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Olena ZHYTOVA,
Larysa BUTUZOVA

Psychoemotional health of students in distance learning conditions

OLENA ZHYTOVA, LARYSA BUTUZOVA. **Psychoemotional health of students in distance learning conditions.** *The article analyzes Ukraine's modern education system in the context of epidemiological situation challenges in the world and the state of war in Ukraine. Methods of overcoming adaptation stress by the subjects of the educational process in the conditions of the forced transition to distance learning are investigated. Attention is focused on the fact that the intensification of the youth adaptation crisis today is accompanied by intense anxiety due to the permanently growing informational pressure, threats to life due to military aggression. The authors describe the results of the study concerning the psycho-emotional profile of students in the conditions of distance learning and its reflection in the state of health. The purpose of the work was to study the psycho-emotional well-being of students, the presence of life exhaustion and some somatic health disorders during distance learning under conditions of the COVID-19 quarantine and the state of war. It has been proven that taking psycho-emotional*

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health regulators into account will let to optimize the process of students' adaptation to the changing conditions of distance learning and improve their mental well-being.

Key words: *psycho-emotional health of students, distance learning, education in conditions of war, education in conditions of quarantine, optimization of adaptation.*

1. Introduction

Problem statement. The epidemiological situation in the world and the state of war in Ukraine put the modern education system in front of the need for the subjects of the educational process to overcome the adaptation stress in the conditions of the forced transition to distance learning. At the same time, the intensification of the youth adaptation crisis is accompanied by an increase in anxiety due to the constantly growing informational pressure, threats to life due to military aggression, which has become a source of additional stress for students, who also have initial obligations.

Today, in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic – a global problem of the twenty first century, there is a trend towards a significant increase in the number of nervous disorders, as well as mental and behavioral disorders of people, stipulated by the complex conditions of their living environment against the background of social, medical, and economic challenges of society. The coronavirus pandemic attracts the attention of not only medical workers, but also educators, which is explained by its negative impact on the educational process, significantly changing the conditions of this process in educational institutions due to long-term social isolation. During the quarantine restrictions, students switched to distance learning, in which they acquired knowledge primarily in the conditions of virtual communication with teachers using modern information and communication technologies, computer systems such as "Moodle", "Zoom" [9]. The Internet and online contacts play a significant role in the process of interpersonal communication among students. However, political and social changes, as well as new learning conditions cause a number of psycho-emotional disorders, intra-personal conflicts and, as a result, lead to deterioration of students' emotional well-being [9]. This, of course, can excessively stimulate the activity of the nervous system, increase the state of stress and lead to the deterioration of the psycho-emotional health of a person. Therefore, the study of students' psycho-emotional profile in the conditions of distance learning and its reflection in the state of health is

relevant. Taking psycho-emotional health regulators into account will make it possible to optimize the process of students' adaptation to the changing conditions of distance learning and improve their mental well-being.

The aim of the research is to study the psycho-emotional well-being of students, the presence of life exhaustion and some somatic health disorders during distance learning in conditions of the COVID-19 quarantine.

2. Organization and research methods

Theoretical, empirical and statistical research methods were used in the study. The psychodiagnostic complex includes the following methods: testing (the degree of vital force exhaustion test by A. Appels, "Self-assessment of mental states" by H. Eysenck), questionnaire (including screening of students' well-being and self-assessment of migraine pain). The method of Pearson's correlation linear analysis was used to identify significant relationships of indicators of students' psycho-emotional health. The sample consisted of 34 full-time students of a higher education institution (30 boys and 4 girls) aged 20-21 years. The criterion for forming the sample was voluntary participation and the presence of experience in distance and traditional forms of learning, participation in the educational process.

3. Research results

Modern educational realities have given rise to many discussions about the effectiveness and effects (positive/negative) of forced distance learning. The rapid change in the stereotypes of the relationship between teachers and students of higher education institutions led to a variety of challenges related to adaptation to new learning conditions and health risks. It is obvious that many aspects of the organization and conduct of distance education led to the expansion of opportunities, acquisition of new experience and strengthening of the personal potential of teachers and students. However, certain conditions of the forced transition to distance learning in higher education institutions significantly influenced the change of students' lifestyles, which became predictors of distress in the educational process and the deterioration of their psycho-emotional and somatic health.

