

# Psychological Conditions for the Development of Stress Resistance in Specialists of Different Age Categories

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## ABSTRACT

The article identifies the psychological conditions of development of social workers of different ages. The peculiarities of the development of stress resistance of social workers of different age groups, its structural components have been empirically studied and their relationship with psychological conditions has been established. The effectiveness of the development program of activating the psychological conditions for the development of stress tolerance of social workers of different ages has been experimentally tested.

**Keywords:** Stress resistance (stress tolerance), Social worker, Stress, Professional activities, Age group, Early adulthood period, Middle adulthood period, Late adulthood period

## INTRODUCTION

The occurrence of stress in professional activities is an important scientific problem due to its negative impact on the effectiveness of professional tasks, as well as the state of health of the employee. Resistance to stress is an important factor that ensures the efficiency and success of professional activities of specialists in various modern specialties. Social work is an integral part of the society of any country, it is aimed at supporting those segments of the population who in a certain period of time are unable to effectively adapt independently in social interactions. Due to this, the development of the social sphere is one of the highest priorities of the social policy of the state. An extremely important task is the systematic training of highly qualified workers able to maintain and develop their own stress resistance, which determines the success of social professionals in their occupational duties.

The manifestation of stress resistance as a systemic dynamic personality trait that determines a person's ability to withstand stressful influences and adequately emotionally respond to most stressful situations, actively change them or adapt to them without prejudice to his/her health and maintain the effectiveness of the activities performed, has its own special aspects in each age period, in including at different stages of adulthood.

## ANALYSIS OF THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Training of highly qualified specialists for social work is becoming an important task for the current stage of Ukraine's development in connection with the growing social needs for social assistance. Repeated stressful situations that a social worker finds himself in during difficult social interactions with clients, constant penetration into the essence of their problems, personal anxiety, other internal and external factors negatively affect his/her mental and physical health, increase the risk of emotional burnout and professional deformity. Therefore, of course, professional activity in such conditions requires certain qualities of a professional, and stress resistance should be one of them. One of the important competencies of a social worker is the ability to function effectively in complex situations often occurring in the practice of social work. A.M. Lovochkina allows to define this type of competence as stress resistance. The scientist noted that a significant amount of research has been devoted to the formation and development of stress tolerance both in Ukraine and abroad. At the same time, these studies mainly concern such specialties as the military and high-risk professions representatives. And although social workers do not fall into these categories, they also often face stressful situations (Lovochkina, 2017).

The social worker helps not only individuals and families who find themselves in a difficult life situation, but also indirectly participates in reforming the social policy of the state. He must be able to identify a social problem, establish its cause, and then assist in its solving. The professionally important qualities of a social worker include professional competence, a benevolent attitude towards people, organizational and communicative qualities, a high moral level and neuropsychic endurance (mental tolerance to stress) (Walton, 2005). An analysis of foreign and domestic psychological works related to the study of the characteristics of stress resistance of specialists in the social sphere of different age groups made it possible to determine the structure of their stress resistance, the components of which are cognitive-reflexive, emotional-motivational and behavioral-regulatory.

The composition of the cognitive-reflexive component includes an optimistic style of thinking, adequate self-esteem and internality-externality. The constructs of the emotional-motivational component are low personal anxiety, emotional balance and motivation to succeed. The behavioral-regulatory component consists of such constructs as volitional self-regulation, self-control in communication and conflict competence. The main psychological conditions for the development of stress resistance of social workers of different age groups are empathy, tolerance, moral norms, the predominance of internal motivation of professional activity, as well as the ability to apply problem-oriented and prosocial strategies of coping behavior.

The mental health of the individual is a prerequisite for effective performance in general and professional performance in particular. Nowadays, there is a revision of ideas about man as a person, his unique value and this requires solving new problems. The most important is the problem of maintaining human health, not only physical but also mental (Kravchenko, Mishchenko, Klymenko, Kuzmenko, Potapchuk, 2021).

**The purpose of this article** is to experimentally test the effectiveness of the development program to activate the psychological conditions of stress resistance of social workers of different age groups.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

The experimental study was conducted on the basis of 8 district centers of social services for families, children and youth and 9 district territorial centers of social services in the city of Kyiv, as well as Uman district center of social services for families, children and youth, Uman district territorial center social services and the Department of Labor and Social Protection of the Uman City Council. The total number of subjects was 177 people.

