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THE MEDIATING ROLE OF HAPPINESS IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LIFE SATISFACTION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE AMONG VETERAN VOLUNTEERS

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The article presents the results of a theoretical and empirical study examining the relationships among happiness, life satisfaction, and psychological resilience in veteran volunteers. The relevance of the study is determined by the need to investigate psychological resources that contribute to maintaining the mental health and psychological well-being of veteran volunteers under conditions of prolonged exposure to war-related stress. Particular attention is paid to the role of happiness as a potential psychological mechanism mediating the relationship between life satisfaction and psychological resilience. The paper analyzes the conceptualization of psychological resilience and proposes its definition as a multidimensional and multilevel psychological phenomenon encompassing cognitive, emotional, and conative components, representing a nonlinear process of adaptation and recovery following exposure to adverse life events. A structural model of psychological resilience is proposed, comprising the following interrelated components: engagement in life and activities, openness to new experiences and learning, an internal locus of control, the ability to set realistic goals and achieve them consistently, readiness to take well-reasoned risks, resourcefulness, behavioral and cognitive flexibility, optimism, cognitive complexity, and an altruistic orientation of the individual. The empirical study was conducted between 2023 and 2026 and involved 324 male veteran volunteers who had directly participated in combat during the Russian–Ukrainian war. The following instruments were employed: the Psychological Resilience Assessment Scale (S. Kravchuk), the Life Attitudes Questionnaire (S. Kravchuk), and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ukrainian adaptation by S. Karskanova). Statistical analysis included the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, Spearman's rank correlation analysis, and mediation analysis. The findings revealed statistically significant positive associations between psychological resilience and indicators of subjective well-being, including happiness, positive emotional well-being, life satisfaction, interpersonal relationships, family life satisfaction, and a sense of life purpose. Happiness was found to play a mediating role in the relationship between life satisfaction and psychological resilience among veteran volunteers.

Key words: *psychological resilience, happiness, life satisfaction, veteran volunteers, hardiness, subjective well-being.*

Кравчук Світлана. Медіаційна роль відчуття щастя у взаємозв'язку між задоволеністю життям і психологічною пружністю добровольців-ветеранів

У статті представлено результати теоретико-емпіричного дослідження проблеми зв'язку відчуття щастя, задоволеності життям і психологічної пружності у добровольців-ветеранів. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена необхідністю вивчення психологічних ресурсів, що сприяють збереженню психічного здоров'я та психологічному благополуччю добровольців-ветеранів в умовах тривалого впливу воєнного стресу. Особливого значення набуває дослідження ролі відчуття щастя як можливого психологічного механізму, що опосередковує взаємозв'язок між задоволеністю життям і психологічною пружністю. Проаналізовано проблему визначення концепту «психологічна пружність». Запропоновано визначення психологічної пружності як багатовимірного і багаторівневого психологічного феномену, що охоплює когнітивний, емоційний та конативний компоненти й являє собою нелінійний процес адаптації та відновлення після впливу несприятливих життєвих подій. Запропоновано структуру психологічної пружності, яка включає такі взаємопов'язані компоненти: як залученість до життя і діяльності, відкритість новому досвіду та пізнанню, внутрішній локус контролю, уміння визначати реалістичні цілі й послідовно досягати їх, готовність приймати обґрунтований ризик, винахідливість, поведінкова й когнітивна гнучкість, оптимізм, когнітивна складність, а також альтруїстична спрямованість особистості. Емпіричне дослідження проводилося у 2023–2026 роках за участю 324 добровольців-

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ветеранів чоловічої статі, які брали безпосередню участь у бойових діях під час російсько-української війни. Використано методику «Діагностика психологічної пружності особистості» (С. Кравчук), дослідницьку анкету «Діагностика ставлення до життя» (С. Кравчук), шкалу психологічного благополуччя К. Ріфф (адаптація С. Карсканової). Статистичний аналіз включав критерій Колмогорова–Смірнова, кореляційний аналіз (коефіцієнт рангової кореляції Спірмена) та медіаційний аналіз. Встановлено статистично значущі позитивні зв'язки психологічної пружності з показниками суб'єктивного благополуччя, зокрема відчуттям щастя, добрим душевним станом, задоволеністю життям, міжособистісними стосунками, сімейним життям та усвідомленням життєвого призначення. Виявлено, що відчуття щастя виконує медіаційну роль у взаємозв'язку між задоволеністю життям і психологічною пружністю добровольців-ветеранів.

