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THE IMPACT OF EXISTENTIAL UNCERTAINTY ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF LIFE PERSPECTIVE IN ADULTS UNDER MARTIAL LAW

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The problem of the impact of experiencing existential uncertainty, caused by the state of martial law in Ukraine, on the process of constructing life perspective by adults is examined in the article. The relevance of the study is determined by the fact that the prolonged war has actualized for a significant part of the population the experience of losing stability, disruption of habitual life orientations, and the inability to predict their own future, which directly affects psychological well-being and the individual's capacity for self-determination. The main theoretical approaches to understanding existential uncertainty within existential-humanistic psychology are analyzed, as well as contemporary Ukrainian studies on the psychological consequences of war. The features of life perspective as a complex dynamic system that integrates value orientations, life goals and plans, as well as the mechanisms of its transformation under extreme stress are investigated. The empirical study was conducted on a sample of 76 respondents aged 18 to 60, divided into three groups: civilians without displacement experience, internally displaced persons, and veterans/military personnel with combat experience. A complex of psychodiagnostic tools was used, including the «Existential Scale» to determine the level of existential fulfillment, and the «Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory» to study individual time orientations. It was found that the lowest indicators of future orientation and the highest indicators of fatalistic attitude towards the present were recorded in the group of internally displaced persons, indicating a deep disintegration of life perspective as a result of forced displacement. In contrast, the group of veterans and military personnel demonstrates higher indicators of existential fulfillment and ability to plan for the future, which can be considered a manifestation of post-traumatic growth. Correlation analysis revealed a strong negative relationship between the indicator of existential freedom and fatalistic present in the IDP group, confirming the key role of the sense of inner freedom in maintaining the ability to project the future. The obtained results prove that existential uncertainty acts as a transformer of the individual's temporal sphere, which can both block future planning (in the case of IDPs) and stimulate existential growth (in the case of veterans).

Key words: *existential uncertainty, life perspective, time perspective, post-traumatic growth, internally displaced persons, veterans.*

Михальчук Юлія. Вплив екзистенційної невизначеності на конструювання життєвої перспективи дорослих під час воєнного стану

У статті розглянуто проблему впливу переживання екзистенційної невизначеності, зумовленої воєнним станом в Україні, на процес конструювання життєвої перспективи дорослими особами. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена тим, що тривала війна актуалізувала для значної частини населення досвід втрати стабільності, порушення звичних життєвих орієнтирів та неможливості прогнозувати власне майбутнє, що безпосередньо впливає на психологічне благополуччя та здатність особистості до самовизначення. Проаналізовано основні теоретичні підходи до розуміння екзистенційної невизначеності в межах екзистенційно-гуманістичної психології, а також сучасні вітчизняні дослідження психологічних наслідків війни. Досліджено особливості життєвої перспективи як складної динамічної системи, що інтегрує ціннісні орієнтації, життєві цілі та плани, а також механізми її трансформації в умовах екстремального стресу. Емпіричне дослідження проведено на вибірці з 76 респондентів віком від 18 до 60 років, розподілених на три групи: цивільні особи без досвіду переміщення, внутрішньо переміщені особи, а також ветерани та військовослужбовці з бойовим досвідом. Використано комплекс психодіагностичних методик, зокрема «Шкалу екзистенції» А. Ленгле та К. Орглер для визначення рівня екзистенційної сповненості, а також «Опитувальник часової перспективи» Ф. Зімбардо для вивчення часових орієнтацій особистості.

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Встановлено, що найнижчі показники орієнтації на майбутнє та найвищі показники фаталістичного ставлення до теперішнього зафіксовано у групі внутрішньо переміщених осіб, що свідчить про глибоку дезінтеграцію життєвої перспективи внаслідок вимушеного переселення. Натомість група ветеранів та військовослужбовців демонструє вищі показники екзистенційної сповненості та здатності до планування майбутнього, що може розглядатися як прояв посттравматичного зростання. Кореляційний аналіз засвідчив сильний обернений зв'язок між показником екзистенційної свободи та фаталістичним теперішнім у групі ВПО, що підтверджує ключову роль відчуття внутрішньої свободи у збереженні здатності до проєктування майбутнього. Отримані результати доводять, що екзистенційна невизначеність діє як трансформатор часової сфери особистості, який може як блокувати планування майбутнього (у випадку ВПО), так і стимулювати екзистенційне зростання (у випадку ветеранів).