In modern conditions, the student's adaptation to the study load is a rather important problem. Educational work in higher education institutions is one of the most intense activities in intellectual and emotional aspects. Here the growth of requirements for the quality of students'

knowledge, their practical professional competences should be noted [10]. In this regard, the state of students is constantly changing, which can lead to a decrease in their mental activity, the development of chronic fatigue, and as a result – to the formation of "emotional burnout", further demotivation regarding their chosen profession [12, 13]. A high level of stress in the educational process reduces the quality of life, negatively affects the general state of health and academic performance [11, 14].

Psycho-emotional and mental health is known to be largely determined by the nature of vital energy, the corresponding psycho-emotional state of the body, the level of fatigue, which contribute to or hinder students' stress resistance.

We have assessed the degree of vital force exhaustion, the threat of increasing anxiety, and the ability of students to self-monitor their own conditions during distance learning (A. Appels test) [1]. It has been found that the vast majority of students (about 53%) have an average level of exhaustion of their vital force and the presence of certain signs of fatigue. The stress load for them is high. They need to restore their strength through a skillful combination of rest and study, they are also advised not to allow further overexertion. A small proportion of the surveyed students (about 9%) have too high level of fatigue, their vital force is in a critical state. This may be evidence of an intense stress load on them, so they need a full rest. Thus, we can state that more than half of the surveyed students who undertake distance learning have signs of fatigue, exhaustion of vital force, and therefore, problems with psycho-emotional health. As for the rest of the respondents (about 38%), they have a low risk of exhaustion and overwork, do not indicate the presence of signs of excessive overload in their own state, rather have a good productive state.

The same students were asked to carry out a comparative subjective assessment of their condition not only during the period of forced isolation and the transition to a distance learning, but also to retrospectively assess (recall) their psycho-emotional state of health during the period of their traditional classroom education in higher education institutions (Fig. 1). As can be seen from the obtained data, students have mostly low assessment of their own overwork and exhaustion during the period of classroom training: almost 59% of respondents did not recall signs of excessive fatigue and exhaustion. However, 38% of respondents still indicated the presence of tension and signs of exhaustion even during traditional training. One student (2.9%), according to his subjective recollection, had stress overload with a high risk of burnout.

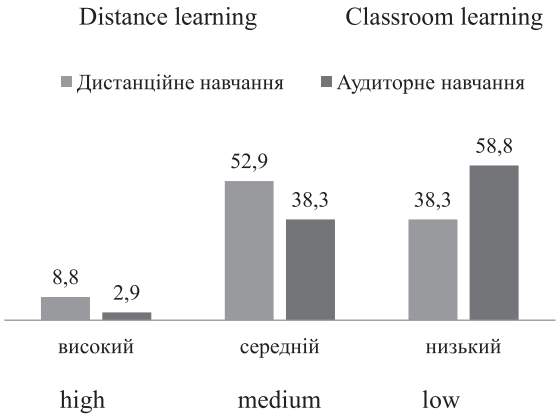

Fig. 1. Comparative assessment by students of the overwork and exhaustion risks in the conditions of distance and classroom learning (in %).

Component-by-component analysis of the overfatigue symptoms and the level of vital force showed its ambiguous frequency distribution. Also, the results of physiological (feeling of fatigue, sleep disturbance, satisfaction with sexual relations) and psychoemotional symptoms (mood swings, irritability, and sense of hopelessness) are presented differently (Fig. 2).

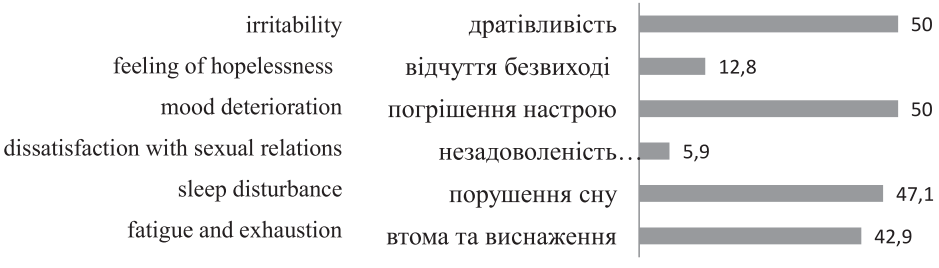

Fig. 2. Evidence of physiological and emotional risk patterns of students' burnout in distance learning conditions

