

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## ISSUES OF EMOTIONAL INSTABILITY IN THE CONTEXT OF STUDENTS' EMOTIONAL HEALTH RESEARCH

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### ABSTRACT

**The aim:** The aim of the research was to investigate the issue of emotional health in the context of mental health of students, in particular, the emotional instability as a students' personal quality with regard to cognitive and empathic components.

**Materials and methods:** In a comparative analysis of the study, 104 3rd-year students of the Faculty of Management and Media Communications of the Ukrainian Academy of Printing, were divided into two groups on the basis of gender (group №1 – females; group №2 – males). In the study, undertaken in 2019–2020, two questionnaires, namely "Problems of Emotional Health" and "Assessment of Empathic Compassion", drawn up by a team of authors, were used. The comparative analysis was carried out with the use of the Mann–Whitney U test.

**Results:** The study of emotional instability and competence in the context of the student's mental health allows us to conclude that the cognitive component is the basis that promotes the development of social, regulatory, and empathic components, and the latter is the main motivator of a person's activity.

**Conclusions:** The research showed that high school students do not always have enough opportunities for independent formation and emotional competence development, and have problems with emotional instability. These problems may be solved by the introduction of the educational component, in particular: introducing relevant special courses into the educational process, conducting psychological training aimed at the development of emotional professional competence in the context of the formation of personality's mental health.

**KEY WORDS:** emotions, mental health, cognitive and empathic components, emotional competence

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### INTRODUCTION

The functioning of modern society, complex social and economic transformations, as well as challenges, including the coronavirus pandemic, put forward significant requirements for the competence and professionalism of future specialists.

The emotional intensity of professional and personal life testifies to the urgency of studying emotional competence, emotional health in the context of mental health as an integral part of personal success. Competence in the field of emotions has become one of the most important components of the high professional level of students, their successful professional development. For the first time, emotional instability and research of emotional intelligence in the context of mental health were discussed at the end of the 90 years of the last century. In the early 1990s, American psychologists P. Salovey and J. Meyer emphasized not only the formation of self-consciousness, self-actualization, self-control, motivation, but also claimed that emotional phenomena affect the individual. In their writings, the scientists identified this complex as emotional intelligence and later they considered emotional intelligence as a set of features of general abilities [1].

Modern researchers, like philosophers and psychologists of the last century, have not reached a common point of view regarding the interpretation of the emotional component of health in the context of mental health. The most common position was the so-called intellectualist theory: organic manifestations are the result of psychic phenomena J. Herbart's concept in particular. [2].

Given the importance of emotions in human life, a number of scientists put forward a lot of theories, thus highlighting their understanding of emotional processes and states, the diversity of their functions and mechanisms of development [3, 4].

J. Dewey wrote about the importance of emotions. He noted that emotional arousal determinates the pattern of behavior, but emotion arises only when instinctive actions are inhibited. Psychologically, emotion is adaptation or tension [5].

Interesting research was presented in 1927 by the famous physiologist W. Cannon. In his research, the scientist presented reasoned evidence confirming his assumptions about bodily changes that occur in different emotional states. A number of scientists, including W. James and

K. Lange, linked the emergence of emotions, emotional experiences with changes in the state of internal organs, which are hyposensitive structures [6].

As the review of psychological literature conducted by us showed, several areas of study of emotions in the context of mental health have been formed during the research of this phenomenon: interpretation of the essence of emotions, creation of theories in order to explain the nature of emotional states, identification of visual changes in appearance and so on. Many scientists (C. Darwin, P. Bard, W. James, K. Izard, K. Lange, S. Rubinstein, P. Simonov, P. Jacobson, etc.) note that emotions are among the most ancient mental states and processes [7-9].

However, despite the widespread representation of emotions in the human psyche, there is no clear generally accepted definition of them in terms of both emotional health and emotional instability in the literature today [10-13].

