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THE PHENOMENON OF ETHNO-CULTURAL RESILIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF TRAUMATIC WAR EXPERIENCES

Анотація. Мета роботи полягає у теоретико-методологічному аналізі феномену етнокультурної резильєнтності в умовах воєнного травматичного досвіду в Україні, з акцентом на взаємозв'язку індивідуальних психологічних ресурсів і колективних культурних смислів, які забезпечують життєстійкість особистості та спільноти. *Методологія дослідження* спирається на системний, культурно-історичний та феноменологічний підходи до вивчення особистості в кризових умовах, принципи гуманістичної психології, а також концепції психологічної резильєнтності (М. Rutter, В. Cyrulnik, А. Masten, М. Ungar) й етнопсихології. Використано методи теоретичного узагальнення, контент-аналізу наукових джерел, феноменологічного опису культурних проявів стійкості та структурно-функціонального аналізу етнокультурних механізмів адаптації. *Наукова новизна* полягає у розкритті етнокультурної резильєнтності як інтегративного феномену, що поєднує індивідуальні та колективні ресурси виживання; у визначенні її функцій (захисної, ідентифікаційної, інтегративної, відновної, креативної та комунікативної) у контексті воєнної травматизації; у виокремленні символічних, мовних і творчих механізмів, через які культура забезпечує психологічну стійкість українців. *Висновки.* Етнокультурна резильєнтність українців у воєнних умовах проявляється у здатності зберігати й відтворювати культурні смисли навіть у травматичних ситуаціях, перетворюючи біль на ресурс духовного зростання. Через мову, пісню, традиції, мистецтво та спільні символи українська культура виконує терапевтичну, відновну та об'єднавчу функції, зміцнюючи внутрішню опору суспільства. Усвідомлення та розвиток цього феномену мають важливе значення для післявоєнної реабілітації, освітньої політики та збереження національної ідентичності.

Ключові слова: резильєнтність, етнокультурна резильєнтність, життєстійкість, культура, психологічна стійкість, війна, травматичний досвід.

Abstract. The purpose of the work is the theoretical and methodological analysis of the ethno-cultural phenomenon of resilience in the context of traumatic war experience in Ukraine, with an emphasis on the relationship between individual psychological resources and collective cultural meanings that ensure the vitality of the individual and the community. *The research methodology* is based on systemic, cultural-historical, and phenomenological approaches to studying personality in crisis conditions, the principles of humanistic psychology, and the concepts of psychological resilience

(M. Rutter, B. Cyrulnik, A. Masten, M. Ungar) and *ethnopsychology*. We used methods of theoretical generalisation, content analysis of scientific sources, phenomenological description of cultural displays of resilience, and structural-functional analysis of ethno-cultural mechanisms of adaptation. **Scientific novelty** lies in revealing ethno-cultural resilience as an integrative phenomenon that combines individual and collective resources of survival; in determining its functions (protective, identifying, integrative, restorative, creative, and communicative) in the context of war trauma; in distinguishing symbolic, linguistic, and creative mechanisms through which culture ensures the psychological resilience of Ukrainians. **Conclusion.** The ethno-cultural resilience of Ukrainians in wartime shows up in their ability to preserve and reproduce cultural meanings even in traumatic situations, turning pain into a resource for spiritual growth. Through language, song, traditions, art, and shared symbols, Ukrainian culture performs therapeutic, restorative, and unifying functions, strengthening the internal resilience of society. Awareness and development of this phenomenon are important for post-war rehabilitation, educational policy, and the preservation of national identity.

Keywords: resilience, ethno-cultural resilience, vitality, culture, psychological resilience, war, traumatic experience.