A significant part of the respondents (42.9%) during learning in the conditions of quarantine restrictions had a feeling of fatigue and exhaustion, felt lethargic and lack of energy, even after sleeping. Sleep disturbances were indicated by 47.1% of respondents, who recorded problems with falling asleep and its interruptions. 5.9% of respondents

pointed to a worsening of satisfaction with their sexual relations, while the remaining 94.1% expressed doubts about understanding the change in their state of this psychophysiological aspect. However, a decrease in sexual energy (libido), as mentioned above, can be an indirect sign of overload and exhaustion. We do not rule out that the answer to this question, due to its intimacy, could cause students to subjectively interpret its essence. As for the psycho-emotional components of the assessment of the students' burnout risk, 50% of respondents noted mood deterioration and irritability, while 12.8% of respondents noted the presence of a sense of hopelessness.

The gender analysis of psycho-emotional exhaustion of vital force showed that the risks young men and girls' vital force exhaustion are distributed approximately equally with a slight predominance of high risk in girls. Thus, among the girls, 25% of the interviewees were at high and medium risk of overfatigue, while among the boys, the average level of exhaustion of vitality prevailed (high – 6.7%, medium – 56.7%, low – 36.7%). We explain these data by the higher emotionality of young women [3], compared to young men, and therefore it is obvious that the violation of psycho-emotional regulation of educational activity will also be more pronounced in them.

These data are evidence that the academic load in the conditions of the forced transition to distance learning, in combination with other factors of the students' condition, can increase their psycho-emotional and physical exhaustion and worsen their life activities in general. However, we do not exclude the influence of other internal and external factors on students' overwork and exhaustion, among which the psycho-emotional component of their condition is not the least (the evidence for this is the presence of signs of overwork in the classroom learning process at the higher education institution). This, in general, creates a favorable background for a threat to the health of young people in the context of a decrease in the resistance forces of the body, deterioration of adaptation to various living conditions, a decrease in the quality of life and a sense of emotional and social well-being.

Emotional states are natural companions of students' learning activities and reflect the context of connection between educational aspirations, goals and opportunities for successful implementation of these activities. They can acquire signs of forms of self-regulation of the psyche of students. Psychoemotional states are peculiar mental states that have a significant impact on a person's life, activity, and behavior. Psycho-

emotional state is a special form of mental state with a predominance of emotional response. Emotional states in psychology include: moods, affects, stress, frustrations and passions [9]. It should be noted that the transition to distance learning in the conditions of quarantine restrictions is usually characterized by a forced or voluntary reduction of contacts with the outside world, a change in lifestyle, the discontinuity of social ties, that is, a certain increase of isolation. According to A. V. Kichuk [4], in the conditions of quarantine restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, deterioration of the psycho-emotional health of students was noted, as well as a change in the emotional experiences of young men and women.

Assuming the possibility of not owning and/or the unavailability of technical support for students' participation in distance learning as a potential factor in increasing anxiety, in our questionnaire we asked the students about their availability of a computer and the possibilities of their access to the distance learning process. The survey revealed that (97.1%) students had a computer at home. The majority of respondents (94.1%) showed a high level of awareness of the quality of the organization of the educational process using distance learning technologies. We ascertained that the majority of students (85.3%) found it convenient to use the Zoom platform for conducting online classes. However, 55.9% of respondents noted that they had occasional difficulties accessing the Internet. Thus, we can state that the factor of lack of access to technical support can to some extent increase anxiety due to sudden or temporary falling into a situation of uncertainty in the conditions of distance learning.

However, distance learning can also act as a mobilizing factor that stimulates students to show all their potential, first of all, in terms of finding new opportunities for acquiring knowledge and showing flexibility, adaptability and personal qualities. It is known that stressful life and educational situations are mastered faster and better by those students who can regulate their emotional state better and quite quickly [5, 8]. It is important to have a sufficient reserve of energy and willpower to solve complex problems – this is one of the conditions for stress resistance. Besides, the evidence of certain mental states at a particular moment of time can hinder the student's resistance to stress and contribute to increased fatigue, exhaustion, neuroticism, and increased anxiety symptoms.