To date, the emotional sphere is deeply and comprehensively studied and presented in the works of both foreign and domestic psychologists (G. Breslav, V. Vilyunas, S. Maksymenko, S. Rubinstein, etc.). Many psychological theories explaining the nature of the phenomenon under study have been created (C. Darwin, W. James, K. Izard, K. Lange, S. Schechter, etc.), close connection of emotional sphere components with cognitive processes (L. Vygotsky, O. Leontiev, S. Rubinstein, O. Tikhomirov, etc.), motives, needs (K. Izard, O. Leontiev, J. Reykovsky, S. Rubinstein, S. Shekhter, etc.), volitional and regulatory processes (K. Abulkhanova-Slavka, L. Bozhovych, Z. Freud, O. Chebykin, etc.) has been studied. [14].

Psychological features of components of students' emotional sphere (B. Ananiev, V. Kolesnikov, etc.) are singled out, general aspects of the problem of emotional maturity are developed, methodological strategies for emotional sphere formation are highlighted (G. Breslav, O. Grebenyuk, O. Zaporozhets, S. Rubinstein and etc.). Understanding the role and special significance of emotions in people's lives contributed to the emergence of the concepts of "emotional competence", "emotional intelligence" in psychology as the necessary components of successful functioning of the individual (G. Breslav, G. Gardner, D. Goleman, D. Lucin, D. Meyer, E. Nosenko, P. Selovey and others).

The student is considered as an active subject (K. Abulkhanova-Slavka, D. Leontiev, S. Stavyska, V. Tatenko, etc.), one of the characteristic features of which is the ability to self-regulation, that is the ability to manage his/ her own mental states, which is necessary to preserve mental, especially, emotional health, and harmonious coexistence with other people and the world around, as well as successful solution of life problems.

Most researchers consider the stability of the individual, the self-regulation of the subject as a conscious, purposeful process of achieving goals in solving personal meaningful tasks (R. Baumeister, I. Galyan, L. Dika, A. Katsero, O. Konopkin, D. Leontiev, N. Naumchik, O. Osnytsky and others) [15].

One of the types of psychic self-regulation is emotional self-regulation, which is an important component of men-

tal health and at the same time is a process of optimizing the emotional state, including the ability to manage one's own emotions, feelings, experiences, thoughts and activities (J. Gross, R. Erber, V. Zarytska, etc.) [16]; management of cognitive activity (regulation of memory, attention and thinking processes), behavior, activity, communication (M. Bernstein, I. Leontiev, O. Osnitsky, V. Morosanova, H. Heckhausen, etc.) [17, 18].

In modern science special attention is paid to the problem of harmonization of the activity of the left and right cerebral hemispheres, that is, the formation of a holistic harmonious bioadequate thinking, contributing not only to individual's spiritual and mental recovery, but also to establishing harmonious, adequate relations with the world around, social and natural environment. [19].

The following types of self-regulation are analyzed in the psychological literature: personal (K. Abulkhanova-Slavka, D. Chizhma), volitional (V. Ivannikov, S. Maksymenko), axiological (S. Maksymenko), motivational (O. Xenofontova, Y. Kul, H. Heckhausen), emotional (R. Baumeister, J. Gross, S. Maksimenko).

Goleman D. indicates the existence of a number of objects of self-regulation and identifies, depending on the focus of the object, self-regulation of activities, behavior, mental processes, motivational sphere, etc. [17].

Emotional self-regulation in the structure of the individual is regarded as one of the varieties of mental self-regulation, which ontogenetically develops first in the form of basal emotional self-regulation aimed at ensuring psychological comfort and stability of the inner state of the individual. (D. Goleman) [17].

Theoretical analysis of the problem showed that the issue of the emotional sphere development is not new for both domestic and foreign psychologists. Considerable material has already been accumulated, many theoretical concepts have been created, and there is certain experience in the formation and development of individual components of the emotional sphere. [14-20].

However, in general, this problem is far from its final solution and still remains of great interest. Firstly, this is due to the ambiguity of the categorical apparatus of the emotional sphere of mental health and constant emergence of new terminology; secondly, the lack of diagnostic tools, which could be explained by the complexity of the study of the individual's emotional sphere in general.