Ключові слова: *психологічна пружність, відчуття щастя, задоволеність життям, добровольці-ветерани, життєстійкість, суб'єктивне благополуччя.*

Introduction

The Russian Federation's military aggression against Ukraine has resulted in profound social, economic, and psychological consequences for the population. Prolonged exposure to war-related events is accompanied by a high level of uncertainty, constant threats to life and safety, the loss of loved ones, forced changes in lifestyle, and substantial psycho-emotional strain. These factors have adversely affected the psychological well-being, quality of life, and mental health of the Ukrainian population.

A particularly vulnerable group comprises individuals involved in military and political events, especially veteran volunteers, who have been exposed to the cumulative impact of combat- and non-combat-related stressors of varying intensity. These stressors include direct participation in combat, physical injuries, exposure to shelling, captivity, physical and psychological violence, the loss of comrades or family members, substantial material losses, and other traumatic experiences. The psychological impact of combat extends beyond the immediate threat to life. It is also associated with the loss of comrades, forced separation from family and social networks, disruption of life plans, difficulties in readjusting to civilian life, and other crisis-related experiences that may adversely affect veterans' psychological well-being.

Exposure to such stressors may lead to reduced life satisfaction, impaired interpersonal relationships, the development of depressive and anxiety symptoms, aggressive behavior, addictive coping patterns, and other manifestations of psychological maladjustment. At the same time, numerous studies indicate that even under conditions of prolonged exposure to extreme events, a substantial proportion of individuals retain the capacity for effective functioning and psychological recovery through the mobilization of internal and external resources.

One of the key resources for adapting to the consequences of traumatic experiences is psychological resilience, which enables individuals to successfully cope with life challenges, maintain psychological well-being, recover from crisis events, and sustain effective functioning.

Despite the substantial body of research on psychological resilience among military personnel and veterans, most studies have focused on its relationship with mental disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, or quality of life. Considerably less attention has been paid to the positive psychological mechanisms that may explain the relationship between life satisfaction and psychological resilience, particularly the mediating role of happiness.

The concept of happiness cannot be reduced solely to positive emotions. It encompasses three interrelated components: affective well-being, which includes positive emotions, joy, and pleasure; eudaimonic well-being, referring to a sense of meaning, purpose, and value in one's life; and evaluative well-being, reflecting overall life satisfaction [16]. Therefore, different dimensions of happiness may have distinct effects on health.

Life satisfaction reflects the cognitive component of subjective well-being, whereas happiness represents its emotional component, which may contribute to the development and maintenance of psychological resilience.

The aim of this study was to examine the mediating role of happiness in the relationship between life satisfaction and psychological resilience among veteran volunteers.

Materials and method

The material presented in this article is based on a theoretical and empirical study.

Currently, there is no universally accepted definition of resilience. Its conceptualization depends on the unit of analysis, whether an individual, a family, an organization, a community, or society as a whole [15]. Furthermore, the literature reflects considerable variation in the operationalization of psychological resilience, the use of incompatible statistical models, and the interpretation of research findings [17]. These differences substantially hinder comparisons across studies and the development of a comprehensive theory of psychological resilience.

In the literature on psychology, social work, and related disciplines, the term resilience has been translated using various terms, including hardiness, stress resistance, resistance to traumatic experiences, vitality, and other conceptually related expressions. Such terminological variation often leads to the conflation of distinct psychological constructs and ambiguity in their interpretation. In general, these concepts are used to describe the processes involved in coping with stressful situations and in adapting to the psychological and social consequences of traumatic events, crises, and loss.

According to the definition provided by the American Psychological Association [1], resilience is understood as both a process and an outcome of successful adaptation to difficult life circumstances, supported by cognitive, emotional, and behavioral flexibility, as well as the capacity to respond effectively to internal and external demands.

Etymologically, the term resilience derives from the Latin word resilire, meaning «to bounce back», «to spring back», or «to return to its original state». The Oxford English Dictionary defines resilience as the ability to withstand difficult life circumstances successfully and to recover quickly from their effects [14].

The concept of psychological resilience is reflected not only in scientific theories but also in literary imagery. For example, in the song «The Winds Are Blowing, Fierce Winds Are Blowing...» from Ivan Kotliarevsky's Natalka Poltavka, the bending of trees under the force of strong winds may be interpreted as a metaphor for resilience. Under the influence of an external force, trees bend, yet when the force subsides, they return to their original position. However, if the load exceeds their structural limits, branches – or even the trunk itself – may break.