Ключові слова: *екзистенційна невизначеність, життєва перспектива, часова перспектива, посттравматичне зростання, внутрішньо переміщені особи, ветерани.*

Introduction

The full-scale war in Ukraine has exposed a significant portion of the adult population to the experience of prolonged uncertainty, loss of stability, and a shift in familiar life orientations. The conditions of martial law transform the structure of everyday life, influence the system of values, professional and family roles, as well as people's sense of security and their perceived control over their own future. Under conditions of constant threat and limited predictability, profound existential questions come to the forefront − questions related to the meaning of life, freedom of choice, responsibility, and the awareness of the fragility of human existence.

Existential uncertainty is regarded as a psychological state that reflects the experience of instability, the loss of predictability of the future, and doubts about one's own life orientations [4]. Within existential psychology, particularly in the works of V. Frankl [9], R. May [13], I. Yalom [15] and A. Längle [11], it is emphasized that crisis events are capable of destroying a person's inner integrity or, conversely, stimulating the process of rethinking and forming a new life position. The experience of uncertainty is considered a phenomenon with dual potential − it can act as a risk factor for some individuals while serving as a resource for personal growth for others.

In the psychology of adult personality development, the concept of life perspective occupies a prominent place. It is defined as a system of ideas about one's own future, including life plans, goals, and expectations of the individual [2]. Life perspective is closely linked to time perspective, which describes the peculiarities of how a person perceives the past, present, and future. The loss of a sense of stability and control over life circumstances can lead to a narrowing of the planning horizon, the strengthening of fatalistic attitudes, or a preference for short-term behavioral strategies over long-term ones [1; 3; 5].

In the context of war, the process of constructing a life perspective acquires particular significance. Adults adapt to new socio-economic conditions, revise their professional and personal goals, and make decisions under heightened stress. The experience of existential uncertainty influences a person's ability to form an image of the future, supports motivation for achievement, and helps preserve the inner integrity of the personality [6; 7; 8].

The problem of constructing life perspectives of adults and adolescents at the present stage has been studied by O. Abanina, I. Harkusha, I. Gulyas, Ya. Demyan, V. Kayko, V. Koretsky, O. Nenchuk, Yu. Norchuk, O. Pavlenko, I. Pidruchna, R. Khavula, T. Shcherban, and other scholars. The problem of experiencing an existential crisis under martial law at the current stage of Ukrainian society's development has been researched by T. Lutsyuk, L. Mishchyha, I. Olshevska, S. Raikhman, T. Repnova, G. Savonova, K. Sachko, T. Tretyakova, O. Shchuyko, and other scholars. Despite the growing number of studies dedicated to the psychological consequences of the war, the interrelationship between the experience of existential uncertainty and the process of constructing a life perspective in adults remains an insufficiently developed area of scientific inquiry.

The aim of the study is to empirically investigate the impact of experiencing existential uncertainty under martial law on the process of constructing a life perspective in adults.

To achieve this aim, the following objectives have been set:

1) to carry out a theoretical analysis of the phenomenon of existential uncertainty and the mechanisms of constructing a life perspective in adulthood under martial law;

2) to empirically investigate the indicators of existential uncertainty and the characteristics of time perspective in three groups of adults (civilians, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and veterans);

3) to establish the nature of the interrelationship between the level of experiencing existential uncertainty and the characteristics of constructing a life perspective.