To conduct the experiment, we used a package of complementary techniques, which were selected in accordance with the reasonable components of the structure and psychological conditions for the development of stress tolerance of social workers: “Test of self-assessment of stress tolerance” (adapted by Yu.V. Shcherbatykh), “Test to determine personality stress tolerance” (V.A. Semichenko), “Scale of activity and optimism” methodology (by I. Schuler and A. Komuniani, adapted by N.E. Vodopyanova), “Diagnosis of the self-esteem level” methodology (by G.M. Kazantseva), “Methods of diagnosis of locus control”, “The scale of personal anxiety (by C.D. Spielberger, adapted by Yu.L. Khanin),” “Emotional excitability - balance” methodology (by B.N. Smirnov), “Motivation for success and fear of failure” methodology (by A.A. Rean), “Diagnosis of the volitional potential of the individual” methodology (by N.P. Fetiskin, “Assessment of self-control in communication” questionnaire (by M. Snyder, adapted by N.V. Hryshyna), “Behavior in a conflict situation” questionnaire (by K. Thomas, adapted by N.V. Hryshyna).

## **RESEARCH RESULTS**

According to the results of the observational experiment on the development of social workers' of different ages stress resilience, the vast majority of professionals in stressful situations that may occur in professional activities can effectively regulate their emotions and control behavior, which enables them to perform professional tasks. There was a tendency to reduce the stress resistance of social workers in middle age in comparison with their younger colleagues. Developed stress resistance, characterized by emotional balance, rapid recovery of lost resources, stable adaptability to various stressful situations in professional activities, and as a result - high efficiency, was found in almost half of social workers over 60 years, which can be interpreted as achievement of these professionals' formation of such a personal quality as professionalism.

The correlation analysis provided an opportunity to identify the height and strength of the relationship between the structural components of stress resistance of social professionals and the psychological conditions of its development. Thus, we can note that the height of the correlation coefficients is dominated by “empathy” in the correlation matrix, on the second place there is “internal motivation of professional activity”, and the third place take

**Table 1.** Quantitative indicators (%) of the stress resistance level of social workers before and after the educational experiment.

Levels			High	Average	Low
Experimental group (EG)	20-39	before	33,33	66,67	0,00
		after	58,33	41,67	0,00
	40-59	before	20,00	80,00	0,00
		after	30,00	50,00	0,00
	60+	before	50,00	50,00	0,00
		after	62,50	37,50	0,00
Control group (CG)	20-39	before	44,44	55,56	0,00
		after	55,56	44,44	0,00
	40-59	before	27,27	72,73	0,00
		after	18,18	81,82	0,00
	60+	before	50,00	50,00	0,00
		after	50,00	50,00	0,00

“moral norms”. This is followed by two other psychological developmental conditions that have revealed a significant number of necessary relationships with the structural components of stress resilience in all age groups: that is the coping strategy “Problem Solving” and “Tolerance”.

The program which was developed by us for activating the psychological conditions for the formation of stress resistance of social workers of different age groups is aimed at developing an understanding of the basic theoretical concepts of “stress” and “stress resistance” among social workers, awareness of the importance of developing stress tolerance to increase the efficiency of professional activity and improve life in general, and development of skills in awareness of states surrounding, teaching techniques of purposeful impact on these states, expanding the repertoire of skills and strategies of behavior in stressful situations by practicing them in safe psychological conditions.

In order to determine the effectiveness of the author’s program, we conducted a psychological diagnosis using the methods presented in the research methods. The results of diagnostics by the method of “cross-sections” before and after the educational experiment provided an opportunity to state the quantitative and qualitative changes that occurred after its completion.

As a result of our development program, the specialists of the social sphere of the experimental groups have significantly increased the indicators of a high level of resistance to stress. For the respondents aged 20 to 39 years, they changed from 33.33% to 58.33%, for those at the age of 40 to 59 years - from 20.00% to 30.00%, and for those older 60 years - from 50.00 % to 62.50% (Table 1).

The subject of research included psychological conditions for the development of stress resistance in social workers of different ages. The total number of the respondents comprised 177 people. We formed three separate groups of subjects: 60 people of early adulthood (from 20 to 39 years), 60 people of middle adulthood (from 40 to 59 years old) and 57 people whose age corresponded to the senior period adulthood (from 60 years).

They noted that they became optimistic about their own success in the social sphere, better analyze and assess their strengths and weaknesses, the result of their own professional activities, learned to reflect on the impression they make on others, fully realize that their own decisions and those corresponding to their actions. Due to the positive attitude towards people and various circumstances, social workers in stressful situations began to show emotional balance and control their emotional manifestations, as well as their motivation to set appropriate professional tasks and make sufficient efforts to succeed.