Introduction. The current war realities in Ukraine have led to an unprecedented actualisation of the issue of psychological resilience of individuals and communities experiencing chronic trauma. Along with biopsychological and social factors, the cultural dimension of vitality is gaining increasing attention, revealing the phenomenon of resilience not only as an individual psychological ability, but also as a system of symbols, meanings, customs, and traditions rooted in ethno-cultural experience that support a person's inner resilience in extraordinary circumstances. Based on this, there is a problem of understanding ethno-cultural resilience as a special form of resilience that combines individual and collective levels of response to the traumatic experience of war. The problem acquires scientific and practical significance in the context of prolonged war conflict, when traditional psychological assistance tools cannot always be quickly applied, instead, deep cultural mechanisms of preserving vitality are activated: rituals of mutual support, symbolic codes of national identity, traditional forms of community interaction, moral and meaningful guidelines that historically served as a resource for survival. Ethno-cultural resilience in this context is not a static feature, but a dynamic process of renewal of identity and psychological boundaries of the “I” in a situation of threat, which has both personal and social dimensions.

In the military context of Ukraine, the question of how ethno-cultural meanings become not only markers of identity but also practical means of regulating the state — through symbols, customs, language, and shared semantic codes that perform the function of “psychological comfort,” — is particularly significant. The psychological trauma of war encompasses not only immediate threats to life or the loss of loved ones, but also a profound disruption of emotional stability, feelings of helplessness, fear, and anxiety. It appears through a disruption of fundamental feelings of security, changes in self-esteem and perception of social connections, loss of trust in the world and people, as well as through the need to restore meaning, values, and a sense of belonging. Traumatic experiences force people to seek psychological support in cultural and community practices, which act as mechanisms for adaptation and post-traumatic integration. Thus, the general theoretical problem lies in the lack of a systematic approach to understanding ethno-cultural resilience as a phenomenon that combines individual psychological capacity for coping and collective cultural support, and requires a theoretical and methodological analysis of its content, meaning, and functional characteristics in the context of the traumatic experience of war.

The purpose of the article is to carry out a theoretical and methodological analysis of the phenomenon of ethno-cultural resilience in the context of traumatic war experiences in Ukraine, with an emphasis on the relationship between individual and collective levels of psychological resilience.

Theoretical foundations of the study. Over 40 years of development of stability (resilience) research, as shown by J. Fleming and R. Ledogar, there has been a shift from studying resilient

personalities to recognising the decisive role of the environment. Psychology has gradually included factors of resilience at the family and community levels, and later at the cultural level, into its analysis. Thus, modern science recognises that resilience is not only an individual trait, but also a fundamental characteristic of entire cultural systems and communities [6].

The category of 'resilience' in psychology is primarily defined as the ability of the psyche to recover after encountering adverse or extreme conditions. This concept explains how individuals not only survive and recover from life's adversities or disasters but can also achieve psychological growth and effective adaptation. Although this category is relatively new in domestic scientific discourse, its individual aspects have been thoroughly researched in the works of such renowned scientists as J. Richardson, M. Rutter, E. Werner, G. Bonanno, as well as domestic researchers A. Makhnach, O. Oliynykov, A. Muraviova [2, pp. 227-230].

Currently, there is no established concept of 'resilience,' and scholars emphasise different aspects when considering this phenomenon, such as: a set of personality traits that consists of the ability to maintain stable, healthy psychophysical functioning, as well as to maintain a positive emotional state and learn from experience (G. Bonanno) [1, p. 65]; a personal characteristic that neutralises the negative effects of stress and promotes personal adaptation (G. Wagnild and H. Young) [3, p. 8]; the ability to resist circumstances and adapt to the impact of traumatic events (Walker, Pfingst, Carnevali, Sgoifo, Nalivaiko) [4]; positive adaptation and one of the defence mechanisms (Cutuli, Herbers, Masten, Reed) [1, p. 67]. However, understanding resilience is not limited to internal qualities or adaptation. Researchers also emphasise the crucial role of the external environment. As Ungar notes, resilience cannot be considered outside the context of the environment: it includes not only individual resources, but also access to culturally determined ways of recovery [1, p. 66]. In our opinion, the phenomenon of ethno-cultural resilience is noteworthy — a dynamic system of personal recovery based on cultural meanings, collective memory, language, symbols, moral norms, and customs that ensure the psychological integrity of the community. This phenomenon is based on the understanding of culture as a psychological space that contains mechanisms for preserving meaning even in situations of extreme stress. Ukrainian culture shapes these methods through the values of kinship, dignity, community, freedom, and faith in recovery. In times of war, we observe a return to deep cultural codes that make it possible to actualise historical memory, identity, and express feelings.

