

CHARACTERISTICS OF POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH AND RESILIENCE

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Abstract

This work examines the peculiarities of the stress factors influence on the human psyche, describes the concept of distress according to H. Selye in the context of traumatic events, in particular war, as well as the possible negative consequences of the distress impact on the human psyche. Possible mechanisms of productive human interaction with stress are resilience and post-traumatic growth, the expediency of distinguishing these two concepts is substantiated, despite their common features. Resilience is considered as a characteristic of a person that helps him/her to act effectively in difficult conditions, and post-traumatic growth is a process that is activated afterwards and as a result of excessive stress and is subjectively experienced as a significant change in such areas of the life as the perception of oneself and life path, life philosophy, communication with others. As the empirical study shows, there is some difference between the manifestations of these *phenomena within male and female. This issue needs further development.*

Keywords: *adaptation, war, stress, distress, resilience, post-traumatic growth, response to stress.*

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1. Formulation of the problem

Modern living conditions require a person to be ready for confrontation with various stressors i.e. from somatic diseases to global social catastrophes. Moreover, the current situation in the world as a whole and in Ukraine in particular places high demands on everyone. In one way or another, a person faces stress in life and everyone reacts individually. An individual can adequately perceive stress and adapt, or, on the contrary, may not have the appropriate adaptive traits and skills, which will later lead to complete maladaptation.

Adaptive response to stress is an important issue of nowadays. By studying it, it is possible to solve not only problems arising from global disasters that affect the entire globe, but also problems of a personal nature that manifest in interaction with the immediate environment or in the integration of one's own self. The adaptation mechanisms comprehension to stressful events and experiences will have an effect not only on the well-being of a separate group of the population, in addition, the pressure on social and medical institutions will decrease, the general level of health of the population will increase, and the economic and cultural-social situation will improve. A profound understanding of this issue makes it possible to build a qualitatively new life. At the same time, insufficient study of the stress issue and traumatic experiences can lead to the risk of worsening the situation. It is impossible to completely eliminate stress and trauma from a person's life, because they are an integral part of our life from birth. The possible solution of world crises and the solution of individual problems still rests on the shoulders of the person him/herself. The ability to adapt and overcome obstacles is the key to a human being.

2. The degree of the problem development

The tense situation in the world has increased the interest to this topic during the last century. Researchers managed to identify a number of individual features of the human psyche, including such mechanisms as resilience with post-traumatic growth. They reflect the qualities and processes that help the human psyche to adapt and recover after experienced stress. V. O. Klymchuk, G. P. Lazos, T. M. Tytarenko, D. O. Leontiyev, V. Frankl, E. Fromm, I. Yalom, A. S. Masten, G. A. Bonanno, G. M. Wagnild, H.M. Young, R. Tedeschi, L. Calhoun, S.M. Southwick, C. Panter-Brick, R. Yehuda, N. Garmezy, S. Fergus, M.A. Zimmerman, K. Bolton studied them in different contexts.

The problem of recovery and adaptation after stressful, traumatic events is directly related to the distress problem. It was developed by G. Selye, T. M. Tytarenko, L. A. Lepikhova, N. E. Vodopyanova, Y. L. Khanin, C. D. Spielberger, S. R. Muddy, G. Matthews, R. W. Maris, R. S. Lazarus, S. Folkman.

3. The purpose of the article

To analyse theoretically and examine empirically resilience and post-traumatic growth and consider differences in the interaction of these two mechanisms with stress.

4. Presentation of the main material of the article

Stress is the natural reaction of a body to external factors that in one way or another pose a potential threat to its existence. It manifests itself at several levels in the human body i.e. from cellular to psychological. The main goal of the stress response is to mobilize all available resources in the body to adapt to adverse conditions. Under a favourable scenario, the body gets rid of threatening factors, after which all systems return to basis, take back to the initial level before the stress factor. In another case, when the stress factor action does not stop regardless of any reactions of the body, the potential adaptation of a person is exhausted. A human enters the exhaustion phase, which Hans Selye called distress. In his well-known model, Selye distinguishes three phases of the adaptive reaction:

- the immediate reaction (alarm stage) is characterized by low adaptability and hyperbolized reaction to stimuli;
- the stage of resistance is characterized by high adaptability to external factors, non-specific responses to factors that fade or completely disappear;
- exhaustion (stage of exhaustion) of the body adaptive resources, maladaptation, which can potentially lead to death (Selye, 2012).

