

SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT OF EX-SERVICEMEN TO CIVILIAN LIFE

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Abstract

Social-psychological adjustment of ex-servicemen to civilian life after returning home from combat zone was analyzed in this paper. The authors used a dialectical subjective approach analysing the ability to cope with traumatic experiences of warfare. A theoretical model of social-psychological adjustment was designed, an empirical research was conducted, the factors that facilitate social-psychological adjustment: consistent, coherent ideas about peaceful life, self and others, emotional stability, commitment to social values, self-awareness, a sense of self-fulfilment, social behaviour, peaceful conflict resolution, job satisfaction, relationships, family ties, productive performance of activities, satisfaction of basic social needs were identified and validated.

Keywords: *social-psychological adjustment, ex-servicemen, socialization, individualization, self-efficacy, self-actualization, self-fulfilment, emotional stability, social values.*

Introduction

Social-psychological adjustment of ex-servicemen to ordinary civilian life is a relevant topic because many of those who return from combat zone face social and psychological problems and need support while reintegrating into society.

Transition from military to civilian life is a painful process, the impact of war on society is huge. Scholars have identified that war trauma may result in:

- deviant, antisocial behaviour, loss of moral values (Velichko, 2014; Weiss & Mannar, 1997);
- negative mental states;
- mental health disorders;
- muscle strength decrease, neuropsychic strain, etc. (Leskov, 2008; Topol, 2015);
- post-traumatic stress disorder that may develop after months or years (Lanius, Yermetten, & Loewebstein, 2010; Jonas, Cusack, & Fomeris et al., 2013).

Studies show that ex-servicemen experience problems, violate the law (Paronians, 2004).

The term “the Vietnam syndrome” is used to define the psychological consequences of active participation in the Vietnam war, e.g. substance abuse, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, other mental health disorders. Many Vietnam war veterans were unable to cope with life outside war, felt out of place in society (Buriak, Hinevskiy, & Katerusha, 2015). According to data of November 1989, 3 700 Afghanistan War veterans were sentenced to prison terms, 75% divorced for family conflicts, over two thirds were unhappy with their jobs, often changed them because of conflicts, 90% had academic arrears or were low-performing students, 60% suffered from alcohol and drug abuse, many committed or attempted to commit suicides, nearly 50% or even 70% were ready to go back to Afghanistan (Buriak, Hinevskiy, & Katerusha, 2015).

According to official data of 20 March 2016, 70 791 people took part in military operations in Ukraine, the ATO (Anti-Terrorist Operation) zone. Psychiatrists claim that, due to this life-threatening experience, 20% develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) the consequence of which is personality disorders, social disintegration, alcohol and drug abuse, suicides. A traumatized person needs special medical treatment and psychotherapy not to develop chronic or acute PTSD (Buriak, Hinevskiy, & Katerusha, 2015; Mykhailov, Serdiuk, & Halachenko et al., 2016; Paroniants, 2004; Lanius, Vermetten, & Loewenstein et al., 2010).

During the adjustment process the following is important: psychological state, the role of the environment, legal regulation (Paroniants, 2004).

Research object. Social-psychological adjustment of servicemen.

Research subject. Social-psychological adjustment of Ukrainian ex-servicemen to civilian life after returning home from the ATO zone.

Research aim. To identify the specificity of social-psychological adjustment of ex-servicemen to civilian life after returning home from the ATO zone.

Research participants. Ex-servicemen who returned home from ATO zone in Luhansk and Donetsk regions (N=110), average age – 32.4 years.

Research date and place. July-August 2016, Recreation and Fitness Center, Khyriv, Lviv region, Ukraine within the study programme *Psychosocial Rehabilitation*.

Research method. The empirical study (chosen for validity and availability of respondents) included psycho-diagnostic testing, scaled self-assessment of psychophysiological state (Kokun, 2004); self-inquiry method “Who am I?” (Kuhn & McPartland, 1984) using general self-efficacy scale (Schwarzer, Jerusalem, & Romek, 1996), stress inventory (Reeder & Kopina), collective consciousness (Yanytskyi, 2012), short index of self-actualization (Jones, Crandall, 1986). Data were collected through a self-assessment questionnaire and processed using the SPSS.20 software, maximum likelihood estimation and Varimax rotation. Some research methods were used in Russian, because they had not been adapted in Ukrainian. In addition, during the preliminary interview with our respondents we realized that they know Russian and they agree to be polled in that language.