The implemented development program allowed them to acquire the ability to show endurance and patience in stressful situations, as well as flexibility in conflict situations - in communication, and also to direct in a constructive way to resolve incoordinated interactions with others. Due to their stable adaptability to various stressful situations, they are distinguished by high working capacity, which ensures high efficiency of their professional activities in general.

After the teaching experiment, the indicators of the average level of stress resistance in all age groups decreased. The number of respondents who showing average level during early adulthood decreased from 66.67% to 41.67%, during average adulthood - from 80.00% to 70.00%, and during late adulthood - from 50.00% to 37.50%. They admitted that, although in most stressful situations they are optimistic about their solution, but in case of unforeseen difficulties, they may be inclined to a pessimistic forecast. Specialists usually gave an adequate assessment of the results of their professional activities, but they were not always fully aware of their own strengths and weaknesses. They tended to take responsibility for their decisions and actions, but in stressful situations they could explain the reasons for their occurrence by external factors independent of them.

The subjects were able to regulate their own emotions, perform professional tasks at the appropriate level and maintain the optimal level of efficiency, but in new stressful situations they began to worry, and therefore might not focus on their own actions required in a given case, which, in turn, led to a temporary decrease in their productivity. The respondents also noted that they need more time to restore emotional balance and return to working condition.

They conscientiously performed their professional duties and were motivated to solve problems of moderate complexity, however, they tried to avoid difficult ones, did not show initiative in performing new or additional tasks. In case of conflict, they tended to give up their interests in order to keep good relations with others. However, after the training, they were determined to develop their level of stress resistance in the future, to acquire new skills to cope with stress.

Before and after the teaching experiment, no respondents with a low level of stress resistance were identified, which can only indicate the absence of negative dynamics. Social workers became less pessimistic about their future, learned to better carry out a reflective analysis of themselves and others, which reduced the likelihood of unjustified overestimation of themselves and those around them or significant underestimation of their own strengths.

They became less inclined to blame others or external circumstances for their own failures, learned to be aware of the flow of their own emotions, and took less time to restore emotional balance.

The specialists in the social sphere noted that they began to worry less often for various reasons and try to avoid most professional tasks, so as not to feel defeated in case of failure to complete them. The respondents realized the need to keep their own promises and try to resolve conflicts in a constructive way.

At a time when as a result of the teaching experiment there was a significant increase in the level of stress resistance among social workers from the experimental groups, the quantitative indicators of the control groups have slight changes, which indicates the effectiveness of the proposed program. Thus, after the teaching experiment, there was an increase in indicators of high levels of stress resistance and a decrease in the average level of the studied personality trait. Social workers of all age groups have acquired new skills to cope with stress, learned to effectively restore emotional balance, plan their activities so as to reduce the likelihood of new stressors occurrence (Kravchenko, Mishchenko, Klymenko, Kuzmenko, Potapchuk, 2021).

Thus, the teaching experiment had a positive effect on the development of all components of social workers stress tolerance. Positive changes are observed in all subcomponents of the cognitive-reflexive component, such as optimistic style of thinking, self-esteem, internality-externality. There was a decrease in the number of respondents with pronounced pessimism and passivity, as well as an increase in the number of specialists with a predominance of optimism and activity as a character trait. The growth of indicators of high level of self-esteem of social specialists of all age groups and simultaneous decrease of indicators on average and low levels of the studied property have been revealed. Thanks to the implemented training, the number of social workers with predominant internality increased and decreased the number of those with externality. In our opinion, there is a positive dynamics of emotional and motivational components (personal anxiety, emotional balance, motivation to succeed) after the teaching experiment. We found a decrease in the number of respondents with a high level of personal anxiety and a simultaneous increase with medium and low levels of this personal personality trait. There was a significant increase in the number of specialists who are characterized by a high level of emotional balance and a decrease in the number of those with a low level. It is also important to note the increased motivation of social workers to succeed. The constructors (voluntary self-regulation, communicative control, conflict competence) of the behavioral-regulatory component of resistance to stress show an increase in high-level indicators and a decrease in the number of social workers with average and low levels. In our opinion, such dynamics indicate that social sphere specialists have acquired skills of constructive resolution of various conflicts. They learned to assess the stressful situation adequately and show appropriate activity for solving it, use social support as an effective resource for stress tolerance.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, activating such psychological conditions as the development of empathy, tolerance, moral normativity, intrinsic motivation of professional activity and the predominance of the use of problem-oriented and prosocial coping strategies, we had the opportunity to influence the components of stress resistance of social workers of different ages positively, thereby achieving a high level its development, and this, in turn, positively influenced the effectiveness of their professional activities. Based on the results of ascertaining and teaching experiments, we have developed guidelines for practical psychologists and social workers on the development of their stress tolerance.

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