A similar analogy was proposed by R. Lazarus [9], who explained the concept of resilience through the physical properties of metals. During elastic deformation, a metal changes its shape under the influence of an external force but returns to its original form once the load is removed, without sustaining permanent damage.

The World Health Organization defines psychological resilience as an individual's capacity to cope effectively with adversity, maintain an adequate level of functioning, and adapt successfully to challenging circumstances. At the same time, psychological resilience is regarded as a personal resource whose development largely depends on protective factors, a supportive social environment, and well-developed adaptive coping strategies.

Contemporary psychological science offers no single interpretation of this phenomenon. A review of the literature highlights its multidimensional nature and the diversity of theoretical perspectives. Some researchers conceptualize psychological resilience as an active, dynamic process of successfully coping with stressful events through the mobilization or development of new adaptive resources [8]. Others describe it as a relatively stable personality trait [2], a positive outcome of effective adaptation to traumatic experiences, life crises, threats, or prolonged stress [13], or a set of capacities that promotes resourcefulness, effective communication, self-organization, and constructive responses to demanding circumstances [4].

Despite the diversity of conceptual approaches, most authors agree that psychological resilience primarily refers to an individual's capacity to maintain effective functioning and adapt successfully,

even under conditions of prolonged stress, substantial risk, severe life adversity, or potentially traumatic events.

The principal indicators of psychological resilience include the preservation of psychological well-being, positive functioning despite adverse life circumstances, constructive responses to challenging events, and the ability to maintain a high level of personal and social functioning under conditions of stress [6].

Contemporary scientific literature includes both specialized models of psychological resilience developed for specific population groups, particularly children and adolescents [10], and broader systemic frameworks that examine resilience at the levels of the family, organization, community, or society as a whole [12]. This perspective underscores the universal nature of resilience and its manifestation across multiple levels of social functioning.

Regardless of the level of analysis, psychological resilience reflects the capacity of a system – whether an individual, a family, a community, or a society – to withstand adversity effectively, recover from crises, reintegrate, and maintain internal coherence and functional stability. Psychological resilience emerges through the interaction of biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors [15].

A key characteristic of psychological resilience is its dynamic nature. Rather than representing a fixed personal characteristic, it changes in response to life circumstances, individual experiences, and features of the social environment [17].

Contemporary researchers increasingly emphasize distinct trajectories of adaptation rather than the mere «presence» or «absence» of psychological resilience [3].

In our view, psychological resilience should be conceptualized as a multidimensional and multilevel psychological phenomenon encompassing cognitive, emotional, and conative components and representing a nonlinear process of adaptation and recovery following adverse life events. It is manifested in an individual's capacity to maintain stable psychological and physical functioning under conditions of crisis, overcome the adverse consequences of potentially traumatic experiences, adapt successfully to changing circumstances, and avoid persistent impairments in personal development.

In our view, psychological resilience comprises a set of interrelated components, including engagement in life and activities, openness to new experiences and learning, an internal locus of control, the ability to set realistic goals and pursue them consistently, a willingness to take well-considered risks, resourcefulness, behavioral and cognitive flexibility, optimism, cognitive complexity, and an altruistic orientation. The interaction of these components enables individuals to cope effectively with adversity and facilitates successful adaptation to changing life circumstances.

Despite their close conceptual relationship, the constructs of psychological resilience and hardiness are not synonymous. Although both are central concepts in the psychology of adaptation and stress coping, they differ in their underlying mechanisms, structural organization, and scope of scientific application.

Hardiness is regarded as a personal resource that enables individuals to confront life challenges, stressful experiences, and crises in an active, purposeful, and energetic manner. The concept was first introduced by Kobasa, while its subsequent theoretical development is primarily associated with the work of Maddi. According to Maddi, hardiness represents a system of fundamental beliefs about oneself, the surrounding world, and one's interaction with it [11]. Its three core dimensions are commitment**,** control, and challenge. Together, these components shape the way individuals perceive stressful events and facilitate the transformation of adversity into opportunities for personal growth.

A synthesis of contemporary theoretical perspectives suggests that hardiness can be understood as an integrative psychological construct that enables individuals to cope effectively with life adversity, maintain inner equilibrium, and transform adverse experiences into opportunities for personal growth.