Research findings

The phenomenon of social-psychological adjustment of personality of the servicemen demobilized after their participation in military operations is hardly revealed in scientific sources. Papers of domestic (Ukraine) and foreign authors had reflected individual aspects of social-psychological adjustment of personality under extreme conditions (Aleksandrovich, Maliutin & Senokosov, 1991; Topol, 2015), typology of this process (Topol, 2015; Leonard, Gwadz, Ritchie, Linick, Cleland, Elliott & Grethel, 2015), psychological mechanisms of the

course (Velichko, 2014; Mykhailov, Serdiuk, Halachenko, O., Halachenko, V. & Vashkite, 2016; Paroniants, 2004), general regularities (Siegel, Ozkaptan, Hegge, Kopstein, Marlowe, Federman & Slifer, 1981), psychological foundations of rehabilitation of servicemen after participation in military operations (Buriak, Hinevskyi & Katerusha, 2015; Velychko, 2014; Leskov, 2008).

Our research was based on the intersubjective approach methodology within which social-psychological adjustment of ex-servicemen back from the ATO zone was studied as a complex dialectical process of establishing a dynamic equilibrium within the system of relations of a ex-serviceman personality with the civilian social environment. Fundamentally, this was about an process of reviewing and rethinking of norms and ways of behavior, social roles as well as individual adaptive mechanisms and strategies that were effective in special military circumstances but were a hindrance in peaceful life. The consequences of such personality changes after returning from the ATO zone require intervention and search for new internal psychological resources to get involved in ordinary civilian life. We mean the process of recovering of ex-servicemen' psychical functions, the primary parameters of which include self-consistent, coherent ideas about peaceful life, oneself and others in it, certainty of the emotional-axiological attitude of personality towards phenomena of civilian life, self-assertion, self-actualization, conflict-free productive performance of activities, satisfaction of the primary social needs.

This process was accompanied by transformations at all levels of functioning of both an individual (personality of a serviceman) and group (civil environment) subjects of interaction and creation of an intersubjective adaptational social-psychological space. It runs smoothly when parties share common views, norms and values, care about each other's emotional wellbeing. This paper analyzed the specifics of the social-psychological adaptation process at the level of personality of a serviceman, components of his self-consciousness during adjustment to civil - peaceful life.

In this empirical study, the participants identified themselves, assessed self-efficacy and stress experience, psycho-physiological state, value orientation, self-identification, self-actualization, self-fulfilment.

Self-identification

25% of the respondents described themselves thoroughly, the rest only wrote briefly. The majority of the respondents described themselves as positive persons, active, enterprising, sociable, reliable. The respondents most often identified themselves as social beings (63%) (see Table1). Content analysis showed that the respondents firstly mentioned their gender, occupation, civil, patriotic, religious identity but the majority (20.6%) - military experiences (*fighter, defender*). Describing themselves as a *son, a brother, a Ukrainian* they also indicated their values (27%): *to defend the family, children; not to let war come to my home*.

Table 1. Self-identification in self-descriptions (n=110)

Indicator	%
<i>Personal profile</i>	37
positive person	97.3
negative person	2.7
physical appearance	2.7
health	2.7
<i>Social profile</i>	63
military experience (<i>defender, fighter, warrior</i>)	20.6
relationships with members of family (<i>son, father, brother</i>)	27
gender (<i>male</i>)	7.9
civil identity (<i>member of society, citizen</i>)	6.3
occupation (<i>specialist, engineer</i>)	6.3
patriotic identity (<i>patriot, Ukrainian</i>)	4.8
religious identity (<i>Christian</i>)	1.6
<i>completeness of self-description</i>	41.7

It should be noted that positive personal profile facilitates, negative – complicates social-psychological adjustment.

Self-efficacy and stress experience

The majority of the respondents (65%) said that the level of their self-efficacy was high, 75% said that they effectively cope with stress (see Table 2). 35% of the respondents said that they experienced insignificant, 40% – medium stress after returning from war.

Table 2. Self-efficacy and stress experience (n=110)

	Level, %					M	σ
	low	below medium	medium	above medium	high		
Self-efficacy	15	5	15	35	30	32.20	6.46
Stress experience	35		40		25	1.33	0.83

It was arguable that quite a substantial proportion of ex-servicemen were in the state of maladjustment on the strength of the affective component indicators.