Discussion of the results of the theoretical analysis

In the process of understanding ethno-cultural resilience as a psychological phenomenon, several levels of its manifestation can be distinguished:

1. The symbolic level (images, songs, language, colours, symbols, history) is aimed at supporting a sense of belonging and national identity;
2. The social level (realised through volunteer initiatives, mutual aid rituals, civic solidarity) is aimed at developing resilience through the support of the environment;
3. The emotional and spiritual level (shared experiences, prayer, humour, creativity) activates ways of internal recovery [5].

The threat to Ukrainian identity has contributed to the revival of national traditions through the popularisation of traditional clothing and accessories. Embroidered shirts, dresses, skirts, necklaces, and beads have all returned to everyday use and revived Ukrainian fashion, which has become a powerful manifestation of ethno-cultural resilience, strengthened the internal solidarity of the nation, and visualised the unbreakable Ukrainian spirit on the world stage.

Language plays a special role in the system of ethno-cultural resilience. In a military context, language ceases to be merely a means of communication; it becomes a marker of identity and a key mechanism of psychological regulation. Active use and protection of the native language in conditions of aggression becomes a conscious practice of preserving national integrity and an instrument that performs the function of "psychological comfort". Language conveys moral and semantic guidelines and deep cultural codes that have historically served as a resource for survival and strengthen a person's inner resilience in extraordinary circumstances [7; 8].

Ukrainian songs became a tool of support that was used in the most difficult times, conveying hope across hundreds of kilometres. Echoing in the basements of Azovstal, on Sophia Square, in the bomb shelters of large and small cities across Ukraine, songs gave people a psychological sense of community, unity and belonging to the Ukrainian people. It is important to emphasise that we are talking specifically about the ethnic component, as most of the songs performed were folk songs that appeal to our collective historical experience of resistance and struggle.

Along with visual symbols, Ukrainian books have become a powerful tool for preserving and restoring national identity. They serve as a collective memory and spiritual bastion. Ukrainian prose, especially historical novels and works about the struggle for independence, is an important element in understanding one's own strength: rethinking the heroic past (reading works dedicated to the Cossacks, the liberation movements of the 20th century or the Holodomor not only honours the memory of the victims, but also actualises the experience of resilience in the face of totalitarian systems; it shapes the understanding that the nation has already experienced similar threats and survived); the creation of national myths and symbols (novels help to reinforce the images of indomitable heroes who become role models for the current generation). Poetry has taken on a special, mobilising and therapeutic significance. Poems can be seen to respond quickly to traumatic events, transforming pain into meaningful experience. The classic works of Taras Shevchenko, Lesia Ukrainka and Vasyl Stus are becoming relevant again, serving as mantras of unbreakable resilience. New poetry, created directly in the combat zone or during shelling, is spreading rapidly, providing an emotional connection between the military and civilians, as well as between different regions. It becomes the common 'breath' of the nation. Thus, Ukrainian literature emerges as an active ethno-cultural resource that helps the community to comprehend trauma, preserve dignity, and project the future, strengthening its resilience.

In the context of the traumatic experience of war, the moral norms and customs of the Ukrainian community function as fundamental ethno-cultural resources that ensure its psychological integrity. They convey moral and meaningful guidelines (in particular, the values of dignity, community, freedom and kinship) that help the community to comprehend trauma and plan for the future, while preventing the disintegration of the personal and collective "I". Thus, these elements act as a collective cultural support that strengthens resilience by forming a stable ethical and behavioural framework.

The ethno-cultural resilience of Ukrainians in wartime is displayed in their ability to continue creating even in traumatic circumstances: painting, singing, writing poetry, and preparing traditional dishes. Such activities have not only symbolic but also therapeutic significance — they help to integrate trauma into shared experience and transform pain into meaning. At the present stage, creative activities incorporating elements of traditions and customs are used in the rehabilitation process for war veterans and adults and children affected by hostilities.

