral purity, etc.). He also introduced the concept of "higher good" as the highest goal to which all living beings strive, it is what people seek for the fulfillment of themselves, their existence, and the highest happiness. Such a higher good can be love for one's neighbor, rejection of passions and freedom of spirit, or the harmonious development of one's personality. The highest good is self-realization, the desire to realize one's potential. Hence, the understanding that the basis of psychological well-being is self-realization, but the way to achieve it can be different: eudaemonistic (in which a person realizes his own potential in his activity expression), or hedonistic (as subjective well-being associated with the feeling happiness, life satisfaction, etc.). As a construct, psychological well-being was first formulated in the works of C. Riff and consists of six components: self-acceptance, personal growth, positive relationships, ownership of the environment, life purpose and autonomy (Ryff, 1989). As noted by O. Chuiko "The interest in studying this phenomenon is driven by the need to record the state of human existence that, despite material / financial/ political / social advantages or limitations, allows a person to feel happy, to find meaning for themselves, without focusing only on the tasks of survival and adaptation" (Chuiko, 2021a, p. 62).

Transitioning to a new educational and cultural environment, as a situation of losing familiar social connections and relationships, can be difficult for international students, leading to a number of psychological problems. In fact, "international students often experience anxiety, loneliness, culture shock, and academic pressure while studying at foreign universities". In addition, language barriers and cultural differences can exacerbate these problems, making it difficult for international students to integrate and adapt to the new environment. And, of course, it is worth mentioning the lack of friends and relatives. It is one thing when a student is studying in their home country, even if it is still far from home, and quite another when they are enrolled in a foreign institution. In some cases, this, along with culture shock and all the problems listed above, can lead to feelings of homesickness and, in some cases, depression.

Scientific studies have proven that the mental health of international students varies, and its dynamics depend on the year of study at the university. Thus, it was found that the greatest load falls on the first courses of study (it is likely that the reason for this is the situation of "culture shock" in general), the load gradually decreases, but never reaches the level it was at the beginning (Macaskill, 2013; Mason, 2006; Cooke et al., 2006). A number of researchers point out that since the student period coincides with the period of early adolescence, the probability of the appearance of psychological problems typical for this age is high. Such problems are called depression, anxiety, stress, frustration. Accordingly, there are reasons to talk about students as a particularly vulnerable population group (Kessler et al., 2007). The identified problems with mental health development in "local" students are likely to be present in international students as well, as the stressors they experience are even more severe.

In particular, it has been found that there are several factors that affect the psychological well-being of

international students in the university environment. According to Yoon and Lee, "cultural adaptation, academic performance, and social support have a significant impact on the psychological well-being of international students" (Yoon, & Lee, 2010, p. 103). The study found that students who experienced higher levels of cultural adjustment and academic performance reported higher levels of psychological well-being. Conversely, those who experienced lower levels of social support reported lower levels of psychological well-being.

According to a study: "during the COVID-19 pandemic, psychological distress, including anxiety and depression, was more prevalent among international students compared to local students" (Choi, & Lee, 2018, p. 1). Another study also found that international students were much more vulnerable during the pandemic, as they "faced a wide range of psychosocial problems, ranging from internal problems (e.g. depression, anxiety, dispositional and situational loneliness) to intercultural difficulties (i. e. homesickness, hatred, discrimination)" (Chen et al., 2022).

Among the factors influencing psychological well-being, R. Bista, L. Foster (2020), name the level of development and standard of living of the country where the international student is studying. In their opinion, the more developed the country, the higher the well-being of a foreign student. In addition, according to them, the standard of living in a country can significantly affect the psychological well-being of an international student studying there. A higher standard of living, including access to quality healthcare, education, housing and social support systems, can contribute to a positive psychological experience for international students. On the other hand, countries with lower standards of living can present challenges and stressors that can affect a student's well-being.

When international students study in a country with a high standard of living, they often enjoy better infrastructure, amenities and overall quality of life. This can lead to a sense of security, comfort and satisfaction, which has a positive impact on their psychological well-being.

This fact makes us suggest that the state of war in Ukraine, which is accompanied by the destruction of the basic foundations of security, large economic losses, disruption of transport infrastructure (for example, the closure of airports), migration processes, etc. are factors that put a serious stress load on foreign students.