Psycho-physiological state

The Kokun method was used. In general, the respondents said that the level of their psycho-physiological state was high. In particular, they highly assess their own wellbeing, development activities (satisfaction with and interest in active socio-psychological development, mastering self-discovery, self-awareness, and self-regulation techniques as part of rehabilitative measures). High indicators of interest in development could be considered as an active intention to change their own position within the social space, as a desire to improve the forms of interaction with the social environment. 15%-20% – low or below medium (see Table 3), experienced psychological difficulties, wanted to feel better emotionally (see Table 3).

Table 3. Psycho-physiological state (n=110)

Indicator	Level, %					M	σ
	low	below medium	medium	above medium	high		
Wellbeing	5	5	25	20	45	8.00	3.04
Satisfaction with development	10	5	15	15	55	7.75	3.07
Interest in development	15	5	15	10	55	7.33	3.67
Engagement in development	5	5	20	35	35	7,25	2,89
Mood	10	15	10	25	40	7,16	3,12

Value orientation

Values were categorized at three levels as proposed by Yanytskyi (2012) at adaptation (survival, safety, order, health, material wealth), at socialization (social recognition) and at individualization level (independence, self-development).

The following hierarchical order of values was identified: 1) socialization (family relationships, social recognition, career); 2) adaptation (order, health, wellbeing); 3) individualization (independence, self-development, self-fulfilment) (see Table 4). Socialization values were most important to the respondents.

Table 4. Value orientation (n=110)

	Level, %			M	σ
	low	medium	high		
Socialization values	80	20	-	1.16	0.57
Adaptation values	90	10	-	0.75	0.62
Individualization values	85	15	-	0.50	0.52

Self-actualization

90% of the respondents showed medium level of self-actualization (see Table 5). Self-actualization, a clear perception of one's personality, emotions, behaviour, thoughts, and reactions are the first step when adjusting.

Table 5. Self-actualization (n=110)

	Level, %			M	σ
	low	medium	high		
Index of self-actualization	0	90	10	50.6	17.6

The desire to identify and develop their own personality capabilities to the fullest extent possible was typical of the respondents. It was one of the most powerful motivational factors of their social behavior during the adjustment to civil life. In our opinion, this indicator of ex-servicemen social-psychological adjustment was a result of all adaptive trends of their personalities in returning to civil life. The retrieval and "access" to own psychological resources could enable personality to comprehend the reason of his existence beyond war having fulfilled himself in those professional, social, family roles that correspond with the identity of personality, his internal intentions and aspirations.

Productive performance of various activities

The productive performance of various activities (professional, family roles and ect.), the satisfaction of the primary social needs of personality were considered one of the social adjustment criteria. Productive performance of various activities is related to building and maintaining relationships, career development. The majority of the respondents said that the level of their ability to perform in social and professional life and build and maintain relationships was high (see Table 6).

Table 6. Productive performance of various activities (n=110)

Indicator	Level, %			M	σ
	low	medium	high		
Social achievements	25	10	65	7.00	2.98
Maintaining relationships	15	25	60	6.91	2.50
Career	25	20	55	6.75	3.07

At the same time, a group of ex-servicemen whose indicators were at low level (15% to 25% of respondents) were outdated. This allows to prove the heterogeneity of the group of servicemen from the combat operational zone, the significant individual differences in the course of their adaptation to peaceful life. This particular group claims for psychosocial rehabilitation in the course.

A factor matrix was developed, 6 factors were extracted (see Table 7).

Table 7. Factors and variables

Variable	Factor, percentage of the total variance					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	32	14	13	9	7	6
Career	.870					
Relationships	.852					
Social achievements	.842					
Wellbeing	.601					
Satisfaction with development		.931				
Interest in development		.872				
Engagement in development		.822				
Family identity			.838			
Occupational identity			.790			
Gender identity			.773			
Patriotic identity			.701			
Self-efficacy				.713		
Civil identity				-.648		
Value orientation				.634		
Stress experience				.629		
Individualization					.716	
Religious identity					-.702	
Self-actualization					.522	
Personality profile						.821
Socialization						.712

Factor 1 associated with connotations in career and other social achievements and relationship with the social environment accounted for 32% of the total variance (54% of the sample). It shows active participation of the respondents in the adjustment process.

Factor 2, that can be defined as “satisfaction with development”, accounted for 14% of the total variance (21% of the sample). The respondents assessed the variables associated with training high. It can be concluded that training activities lead to self-improvement, help develop self-awareness, self-control.