Distress and adaptation syndrome can be described in several facets from the point of different sciences (for example, the division into somatic and psychological components), because the stress reaction covers all the available resources of the body. In the context of this work, we will focus on the psychological aspect of this phenomenon. It is expressed in a complex of negative emotional states (such as anger, depression and anxiety, these states may vary in duration), disorders in the cognitive sphere (inability to concentrate, presence of obsessive thoughts about a traumatic event, slowness of thinking), motivational problems

(complexity or slowness in decision-making), behaviour (reduced activity and efficiency, inability to rest, communication problems, psychoactive substances usage) (Matthews, 2016).

Maladaptation of a person can occur due to events that do not go beyond the scope of ordinary human experience, for example, as a terminal diagnosis result (Yalom, 2015). Similarly, distress can be provoked by events that go beyond ordinary experience. This is, for example, the experience of such disasters as war. The problem of post-war trauma is its complexity, it affects a person individually and at the social level. The war affects many people, and at the same time, everyone has their own experience of surviving it. Factors that influence individual traumatization in cases of disasters are the degrees of contact and loss (Flynn, 1997). The greater the effect of each of these factors, the more intensely subjectively experienced stress, the greater the traumatization. A person, attracting all the resources available to him/her, cannot cope with the stress factor, the events around overwhelm him/her and the psyche turns to a pathological reaction, maladaptation. The pattern of pathological response is different for everyone due to the difference in personal characteristics and the factors described above. Most often, the traumatic experience of war can be the cause of such affective disorders as depressive, anxiety, PTSD, traumatic grief disorder (Morina et al., 2011). Since war is a global catastrophe, even a low level of loss and contact with war events can pose a great challenge to the psyche. Such a disaster brings a lot of changes that a person has to deal with. No one usually faces the same level of stress in life as war, so some maladaptation occurs in most cases. It may not be so serious that a person cannot cope with on his/her own and recover over time. But in part, when we talk about war traumatization, we mean the prolonged effects that can cause pathological conditions, even developmental defects.

As it has already been mentioned above, distress is a multifaceted concept, it manifests itself on many levels, and it is also possible to overcome it on many levels. Examples of factors that contribute to overcoming stress are immediate high-quality psychological first aid (it includes the experience normalization and reactions to the situation, elimination of guilt), special exercises to control and reduce stress, social support of close people, return of life attributes before the disaster (photos, things), with which a person has an emotional connection, psychological education, creation of short-term tasks and goals, turning to spiritual practices and religion, etc. (Flynn, 1997, Brooks et al., 2019).

In psychology, there are several concepts that describe a healthy response, recovery and overcoming stress. Among them, there can be highlighted resilience and post-traumatic growth.

Both concepts indicate positive consequences that are achieved through an individual's interaction with stress. In greater detail, however, these concepts are blurred in the literature, they indicate either their absolute opposite or their identity (Lazos, 2018). In our opinion, it is advisable to draw a distinction between these concepts, despite their similarity.

According to Wagnild and Young, resilience is a personal characteristic that moderates the negative effects of stress and promotes adaptation. This quality is attributed to those who facing with difficult situations, are able to adapt and regain balance in order to avoid the destructive effects of stress. It should be noted that resilience, like any relatively constant personality quality, can change with age. A number of factors can contribute to its development i.e. close relationships with a high level of trust, role models with traits of enthusiasm and self-confidence, healthy relationships in the family as a whole. Reliable relationships in adulthood are also favourable for the resilience development (Lazos, 2018, Wagnild and Heather, 1993). In this way, a resilient personality acts efficiently and productively under conditions of stress, its key characteristics do not change as a result of interaction with the stress factor, they are only strengthened and hardened.