Students' psycho-emotional health and their ability to effectively carry out educational activities (in the context of stress resistance) are largely mediated by such emotional states as anxiety, frustration, aggressiveness and rigidity [3]. Anxiety can manifest itself in an increase in the degree

and duration of the experience of anxiety, fear, uncertainty and provoke a tendency to addictions (overeating, cravings for sweets, drinking alcohol, etc.). Frustration manifests itself in the unpleasant experience of the discrepancy between desires and opportunities, the impossibility (real or imagined) of achieving the goal set by the student. In combination with aggressiveness, the growth of verbal and non-verbal reactions of anger, this can significantly affect the destructive behavior of a person. Rigidity is manifested in a person's unpreparedness for life changes in accordance with situational requirements, reduced flexibility, and a feeling of limitation regarding solutions to life's problems [3].

The results of a comparative analysis as regards various mental states of students during the distance learning period were mostly consistent with the data presented in the study by A. V. Kichuk [4]. Thus, the *anxiety* of the interviewed students appeared to be mainly at the medium level (61.8%), and was characterized by the situational nature of the manifestation. However, more than a quarter of respondents (26.4%) recorded a persistently elevated level of anxiety, worry about threats, fears (real or imagined).

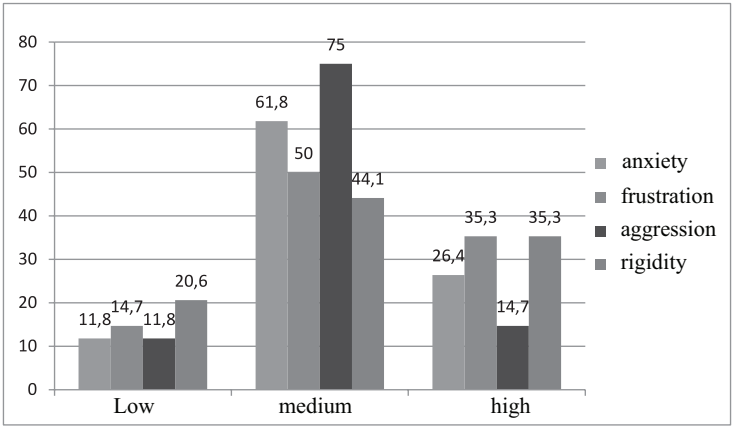

Fig. 3. The level of detection of mental states among students

At the same time, 11.8% of the surveyed students had a low level of anxiety, which showed evidence of their emotional well-being and inner peace.

Analysis of the level of *frustration* showed that 35.3% of students were diagnosed with a high level of frustration. They felt disappointment,

which was due, in our opinion, to the unsatisfaction of some urgent need. Such frustration among a third of respondents may be a general indication of dissatisfaction with the need for social communication in conditions of increased isolation and quarantine restrictions. 50% of respondents had a medium level of frustration, while 14.7% of students had a low level of frustration and were resistant to failure and academic difficulties. That is, in fact, 85% of students during the period of distance learning experienced a strong or episodic emotional state of disappointment because of dissatisfaction or the inability to satisfy any of their urgent needs or achieve a set goal. Potentially, such an emotional state does not contribute to the effectiveness of educational activities, impairs mental performance, and affects the psycho-emotional health of students.

As for the level of *aggressiveness*, 11.8% of students were diagnosed with a low level: they did not show hostility, were calm and reserved. However, a significant number of respondents (73.5%) showed a medium level of aggressiveness, and 14.7% showed a high level of aggressiveness. It is such students who most often feel excessive anger and rage (at least with a certain recurring episodic nature). They are the least capable of emotional self-regulation, may harm others or resort to self-destructive behavior (autoaggression).

It was found that 20.6% of respondents had a low level of *rigidity*, which indicates their emotional flexibility, the ability to relatively easily adapt to updated, changed conditions for the performance of learning tasks. 44.1% of students were diagnosed with a medium level of rigidity, which indicates the slowness of behavioral changes, feelings, and ideas, even if they are dictated by real circumstances and require a quick response. The high level of rigidity of 35.3% of respondents characterizes their inability or great difficulty in changing their own activity program in conditions that require such changes.