The experience of ethno-cultural resilience is not unique to the Ukrainian people, but is universal in nature, characteristic of many nations that have experienced war, occupation or genocide. In different cultural contexts, similar mechanisms of community recovery can be observed through the use of traditions, language, art and rituals.

For example, in Polish society after World War II, the revival of national memory and cultural symbols (particularly through literature and theatre) became a factor in the moral consolidation of the nation. After the Holocaust, the Jewish people built their identity around collective memory, religious rituals, and art that conveyed the experience of survival and spiritual rebirth. Similarly, after the genocide, Armenian culture maintained national unity through language, music, traditional art, and the cult of memory.

In this context, Ukrainian ethno-cultural resilience demonstrates common patterns with other nations, but has its own unique specificity — a synthesis of spirituality, folk art, a deep sense of freedom and historical dignity. Having endured centuries of colonial pressure, famines and wars, Ukrainian culture has developed powerful mechanisms of collective recovery, which today are manifested in the forms of volunteer movements, artistic initiatives, linguistic revival and the preservation of historical memory. The effectiveness of ethno-cultural resilience as a resource for

trauma transformation is illustrated by the example of communities that have survived occupation or the direct impact of hostilities, where the collective restoration of traditional rituals (such as the joint celebration of ceremonial holidays) has taken on therapeutic significance. This phenomenon provides multi-level psychological support: the symbolic function is realised through the reproduction of rituals (even with limited resources), which visualises resilience and confirms the preservation of identity, allowing the symbol of stability to prevail over the consequences of destruction. The social function reveals itself in the fact that joint preparation for and participation in rituals activate civic solidarity and rituals of mutual assistance, which is a factor of moral consolidation and helps to overcome social isolation. Finally, the emotional-spiritual function is activated through shared experiences that appeal to the collective historical experience of resistance, serving as a mechanism for emotional recovery and helping to integrate traumatic experiences into meaning. Thus, the effectiveness of ethno-cultural resilience is confirmed by its nature as a practical, self-organised mechanism of society that transforms trauma into a resource for community recovery and development. Thus, the phenomenon of ethno-cultural resilience acquires not only a national but also a universal dimension, reflecting the universal ability of culture to transform trauma and maintain resilience.

Prospects for further research. In the scientific literature, psychological resilience is traditionally considered through the concepts of “resilience”, “hardiness”, and “posttraumatic growth” (M. Rutter, A. Antonovsky, B. Cyrulnik, A. Masten). Most approaches focus on the individual level and do not sufficiently take into account the cultural and historical sources of resilience. Contemporary Ukrainian research, especially in the context of war, expands the focus on collective forms of support, but the phenomenon of ethno-cultural resilience has not yet received a comprehensive theoretical and methodological understanding. Particularly relevant issues remain: the interaction between individual and collective resilience, the mechanisms of transition from trauma to a stronger sense of community belonging, and the role of collective memory as psychological protection. Research is also needed on how these mechanisms are activated during a threat — spontaneously, through tradition, or through conscious practices.

Conclusions. The ethno-cultural resilience of Ukrainians in wartime appears as a holistic phenomenon that integrates psychological, social, and cultural factors of resilience. It is based on deep-rooted symbols, values, traditions and moral and semantic guidelines that form the inner strength of individuals and communities in situations of existential threat. Theoretical analysis has determined that ethno-cultural resilience performs a number of functions: protective, identificatory, integrative, restorative, creative, and communicative. Its essence lies not only in preserving cultural heritage, but also in the ability to transform traumatic experiences into a resource for the development, revival and self-awareness of the community. The phenomenon of ethno-cultural resilience is of great practical importance for the system of psychological assistance, education and rehabilitation. The integration of elements of traditional culture into modern psychotherapeutic and social programmes contributes to a deeper integration of traumatic experiences, the formation of a positive identity, and the strengthening of moral resilience in society.

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