## THE AIM

The theoretical analysis of scientific papers showed insufficient presentation of thorough researches aimed at studying the development of emotional competence of students' mental health, in particular emotional instability and confirmed the relevance of our study, and also allowed to formulate our own approach to determining and studying emotional instability of students during the pandemic, to reveal the content and identify the structural elements of this phenomenon.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In our research, we studied the issues of emotional health of students of the Ukrainian Academy of Printing in the context of personality's mental health, in particular the study of emotional instability as a personal quality of students with regard to cognitive component (system of knowledge, emotional analysis skills, ability to emotional reflection, self-awareness, self-reflection, ability to correctly recognize, identify their own emotional states, emotions and feelings of others) and empathic component (understanding the emotional states of others in the form of compassion, empathy, ability to accept students' experiences, emotional sensitivity).

As part of our study, undertaken in 2019-2020, we used two questionnaires, namely "Problems of Emotional Health" and "Assessment of Empathic Compassion", compiled by a team of authors [5-7]. The comparative analysis of the obtained data was carried out with the use of the Mann-Whitney U test.

The results of the comparative analysis of the study, the respondents of which were 3rd year students of the Faculty of Management and Media Communications of the Ukrainian Academy of Printing are presented. A total of 104 students were included in our study. Since it is generally believed that females are more emotional than men, we decided to find evidence of this in the course of our study, and that is why the students were divided into two groups according to gender (group № 1 – female students; group № 2 – male students).

## RESULTS

The question of the necessity of forming the emotional stability of the individual in the context of his/ her mental health through formation and development of the cognitive component (system of knowledge, emotional analysis skills, ability to emotional reflection, self-awareness, self-reflection, ability to correctly recognize, identify their own emotional states, emotions and feelings of others) and the empathic component (understanding the emotional states of others in the form of compassion, empathy, ability to accept the experiences of others, emotional sensitivity) arises. We believe that emotional instability is correlates with the dynamics of students moods and emotions in the emotional health of students.

According to the generalized results of our research, we can state that group №1 (female students) is more prone to emotional instability than group №2 (male students). Indicators 52.9 versus 47.1, in particular, show that it has problems in forming cognitive component (system of knowledge, emotional analysis skills, ability to emotional reflection, self-awareness, self-reflection, ability to correctly recognize, identify their own emotional states, emotions and feelings of others).

In this regard, we can conclude that female students in comparison with male students lack sufficient systemic knowledge, formed cognitive skills to analyze emotions, formed ability to rational emotional reflection. In group № 2 (males) the average indicators on the "emotional in-

stability" scale prevail, i.e. 51% of the subjects in this group have average emotional instability, 42% have low emotional instability and only 7% have high emotional instability.

With regard to the results of the study "Assessment of Empathic Compassion" in the context of the study of the empathic component as a component of mental health (understanding the emotional states of others in the form of compassion, empathy, ability to accept students' experiences, emotional sensitivity), after analyzing the obtained data we can state the following.

According to the generalized results of our research, it should be noted that group №1 (females) has higher indicators of empathic compassion – 63.2 than group №2 (males) – 36.8. In this regard, we can conclude that group №1 (females) is more prone to high rates of empathic compassion, even in extreme situations, than group №2 (males).

In group №1 (females) average indicators of neuropsychological stability (79%) dominate, high rates have 21% of the students; low and very high rates are not observed. As for the group №2 (males) the average rates of neuropsychological stability prevail (49%), low rates have 40% of the students, and 11% – high rates.

To study emotional instability as a personal quality of students on the basis of gender specificities, we carried out a comparative analysis, using the Mann-Whitney U-test to compare two independent data samples.

According to the results of the comparative analysis between the sample of female and male students, statistically significant differences were found in the parameters of "Problems of Emotional Health" and "Assessment of Empathic Compassion".

Thus, emotional instability in the study of emotional health is significantly higher in group №1 (females) ( $m = 52.9$ ), while in group №2 (males) this indicator is  $m = 47.1$ .

These results confirm the findings of other authors that emotional instability as a personal quality, in our case, of students is more pronounced in female students.