Materials and Method

Organization and Sample. The empirical study was conducted in a remote (online) format using digital platforms (Google Forms, Online Test Pad). Respondent recruitment was carried out on the basis of the Academician Stepan Demianchuk International University of Economics And Humanities, as well as through the author's private psychological practice. This approach made it possible to reach various social groups of the population.

The sample consisted of 76 respondents aged 18 to 60 years. The sample was formed according to the quota principle, taking into account gender, age, and social experience under martial law. Respondents were divided into three groups: civilians without displacement experience (n=25); internally displaced persons (IDPs, n=25); and veterans and military personnel with combat experience (n=26). Statistical processing of the results was performed using the IBM SPSS Statistics software package, Version 27.0.

The «Scale of Existence» (A. Längle, C. Orgler) is designed to measure the subjective level of existential fulfillment in an individual. The method allows for the assessment of four basic capacities: self-distancing (SD) – the ability to analyze one's own experiences; self-transcendence (ST) – sensitivity to values; freedom (F) – the capacity for conscious choice; and responsibility (V) – the ability to implement one's choices. Based on these subscales, integral indices are calculated: «Person» (P = SD + ST), «Existence» (E = F + V), and the overall index of existential fulfillment (G-WERT) [12].

The «Time Perspective Inventory» (F. Zimbardo, ZTPI) is designed to examine the dominant time orientation of an individual. The inventory contains 56 statements and allows for the measurement of indicators across five scales: Negative Past (NP), Positive Past (PP), Present Hedonistic (PH), Present Fatalistic (PF), and Future (F) [16].

The results

The results of the comparative analysis of mean scores on the «Scale of Existence» revealed significant differences between the groups (Table 1). The highest level of overall existential fulfillment (G-WERT) was recorded in the group of veterans/service members (140.1 ± 18.6), which may indicate an actualization of meaning-seeking resulting from encounters with extreme challenges. The lowest scores were found in the group of internally displaced persons (IDPs) (127.2 ± 22.5), which indicates a profound existential crisis caused by the loss of home, familiar connections, and social status. Service members demonstrate higher scores on the «Freedom» (34.8 ± 5.1) and «Responsibility» (37.2 ± 5.5) scales compared to civilians (31.5 and 33.7, respectively) and IDPs (30.2 and 31.5, respectively) (Table 1).

Analysis of mean scores on the ZTPI (Table 2) revealed that the IDP group is characterized by the dominance of the «Past Negative» (3.6 ± 0.8) and «Present Fatalistic» (3.3 ± 0.7) scales, which indicates fixation on traumatic experience and a sense of helplessness regarding the future. The veteran group, in contrast, demonstrates the highest scores on the «Future» scale (3.8 ± 0.5), pointing to their capacity for planning and strategic thinking as a resource for coping with uncertainty. The lowest scores on future orientation were recorded specifically in the IDP group (2.8 ± 0.6).

Table 1

Mean scores of existential fulfillment in three groups of participants (M ± SD)

Scales	Civilians (n=25)	IDPs (n=25)	Veterans (n=26)
Self-distancing (SD)	26.4 ± 5.2	24.8 ± 6.1	29.6 ± 4.8
Self-transcendence (ST)	42.3 ± 6.8	40.7 ± 7.3	38.5 ± 6.5
Freedom (F)	31.5 ± 5.9	30.2 ± 6.4	34.8 ± 5.1
Responsibility (V)	33.7 ± 6.2	31.5 ± 6.9	37.2 ± 5.5
Person (P = SD+ST)	68.7 ± 10.5	65.5 ± 11.8	68.1 ± 9.7
Existence (E = F+V)	65.2 ± 11.3	61.7 ± 12.4	72.0 ± 10.2
G-WERT (total)	133.9 ± 20.1	127.2 ± 22.5	140.1 ± 18.6

Table 2

Mean scores of time perspective (ZTPI) in three groups of participants (M ± SD)