The analysis of educational trends in modern higher education shows that the key positions are occupied by the use of social media or social networks. Today, this is an integral component of the educational socialization of students, which, in our opinion, has especially intensified during the Covid-19 period. The main advantages and possibilities of using social media are mentioned in the studies. In particular, these are: 1) the speed of messages 2) the ability to share audio and visual content 3) the creation of student communities and the ability to communicate 4) operational interaction with teachers, which positively affects academic success (Mason, 2006; Uusiautti, Satu, & Määttä Kaarina, 2014).

A study by American researchers examined the relationship between psychosocial well-being and social media use by international students in the United States at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, when social isolation was mandatory. Four groups with distinctive psychosocial profiles were identified, with the "unadjusted" international students reporting the highest social media engagement compared to other groups. Thus, it was confirmed that there is a person-specific relationship

between psychosocial well-being and social media use (Chen et al., 2022).

The analytical search revealed that social support is crucial for the psychological well-being of international students in the university environment. In the study of Jennifer Hefner and Daniel Eisenberg (Hefner, & Eisenberg, 2009), the peculiarities of the risk of social isolation of foreign students were revealed. It was found that social support plays a major role in overcoming these risks. Thus, students who have a low socio-economic status, or belong to racial or ethnic minorities, and do not have high social support, experience significant problems with mental health, are at risk of depression.

Positive correlations were found between the level of social support and psychological well-being in Chinese students. This relationship was also shown to be partially mediated by resilience and spirituality. Another important conclusion was made in the context of this study, namely the role of emotional and instrumental support in the context of psychological well-being, which can enhance the potential of students' academic success (Chen, & Qiu, 2015).

In our opinion, an important conclusion has been made about a key person who plays the role of a liaison in the process of providing support. Such a key person is the teacher, whose competence is to establish relationships, organize communication, create an appropriate environment of support, acceptance and communication between students (Cruce et al., 2006). Other studies speak of problems in this area. Thus, Finnish scientists have found that students often feel that they do not belong to any group or "not heard" because there is no practice of discussing academic difficulties, future plans, career prospects, etc. Hence the role and professional position of the teacher as an organizer of meetings, exchange of information and support, as well as a way of creating social relationships and increasing the "social capital of students" (Kuh et al., 2008, Lähteenoja, 2010).

In a cross-cultural study presented in the monograph "Modern Technologies and Practices of Social Rehabilitation", O.V. Chuiko illustrated the role of instrumental support provided to Ukrainian students of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv on academic mobility programmes at foreign universities in 2019-2020. For example, we quote the following statements of students: *"Very good attitude towards foreign students! Upon arrival, many events were held to advise foreign nationals on studying, living and the German mentality"; "Excursions were held, we were actively involved in the student community by both teachers and students themselves"; "I was given the opportunity to be a member of clubs and communities, to attend all events"*.

63.6 % of respondents indicated that the staff of foreign universities includes specialists whose task is to provide assistance and support to foreign students, including special psychologists, student mentors (Mexico, Finland), personal tutors for extra lessons (Kenya), lawyers and judges (Romania), psychologists, philosophers (Poland); psychologists, tutors, job search consultants; consultants for students with poor academic performance; nannies, consultants for international students; assistants for people with disabilities (Germany).

Reflecting on the peculiarities of studying at a foreign university, one of the respondents noted the following: *"I noticed that we (in Ukraine) have a completely different attitude towards foreign students; they seem to be not included (emphasis added) in student life; I would like to see interesting events for them, where they could communicate with our students, become members of interesting student*

clubs, try themselves in the student council, etc." (Chuiko, 2021b, p. 140).

Thus, the status of Ukrainian students as international students has made it possible to identify the international student population more effectively and develop effective measures to address the important issue of psychological well-being. In particular, it has become clear that support, engagement and inclusion are the basic mechanisms of this process, which is purposeful and organised in the overall structure of educational activities.