The rate of empathic compassion in group №1 (females) is higher ( $m = 63.2$ ) than in group №2 (males) ( $m = 36.8$ ). The data suggest that female students have much higher empathic compassion than male students.

The emotional competence of the student's mental health includes the following components: cognitive component (system of knowledge, emotional analysis skills, ability to emotional reflection, self-awareness, self-reflection, ability to correctly recognize, identify own emotional states, emotions and feelings of others); social component (ability to establish emotional contacts, ability to recognize the emotions of others, have the skills to overcome emotional barriers in the communication process); regulatory component (ability to control and manage emotional states, emotional resistance, self-control of expression) and empathic component (understanding the emotional states of others in the form of compassion, empathy, ability to accept students' experiences, emotional sensitivity).

In our further work we plan to continue research on gender characteristics of emotional instability as personal quality of students in order to verify the results obtained.

**Table I.** Results of Comparative Analysis on the Problems of Emotional Health and Empathic Compassion

Parameters of cognitive and empathic components research	Group of students (females) №1	Group of students (males) №2	U	Z	p-level
Parameters «Problems of Emotional Health»	52.9	47.1	23.5	3.7	0.005
Parameters «Assessment of Empathic Compassion»	63.2	36.8	77	1.4	0.2

## DISCUSSION

The educational environment of a modern higher education institution is a student-centered. Researches in this area are carried out by many scientists [15-17]. L. Chernyavska, I. Krynytska, O. Myalyuk argue that “the formation of the future specialist’s personality includes concern for health self-care, and the most acute problem is its serious deterioration in student youth. Therefore, it is advisable for students to develop and implement a personalized, individual, prospective wellness program, given the significant percentage of students is classified by health status as a “special medical group” [15]. In his research, S. Stein [11] studied aspects of the development and manifestation of emotional burnout of psychology students. In particular, the author states that “the first-year students have a minimal level of depression, whereas the fifth-year students have a moderate level of depression. Therefore, such depressive manifestations as apathy (state of indifference, disinterest to other people, events, future prospects), neurocirculatory hypotension (decrease in blood pressure, changes in the nervous system against the background of stressors), dysphoria (dissatisfaction, hostility towards others, irritability, resentment), anxiety, fear are less common in junior students than in 5th year students” [11]. S. Smirnov [10] in his research argues that “the level of formation of certain symptoms makes it possible to comprehend the indicators of the phases of emotional burnout syndrome – “stress”, “resistance”, “exhaustion”. Master’s students have phases of “stress” and “exhaustion” at the formation stage, and the “resistance” phase is already formed.

These data resonate with our study of problems of emotional instability. Interesting researches in this area were carried out by such authors as O. Mykytyuk [6, 7], T. Tyurina S. Stavkova [19], Flaherty et al [20].

Emotional stability is manifested in patience and perseverance, endurance and self-control even in stressful situations, self-restraint and ability to behave adequately in negative emotional circumstances, and so on. It should be noted that in professional activities, emotional stability is a crucial feature for a specialist to successfully perform his functions, since the specialist requires considerable self-control and self-regulation efforts.

## CONCLUSIONS

According to the results of our study, students of higher educational institutions need, especially now, in the face of the coronavirus pandemic, relevant knowledge on the development of emotional competence and formation of practical skills to overcome emotional instability.

In our opinion, introduction of appropriate special courses, seminars, psycho-trainings will contribute to the formation of resilience to stressful situations, self-sufficiency, improvement of students’ mental health by forming positive feelings, constructive thinking, good will and conscious desire to harmonize the inner and outer worlds, establishing harmonious relationships with the social and natural environment, spiritual and social self-realization.

That is why we continue to work on the syllabus of an optional discipline “Psychology of Emotions” for students and development of trainings on preventing emotional burnout. Furthermore, we believe that it is timely to organize a special psychological assistance unit for individual students at the Lviv Academy of Printing.

Therefore, in our opinion, relevant research should be continued in the field of a comprehensive program aimed at the formation of emotional competence of students in the context of mental health of the individual.

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The Authors declare no conflict of interest

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