In order to find a relationship between the level of exhaustion of students, their state of overtiredness and their typical emotional states (anxiety, frustration, aggressiveness and rigidity), we used Pearson's correlation linear analysis method, which is applicable to samples of more than 30 people [2].

A direct close relationship was established between the state of exhaustion of students' vital force and their states of anxiety ($r=0.57$, at $p\leq0.01$) and aggressiveness ($r=0.38$, at $p\leq0.05$). This indicates that the level of exhaustion of vital force directly increases with the aggravation of such emotional states as anxiety and aggressiveness. At the trend level, a direct relationship between the level of overtiredness and students' frustration

(r=0.31, at p≤0.1) was also evident, however, this relationship turned out to be statistically unreliable. No reliable correlation was recorded between the students' exhaustion of vital force and rigidity, but its average values tend to increase. Thus, we can see that the psycho-emotional health and state of well-being of students in the educational process are largely related to states of anxiety, aggressiveness, and frustration.

We should note that it is during the student years that important for the future qualities such as stability, leadership, courage and intelligence manifest themselves. The independent life of a student requires making certain decisions, which is also stressful. At the same time, both mental and physical conditions can be affected. During stress (distress), the student is prone to frequent colds, anxiety disorders, apathy, unwillingness to study due to lack of energy potential. The questionnaire offered to the students included questions related to their quality of life, health assessment and distance learning, which would expand the data on their psycho-emotional health.

The general self-assessment of the students' health state and well-being was determined using the question about well-being and the state of the body during the distance learning period (V.V. Voytenko's method). It was found that young men better assessed their own well-being and considered their condition to be better (33.3%) than girls did (25%). However, the share of satisfied with their own well-being was approximately the same among both young men and young women, and made up half of the sample, respectively – 46.7% and 50%. Among the surveyed girls, there were none who assessed their health as "bad", while among the boys, one young man assessed his own health just as "bad". The share of those who found it difficult to assess their state of health also turned out to be insignificant: 16.7% of young men and 25% of girls. In general, almost half of students described their general well-being and state of health as "satisfactory" – 47.1% and "good" (32.4%). These data, taking into account the young age of the respondents, can confirm the absence of a large number of diseases among students.

Regarding the risk of a possible decrease in motor activity, it was important to learn from the students about purposeful physical education classes at home and their frequency. The largest share of answers fell on the option "sometimes" (52.9%). The total share of answers "every day" and "often" is 60% (32.4%). That is, we see that students understand the importance of physical activity for themselves and actively use purposeful physical exercises, albeit with different frequency.

During the period of distance learning, a significant part of students' time is spent on computers, which can lead to the probable occurrence of various diseases. Thus, when using a computer, the organs of vision, skeletal-muscular system, central nervous system (CNS), reproductive organs, etc. are at the greatest risk. [7]. In particular, users of computer equipment are affected by a whole complex of factors of low intensity, the negative effect of which will manifest itself gradually and covertly [7].

The students were asked to answer a number of questions that allowed us to find out the length of time spent at the computer, the feeling of "sand" under the eyelids, pain in the eye sockets and forehead when working at the computer, breaks while working at the computer, compliance with certain safety requirements. On average, the time spent by the students at the computer during distance learning ranged from 5 to 17 hours. 23.5% of respondents complained about pain in the eyes, about 65% about its infrequent occurrence. The feeling of "sand" under the eyelids was noted as "never" by 44.1% and "often" by 14.7% of respondents.

In the comprehensive characteristics of the students' well-being during distance learning, an assessment of the state of health was carried out due to the presence of migraine and headache. For this, a self-assessment screening questionnaire was used to detect migraine and headache) [6]. As a result of the survey, 8.9% of students (out of the total number of respondents) were established to experience migraine headaches while working at the computer. However, 58.8% of students had a headache that limited their ability to complete distance learning at least once. We should mention that migraine pain was detected only in girls. 50% of respondents experienced discomfort and impaired perception of educational material due to headache, while the rest (41.2%) did not have it. The obtained data indicate the presence of headaches in a significant number of students, which, in our opinion, is reflected in the quality of perception of educational material.