Scales	Civilians (n=25)	IDPs (n=25)	Veterans (n=26)
Past Negative (PN)	2.8 ± 0.7	3.6 ± 0.8	3.3 ± 0.7
Past Positive (PP)	3.7 ± 0.6	2.9 ± 0.7	3.2 ± 0.6
Present Hedonistic (PH)	3.4 ± 0.6	3.1 ± 0.7	2.8 ± 0.5
Present Fatalistic (PF)	2.7 ± 0.6	3.3 ± 0.7	2.5 ± 0.5
Future (F)	3.3 ± 0.5	2.8 ± 0.6	3.8 ± 0.5

To test the hypothesis about the relationship between existential uncertainty and the characteristics of life perspective, a correlation analysis using Pearson's coefficient was conducted separately for each group (Table 3). In the IDP group, an extremely strong inverse correlation was found between the «Freedom» (F) scale and «Present Fatalistic» ($r = -0.71$, $p \leq 0.001$), which confirms the thesis that the loss of inner freedom leads to a refusal to project the future due to the perception of events as fate-determined. In the veteran group, the strongest positive correlation was found between the integral index «Existence» (E) and the «Future» scale ($r = 0.75$, $p \leq 0.001$), which indicates that for them, planning for the future is a deep existential characteristic that helps them overcome uncertainty.

Table 3

Statistically significant correlations between indicators of existential fulfillment and time perspective (Pearson's r)

Group	Correlation pair	r value
Civilians	Existence (E) – Future (F)	0.64**
IDPs	Freedom (F) – Present Fatalistic (PF)	-0.71**
Veterans	Existence (E) – Future (F)	0.75**

Примітка: ** $p \leq 0.001$.

The obtained results allow for a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which existential uncertainty influences the construction of life perspective. The identified differentiation of indicators across the three groups confirms the thesis that traumatic experience has an ambiguous impact on the individual [14]. The most vulnerable group consists of internally displaced persons. Their condition is characterized by a disintegration of life perspective, which manifests in fixation on the negative past and a fatalistic attitude toward the present. The strong negative correlation between freedom and fatalism in this group indicates that forced displacement undermines the sense of agency and control over one's own life. This is consistent with studies indicating that the loss of a familiar environment leads to an existential vacuum − a state of profound loss of life meaning, apathy, and existential emptiness [9].

The results of the veteran group demonstrate the phenomenon of post-traumatic growth. Despite high levels of traumatization, they exhibit higher scores on existential fulfillment and future orien-

tation. The strong positive correlation between existence and the future indicates that for this group, planning is not merely a cognitive strategy but a deep existential resource that allows them to structure their lives and cope with anxiety.

The civilian group occupies an intermediate position, demonstrating a relatively balanced structure of correlations. This suggests that they retain the ability to plan and derive satisfaction from life, yet their perspective is more "blurred" compared to veterans, reflecting the general existential anxiety present in society.

Thus, existential uncertainty acts as a transformer of the temporal sphere. It can suspend life planning, thereby effectively shifting the individual into a survival mode (as in the case of IDPs), or it can serve as a catalyst for existential growth through the search for new meanings (as in the case of veterans). This points to the need for a differentiated approach to psychological support, where the key task is the restoration of a sense of inner freedom and the restructuring of time perspective.

Conclusions

Existential uncertainty in the context of war undermines the ontological certainty of the individual and compels a complete revision of life plans. Life perspective is a hierarchical structure encompassing values, goals, plans, and programs that determine the choice of life direction and the self-construction of the individual. Under these conditions, life perspective is transformed, requiring the individual to shift from rigid planning to a strategy of flexible responding.

The experience of existential uncertainty affects the construction of life perspective differently depending on social status. The most disintegrated structure of time perspective, characterized by fixation on the past and fatalism, was found in IDPs. The most integrated and future-oriented structure was found in veterans.

A statistically significant inverse relationship was established between existential freedom and fatalism, meaning that the loss of agency and inner freedom leads to a refusal to project the future. At the same time, it was found that high existential fulfillment and responsibility serve as a resource for maintaining future orientation even in crisis conditions.

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