Ukrainian researchers Nadia Kot and Daryna Lytvychenko (Kot, & Lytvychenko, 2022), describing the difficult life situations faced by students of higher education institutions with the outbreak of a full-scale war in the country, point out that they all had a significant impact on the psycho-emotional state of the latter, on their psychological well-being. In this regard, it was important to organize psychological support for students "as a social environment where it is possible to prevent the formation of negative behavioral patterns, help them survive, learn to perceive the surrounding reality and communicate with it". The authors prove the effectiveness of psychological support for students, which was carried out in the form of an online camp in the Telegram channel, which also contributed to the formation of psychological resilience. An important conclusion is that modern means of communication can provide a support network, promote community building, and develop resilience.

Ukrainian researcher M. Dvornik notes that in modern studies of the problem of psychological well-being of an individual, "the emphasis is on the community aspect... Positive relationships with others are an important part of the classic six-factor model of psychological well-being by C. Ryff's classic six-factor model of psychological well-being, and accordingly, it can be assumed that positive interpersonal relationships can influence and depend on a person's state of mind and mental health (Dvornik, 2020).

Discussion and conclusions

The analytical review of the problem of psychological well-being of foreign students in the educational environment of the university allows us to draw the following conclusions:

a) the war in Ukraine has significantly affected the traditional architecture of the educational process in higher education, changed the established forms and methods of organizing the educational environment, and highlighted the need to focus on the psychological well-being of students as a factor of academic success;

b) a group of foreign students has emerged who, due to forced migration, have found themselves in a situation of social isolation and who need additional resources to be included in academic processes, to ensure a sense of involvement in the academic environment, and to be consciously motivated to continue their studies;

c) social support can mitigate the negative effects of these problems by providing a sense of belonging and emotional support. Social networks and social media can be a powerful resource for organising social support, as they can meet the social (educational) needs of international students with severe psychosocial vulnerability;

d) universities can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for international students by developing strategies for appropriate interventions that will help ensure their psychological well-being and academic performance, increasing the sense of significance of learning and positive impact. A key actor in academic connectedness and inclusion policies is the teacher, who has the resource to create a network of relationships and increase social capital.

Research perspectives. In the process of research, we managed to identify the main factors of the psychological well-being of foreign students and determine the conditions, the observance and implementation of which in the educational process of the university, in our opinion, will ensure their psychological well-being and academic success. The perspective of further research is the empirical determination of the psychological well-being of foreign students in Ukrainian universities.

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ПСИХОЛОГІЧНЕ БЛАГОПОЛУЧЧЯ ІНОЗЕМНИХ СТУДЕНТІВ: ФАКТОРИ ТА УМОВИ ЗАБЕЗПЕЧЕННЯ

Вступ. Розглянуто явище психологічного благополуччя серед іноземних студентів в університеті та досліджуються фактори, що на нього впливають.

Методи. У процесі дослідження було застосовано методи теоретичного аналізу джерел та узагальнення результатів досліджень зарубіжних і українських дослідників.

Результат. Акцентовано увагу на висвітленні проблем психологічного благополуччя іноземних студентів у період криз (Covid-19). Проаналізовано фактори й умови для пом'якшення негативного впливу вимушеної соціальної ізоляції. Зроблено припущення, що війна в Україні значно вплинула на архітектуру освітнього процесу у вищій школі, змінила усталені форми та методи організації навчання, актуалізувала необхідність у фокусуванні уваги на психологічному стані студентства як фактора академічної успішності. У результаті виокремилась група іноземних студентів, які за фактом вимушеної міграції опинились у ситуації соціальної ізоляції, а тому потребують додаткових ресурсів задля включення в академічні процеси, забезпечення відчуття причетності до академічного середовища, усвідомленої мотивації на продовження навчання.

Висновки. Ключову роль у психологічному благополуччі іноземних студентів (як безпосередньо в академічному контексті, так і міжособистісному) відіграє соціальна підтримка. Основною особою, що виконує роль зв'язку в процесі надання підтримки, є викладач, який створює можливість для встановлення взаємозв'язків між студентами, і, таким чином, підвищує відчуття значущості навчання та позитивного впливу. Віддаючи пріоритет надання соціальної підтримки іноземним студентам, університети можуть створити інклюзивне та сприятливе середовище для них, забезпечуючи психологічне благополуччя та академічну успішність.

Ключові слова: академічна залученість, іноземні студенти, навчання в університеті, психологічне благополуччя, соціальна підтримка, соціальні мережі.

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