3. Conclusions

So, the results of the study show that distance learning can be both a mobilizing and a destabilizing factor. Deterioration of the state of psycho-emotional health of students, increase in their emotional excitability, excessive sensitivity, anxiety, aggressiveness and frustration with a relatively limited ability to quickly reorient activities have been established. These experiences can be connected, in our opinion, both by direct predictors of distress (the possibility of virtual maintenance of

relationships with classmates, insufficient support and understanding of teachers, level of understanding, success/failure of learning, etc.), and by indirect factors (the general toxic influence of mass media in conditions of limited leaving the house, duration of stay at the monitor, aggravation of the state of uncertainty, etc.).

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Authors

Olena Zhytova
Doctor of Biological Sciences, Professor,
Faculty of Forestry and Ecology,
Polissya National University,
Zhytomyr, Ukraine
ORCID https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2572-4163
E-mail: elmi1969@meta.ua

Larisa Butuzova
Candidate of Psychological Sciences,
Associate Professor,
Social and Psychological Faculty,
Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University,
Zhytomyr, Ukraine
ORCID https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2112-5211
E-mail: lorabutuzova@gmail.com

Abstracts

ОЛЕНА ЖИТОВА, ЛАРИСА БУТУЗОВА. **Психоемоційне здоров'я студентів в умовах дистанційного навчання.** *У статті проаналізована сучасна система освіти України у контексті викликів епідеміологічної ситуації у світі та воєнного стану в Україні. Досліджені способи подолання суб'єктами навчального процесу адаптаційного стресу в умовах вимушеного переходу на дистанційні форми навчання. Акцентовано увагу на тому, що посилення кризи адаптації молоді сьогодні супроводжується інтенсивною тривогою через перманентно зростаючий інформаційний тиск, загрози життю через військову агресію. Автори описують результати дослідження*

психоемоційного профілю студентів в умовах дистанційного навчання та його відображення у стані здоров'я. Мета роботи полягала в дослідженні психоемоційного самопочуття студентів, наявності у них життєвої виснаженості та окремих соматичних порушень здоров'я під час дистанційної форми навчання за умов карантину COVID-19 та воєнного стану. Доведено, що врахування психоемоційних регулятів здоров'я дозволить оптимізувати процес адаптації студентів до мінливих умов дистанційного навчання та покращить їх ментальне благополуччя.

Ключові слова: *психоемоційне здоров'я студентів, дистанційне навчання, освіта в умовах війни, навчання за умова карантину, оптимізація адаптації.*

OLENA ZHYTOVA, LARYSA BUTUZOVA. **Zdrowie psychoemocjonalne studentów w ramach nauczania zdalnego.** *W artykule analizowany jest współczesny system edukacji Ukrainy w kontekście wyzwań związanych z sytuacją epidemiologiczną na świecie i stanem wojennym w Ukrainie. Badane są sposoby pokonywania stresu adaptacyjnego przez podmioty procesu edukacyjnego w warunkach wymuszonego przejścia na nauczanie zdalne. Podkreśla się, że narastającemu współcześnie kryzysowi adaptacyjnemu młodzieży towarzyszy intensywny lęk związany z coraz większą presją informacyjną i zagrożeniem życia z powodu agresji militarnej. Autorzy opisują wyniki badania profilu psychoemocjonalnego studentów w ramach nauczania zdalnego i jego wpływu na ich zdrowie. Celem pracy było zbadanie dobrostanu psychoemocjonalnego studentów, występowania wyczerpania witalnego i niektórych zaburzeń zdrowia somatycznego podczas nauki zdalnej w warunkach kwarantanny COVID-19 i stanu wojennego. Udowodniono, że uwzględnienie regulacji dotyczących zdrowia psychoemocjonalnego zoptymalizuje proces adaptacji studentów do zmieniających się warunków nauki zdalnej i poprawi ich dobrostan psychiczny.*

Słowa kluczowe: *zdrowie psychoemocjonalne studentów, nauka zdalna, edukacja w warunkach wojny, edukacja w warunkach kwarantanny, optymalizacja adaptacji.*