According to Tedeschi and Calhoun, posttraumatic growth is a term that describes the experience of an individual whose development has exceeded its level prior to the onset of the crisis event. Post-traumatic growth is not a simple recovery to the previous level, but an improvement that can be subjectively experienced as deep and meaningful (Tytarenko, 2017, Tedeschi and Lawrence, 2004). The process of post-traumatic growth in most cases affects several spheres of personality at once. The classification of areas in which such growth can occur varies. One of these classifications is the division into the growth in the relationships sphere, changes in the life philosophy construction, changes in self-views (Klymchuk, 2020). As we can see, post-traumatic growth is preceded by a complex crisis situation that pushes a person to change. Such a crisis event can completely or partially destroy significant components of the personality, which leaves no other choice but to develop new components (hence the importance of the subjective experience in changes and the breadth of growth areas). This growth itself is not a quality, but rather a process by which qualities (components) are created or transformed.

This is actually the difference between the phenomena in resilience and post-traumatic growth. The first refers to quality, the second to process. The following fundamental points should also be highlighted i.e. the destruction of significant personality components precedes

only post-traumatic growth, the growth and renewal of these components occur during post-traumatic growth, effective and productive activity during stress is a sign of a resilient personality, and increased efficiency and productivity due to distress is a post-traumatic growth sign. Differences between these phenomena were also studied in empirical studies (people with high adaptability are unlikely to experience significant growth and improvement after exposure to stress factors) (Ogińska-Bulik and Kobylarczyk, 2016, Tedeschi and Lawrence, 2004).

To investigate the differences between the concepts of resilience and posttraumatic growth, we conducted a survey using the Connor-Davidson Stress Resilience Scale-10 (CD-RISC-10) and the Posttraumatic Growth Questionnaire (PTGI) (Shkolina et al., 2020, Zlyvkov et al., 2016).

94 participants took part in the survey, 81.9% were female (77 respondents) and 18.1% were male (17 respondents). The average age of the sample was 18.9, the standard deviation by age was 2.3.

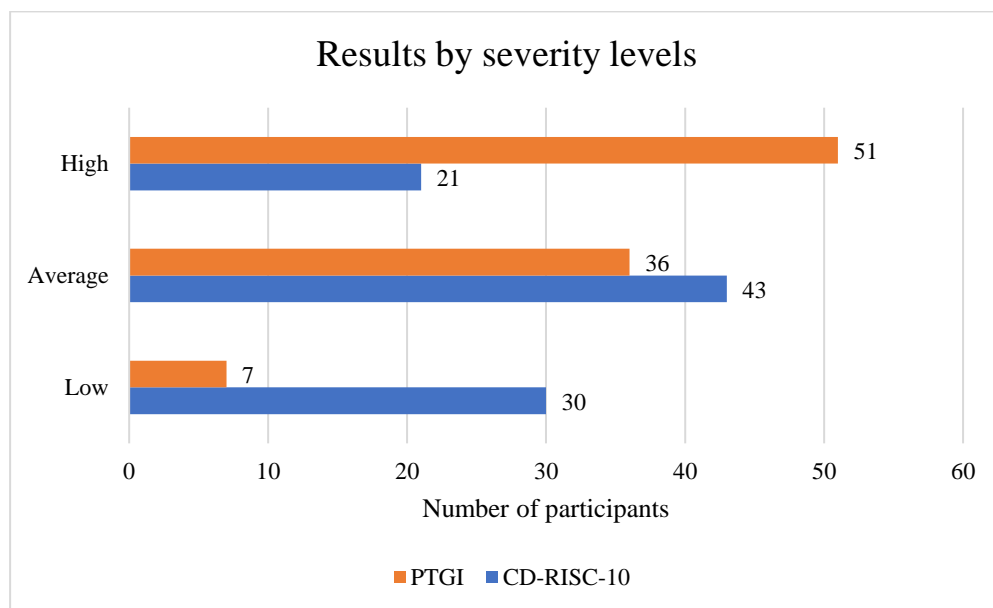


Diagram 1. CD-RISC-10 and PTGI results by severity level

Diagram 1 presents the results of the survey with distribution by severity levels. As we can see, the majority of post-traumatic growth is characterized by high indicators i.e. 51 respondents (54.2% of the number of respondents). 36 respondents (38.3%) have an average indicator, and the fewest respondents have a low level of post-traumatic growth they are 7 respondents (7.4%).