At the conceptual level, hardiness comprises such interrelated characteristics as emotional stability, emotional balance, a positive attitude toward one's activities, optimism, an internal locus of control, a willingness to accept challenges, a sense of meaning in life, a coherent system of beliefs, positive self-regard, goal orientation, initiative, autonomy, decisiveness, persistence, endurance, resistance to adverse influences, humanistic values, and active engagement in life.

From a process-oriented perspective, hardiness can be understood as an individual's characteristic way of interacting with stressful circumstances. From a functional perspective, it represents an important component of the individual's adaptive capacity, an indicator of psychological maturity, mental health, creative potential, and life creativity, as well as a significant predictor of the development of psychological resilience.

The empirical study was conducted between 2023 and 2026.

The study involved 324 male veteran volunteers who provided informed consent to participate. In this study, veteran volunteers refers to veterans of the Russian–Ukrainian war who voluntarily joined the Defense Forces of Ukraine and participated directly in combat operations.

The sample comprised 172 participants in the young adulthood group and 152 in the middle adulthood group. Age classification was based on the updated World Health Organization classification, according to which young adulthood includes individuals aged 25–44 years and middle adulthood includes those aged 45–60 years.

The target sample was also selected with consideration of several additional characteristics, including nationality, participant status, region of permanent residence prior to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, primary occupation, and religious affiliation.

The empirical study employed the following instruments: the *Psychological Resilience Assessment Scale* (developed by S. Kravchuk), the *Life Attitudes Questionnaire* (developed by S. Kravchuk), and *Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale* (developed by C. Ryff).

Statistical analysis of the empirical data was performed using methods of mathematical statistics, including the Kolmogorov–Smirnov goodness-of-fit test, Spearman's rank correlation analysis, and mediation analysis.

Results

The Kolmogorov–Smirnov goodness-of-fit test indicated statistically significant departures from normality for all study variables ($p < .05$). Therefore, Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient was used for the subsequent correlational analyses.

The correlation analysis revealed that psychological resilience was positively and significantly associated with all indicators of subjective well-being among veteran volunteers. The strongest correlations were observed with happiness ($\rho = 0.52$, $p < .001$), positive emotional well-being ($\rho = 0.48$, $p < .001$), and satisfaction with family life ($\rho = 0.45$, $p < .001$). Strong and statistically significant associations were also found with satisfaction with interpersonal relationships ($\rho = 0.42$, $p < .001$), satisfaction with one's life in recent years ($\rho = 0.39$, $p < .001$), and a sense of life purpose ($\rho = 0.37$, $p < .001$). These findings indicate that higher levels of psychological resilience are associated with greater subjective well-being among veteran volunteers.

The mediation analysis demonstrated that happiness mediates the relationship between life satisfaction and psychological resilience among veteran volunteers. The indirect effect of life satisfaction on psychological resilience through happiness was statistically significant (Estimate = 1.829, SE = 0.360, Z = 4.832, $p < .001$), confirming the mediating role of happiness. In contrast, the direct effect of life satisfaction on psychological resilience was not statistically significant (Estimate = 0.264, SE = 0.599, Z = 0.542, $p = .596$). However, the total effect of life satisfaction on psychological resilience was positive and statistically significant (Estimate = 2.122, SE = 0.338, Z = 6.038, $p < .001$).

The present findings are consistent with those reported in previous international studies. In particular, several authors have documented a positive association between health and happiness [16].

Higher levels of happiness have been observed among veterans who perceived greater social support, maintained close interpersonal relationships, and exhibited a secure attachment style [7]. In addition, Hu, Zhang, and Wang [5] found that psychological resilience mediates the relationship between extraversion and happiness.

Previous research has shown that meaning in life and life satisfaction are distinct components of well-being that are associated with health but are conceptually different from happiness [16]. Individuals may experience difficult life circumstances; however, if they perceive their lives as meaningful, their subjective well-being is substantially enhanced [7].

The present findings extend this evidence by demonstrating that psychological resilience is closely associated with subjective well-being among veteran volunteers and that the effect of life satisfaction on psychological resilience is mediated by happiness.

Conclusions

Statistically significant positive associations were found between psychological resilience and happiness, positive emotional well-being, satisfaction with family life, satisfaction with interpersonal relationships, satisfaction with one's life, and a sense of life purpose among veteran volunteers. These findings indicate that higher levels of psychological resilience are associated with greater subjective well-being.

The findings further demonstrated that happiness mediates the relationship between life satisfaction and psychological resilience among veteran volunteers. This suggests that the effect of life satisfaction on psychological resilience is transmitted indirectly through happiness.

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