Factor 3, that can be defined as “social self-identification strategies”, accounted for 13% of the total variance (37% of the sample). This group of variables was characterized by a high expression of social identity markers.

Factor 4, that can be defined as “self-efficacy, orientation towards order, health and wellbeing”, was most contradictory, it accounted for 9% of the total variance (27% of the sample). This group of variables was perceived as stressful, requiring high emotional tension.

Factor 5, that can be defined as “reliance upon inner resources – reliance upon outer resources”, accounted for 7% of the total variance. It showed dichotomous orientation, towards individualization and self-actualization (13% of the sample) on the one hand and towards external forces (religious identity) on the other (21% of the sample).

Factor 6, that can be defined as “socialization”, accounted for 7% of the total variance (42% of the sample). It showed personality development via social values integration.

Table 8. Factor loading

Factor extracted from primary data	Factor extracted from secondary data		
	1	2	3
Factor 4	0.648958		
Factor 6	-0.62064		
Factor 1		0.725549	
Factor 2		-0.52773	
Factor 3			-0.68837
Factor 5			0.633842

Let us analyze contradictions within the structure of these factors. A desire to substantiate one’s self-efficacy, which requires significant psychic energy and emotional tension, personal and social identity is in conflict with a need to change and adjust, a need to belong – with a need to act independently, individuality – with a requirement to comply with social norms and values. Thus, it can be summed up that the main conflict is between “subjective activity at self-consciousness and at social interaction level”, conflict between needs and wants, aspirations and norms of civilian life.

Conclusion

Social-psychological adjustment of ex-servicemen after returning from ATO zone is a complex dialectical process in the course of which an individual makes attempt to achieve harmony with the civilian social environment. Values, social roles, behaviour strategies once effective in war and doing military service but ineffective in peaceful life should change.

The authors of the paper designed a theoretical model of this process, developed and empirically validated factors that facilitate adjustment: consistent, coherent ideas about peaceful

life, self and others, emotional stability, commitment to social values, self-awareness, a sense of self-fulfilment, social behaviour, peaceful conflict resolution, job satisfaction, relationships, family ties, productive performance of activities, satisfaction of basic social needs.

Empirical study revealed that the respondents tended to rely on themselves on the one hand and seek support from others on the other. It was found that the process was contradictory, based on conflict between needs and wants, aspirations and norms, “subjective activity at self-consciousness and at social interaction level”. A desire to substantiate one’s self-efficacy, personal and social identity was in conflict with a need to change and adjust, a need to belong – with a need to act independently, individuality – with a requirement to comply with social norms and values of civilian life. We found that the adjustment process varied among ex-servicemen. Psychological support should be provided, inner resources and potential used, psychological rehabilitation offered.

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Summary

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The paper examines the problem of social-psychological adjustment of the demobilized servicemen and their integration into society, which is due to the need to study psychological manifestations and consequences of participation in hostilities and develop enabling psychological aid technologies. The **object of the research** consists in the process of social-psychological adjustment of ex-servicemen. The **goal of the research** is to identify the specifics of social-psychological adjustment of the ex-servicemen back from the ATO zone, Ukraine.

Social-psychological adjustment of demobilized servicemen is studied as a complex of dialectical process of establishing a dynamic equilibrium within the system of relations of personality with the civilian social environment. In substance, this is a process of readjustment that requires reviewing and rethinking by a subject of norms and ways of behavior, social roles, adaptive mechanisms, their sets and strategies that were effective in special circumstances while in military service in a combat unit but are a hindrance in peaceful life, with their partial or complete rejection. The model of social-psychological adjustment of personality of the ex-servicemen back from the ATO zone includes such it's empirical indicators as consistent, coherent ideas about peaceful life, oneself and others in it, certainty of the emotional-axiological attitude of personality towards phenomena of civilian life, experiencing the state of self-assertion, self-actualization, conflict-free productive performance of activities (professional, family roles etc.) and satisfaction of the primary social needs.

The research found that the specifics of the adjustment process of ex-servicemen consist in, on the one hand, tendencies to actively, effectively regulate own life drawing mainly on resources of own

personality, as well as seeking them in the immediate social environment. On the other hand, a tendency to seeking reliance on external forces beyond own resources is also typical. We identified heterogeneity of the group of ex-servicemen under study, significant individual differences in the course of their adjustment to civilian life, which dictates the need for psychological support for this process.

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