We observe a slightly different situation in terms of resilience. The largest number of participants - 43 (45.7%) scored an average score. Low indicators are observed in 30 respondents (31.9%). The minority scored high in 21 respondents (22.3%).

To test the hypothesis about the difference in resilience and post-traumatic growth, Spearman's correlation coefficient was determined for the results. For the total sample, its value is 0.35. This result indicates a significant relationship between PTGI and CD-RISC-10 indicators ($p = 0.01$). The correlation coefficient was also calculated separately for male and female. For male, the correlation coefficient is 0.15. This result indicates the absence of results correlation in the male group ($p = 0.01$). For female who took part in the survey, the correlation coefficient was 0.44. This coefficient value indicates a significant correlation of test scores, the correlation in the female group is much stronger than the correlation in the male one ($p = 0.01$). It is worth noting that the results of the male group confirm the previous studies data (Ogińska-Bulik and Kobylarczyk, 2016). We can see that there is some difference between the phenomena of post-traumatic growth and resilience. A large number of participants show signs of high levels of growth due to trauma, while the fewest participants show high resilience. Such a feature can be provoked by a number of factors, including the age of the respondents i.e. most of them are young people, which can serve as a reason for more expressed post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi and Lawrence, 2004).

We can make assumptions about the difference between post-traumatic growth and resilience. This issue needs further development. The disadvantage of our study is the groups ratio by gender i.e. 17 male and 77 female, which could affect the obtained results.

5. Conclusions

In this work, we conducted a theoretical analysis and empirical study of several concepts related to stress and made the following conclusions.

Firstly, the very concept of stress was characterized with possible scenarios of interaction and the distress concept according to Hans Selye was described. Distress is an undesirable development scenario when interacting with stress, it is a consequence of the body's adaptive resource exhaustion and poses a threat to it as a whole, to the psyche in particular. Psychological distress manifests itself first of all in a complex of negative emotional states, disorders in the cognitive sphere, problems of motivation, and behaviour. Maladaptation of the body can be provoked by various factors; the issue of military traumatic experience is

relevant today. The consequence of the war is both temporary maladaptation and pathologies of a prolonged nature, which can significantly affect the person's future mental life.

Secondly, we described two mechanisms of resistance to distress in the human psyche, distinguished their key features. Resilience, as a relatively permanent characteristic of a person, determines his/her ability to act effectively under conditions of stress. It can change over time due to various factors, among the development factors we can note the presence of healthy relationships in childhood. Posttraumatic growth is a process of recovery with some growth after significant destruction of the personality significant components. It can manifest itself in the following areas as growth in the sphere of relationships, changes in the construction of life philosophy and changes in self-views. Both mechanisms, as well as their individual forms, should be used in therapy and counselling for effective rehabilitation.

Thirdly, we empirically explored the difference between resilience and posttraumatic growth. The sample of subjects shows high rates of post-traumatic growth and average rates of resilience. The correlation between these phenomena in general and female samples was statistically significant. The correlation was not found in the male sample. The interaction of resilience and post-traumatic growth in connection with the gender of the subject needs further research and detailing. We allow for a possible difference in the interaction of these stress resistance mechanisms within male and female.

Thus, we considered the mechanisms of human interaction with stress and characterized the difference between them. We were also able to reveal the peculiarity of the manifestation of post-traumatic growth and resilience in male and female and outline the goals of further research in this area i.e. the connection of these mechanisms considering gender should be investigated in more detail by comparing the same sample size. The peculiarities of manifestations of resilience and post-traumatic growth depending on age are also worth separate research.

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