

## THEORY AND IMPROVEMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

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### THE CONCEPT AND ESSENCE OF PROFESSIONAL RESILIENCE IN PSYCHOLOGY AND PROFESSIONAL RESILIENCE AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTIC OF ACTIVITY IN EXTREME CONDITIONS

*Volodymyr Koss,*

*Postgraduate Student,*

*Kharkiv National University of Internal Affairs (Kharkiv, Ukraine)*

*ORCID ID: 0009-0008-3142-7134*

*vladimir-koss@ukr.net*

**Abstract.** The article explores the concept and essence of professional resilience in psychology as a key factor in the effective functioning of specialists under challenging, stress-inducing, and extreme working conditions. Professional resilience is defined as an integral psychological characteristic of an individual, encompassing emotional stability, adaptability, internal motivation, self-regulation, and the ability to overcome difficulties. Particular attention is given to the manifestation of professional resilience among security and defense personnel, emergency responders, medical workers, and crisis service professionals. The psychological mechanisms of maintaining resilience in critical situations are discussed, including the role of coping strategies, social support, professional identity, and psychological readiness. The article also summarizes approaches to diagnosing and developing professional resilience in extreme occupational activities. It is intended for researchers, practicing psychologists, and specialists operating in high-risk professional environments.

**Key words:** professional resilience, psychological capital, emotional self-regulation, reflectivity, moral and ethical maturity, social support.

**Introduction.** The issue of professional resilience has become particularly relevant in the 21st century in the context of dynamic social development, instability, numerous crises, and military conflicts. In contemporary psychological science, professional resilience is viewed as an integrative personality trait that ensures effective performance of professional activities under conditions of prolonged or extreme psycho-emotional stress. The concept of “professional resilience” does not have a single definition, but its meaning reflects the ability of a specialist to maintain professional effectiveness, inner balance, motivation, and psychological health in difficult or unusual circumstances.

**Main text.** At the initial stage of studying this phenomenon in psychology, approaches related to adaptation, stress resistance, hardiness, preservation of personal integrity, and professional potential dominated. Resilience as a special personality trait allows one to maintain control over life situations, be involved in processes, and perceive difficulties as challenges rather than threats. There are three key components of a resilient personality: control, involvement, and challenge, which ensure its ability to overcome stress and adapt to change.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the essence of professional resilience as an integrative personality trait that ensures effectiveness in difficult conditions, as well as to identify the key factors that contribute to its formation and maintenance. Particular attention is paid to the study of the professional resilience of psychologists working in crisis conditions, such as war, traumatic events, and moral dilemmas.

K. Maslach, researching professional burnout, actually laid the foundation for a reverse understanding of resilience – as protection against emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased professional achievement. In her opinion, professional resilience is based on deep internal motivation, social support, and the presence of emotional regulation mechanisms (Maslach, 1981: 34).

Contemporary psychology divides professional resilience into several levels:

- Intrapersonal – covers cognitive-emotional processes, self-regulation, reflection, resistance to frustration, and decision-making ability.
- Interpersonal – includes effective communication, empathy, social support, and adaptability to the team.
- Meaningful – concerns the presence of a clear system of professional values, meaning of activity, and motivation to help.

Among contemporary Ukrainian researchers, the issue of professional resilience is actively studied by V. M. Synenkyi, M. D. Kurliak, and A. Ya. Kruk. In their work, they point to the particular importance of professional resilience for psychologists who work in war conditions and encounter trauma, loss, suffering, and moral dilemmas. They emphasize the role of reflection, self-acceptance, value integration, and social support as key factors in maintaining inner balance (Synenkyi, 2024: 66).

Resilience in a professional context is seen as a manifestation of the resourcefulness of a person who is capable of continuous development, self-renewal, and meaningful transformation of experience. It is important that psychologists possess not only technical knowledge but also personal potential that allows them to withstand complex influences.

Professional resilience is actively researched within positive psychology, which focuses on the strengths of the personality, its internal potential, and its ability to develop in difficult conditions. One of the key concepts is “psychological capital,” which includes four main characteristics: optimism, hope, self-efficacy, and resilience. These qualities are closely related to professional resilience and allow specialists not only to maintain effectiveness but also to maintain a constructive approach to change, crises, and uncertainty.

Bonanno's research on post-traumatic resilience is also relevant to understanding the nature of professional resilience, especially in crisis professions. He demonstrated that even in the most challenging circumstances, most people have the potential for psychological recovery through adaptive flexibility, social support, a sense of humor, and the ability to focus on the future (Bonanno, 2004: 20).

A significant contribution to the development of practical approaches to assessing professional resilience was made by K. M. Connor and J. R. T. Davidson, who created one of the most famous and widely used psychodiagnostic scales – the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) (Connor, Davidson, 2003: 76). They defined resilience as the ability to adapt, recover quickly from stress, and maintain productivity in difficult conditions.

In line with cognitive psychology, K. Reivich and A. Shatté emphasize that resilience is a set of skills that can be developed: impulse control, emotional awareness, empathy, positive thinking, goal setting, and flexibility in decision-making (Reivich, Shatté, 2002). This opens the way to the practical formation of professional resilience through training and the development of personal resources.

Another important concept is S. Hobfoll's “resource conservation” model, according to which a person strives to preserve, protect, and multiply resources that are important to them (emotional, social, physical, financial, etc.), and the loss of these resources leads to distress (Hobfoll, 1989: 513). In the professional environment of psychologists, especially in wartime, such loss can be significant, so it is important to ensure resource recovery through peer support, supervision, and mental hygiene.

Equally important is the approach of S. M. Southwick and D. S. Charney, who, studying the experience of combat veterans, identified biological, psychological, and social factors that ensure resilience in the most extreme conditions (Southwick, Charney, 2012). They emphasize the importance of an internalized meaning of life, the presence of reliable support, religious and spiritual orientation, and physical endurance.

From the perspective of domestic science, resilience is seen as the realization of personal potential, which allows a person not only to overcome difficulties but also to develop through them. Professional resilience has both an individual psychological and a cultural-semantic basis, which emphasizes its importance in the formation of a mature and adaptive personality.

Against this background, it is also important to consider the influence of values, worldview, and moral convictions. For example, it is believed that in the most difficult situations, a person is capable of enduring any “how” if they have their “why.” This approach underlies existential resilience – the ability to maintain integrity in extreme conditions.

The essence of professional resilience is also manifested in the psychologist's ability to reflect – that is, to comprehend their own actions, experiences, and interactions. Reflection allows one to avoid identifying with the client's experiences, maintain professional boundaries, and support self-regulation. A high level of reflexivity significantly reduces the risk of professional burnout and helps restore inner balance after difficult sessions.

In general, several key signs of a psychologist's professional resilience can be identified:

- the ability to function effectively under stress and uncertainty;
- the ability to maintain emotional balance when working with trauma, pain, and aggression;
- a well-developed motivational and value basis for their work;
- the presence of reflexivity, empathy, and self-regulation;
- readiness for long-term interaction in risky conditions without losing the meaning and quality of their work.

An essential feature of professional resilience, especially in the work of psychologists in the security and defense sector, is moral endurance. In military conditions, psychologists not only support others, but are often at the epicenter of difficult ethical decisions: they encounter moral trauma, witness violations of values, and accompany individuals who have survived catastrophic events. In such conditions, it is important to maintain an internal moral framework that serves as a point of support. In his work “The Lucifer Effect,” P. Zimbardo emphasizes that moral resilience is the basis for maintaining personal integrity in critical conditions when social pressure, aggression, or fear can lead to destructive behavior (Zimbardo, 2007).

Professional resilience also includes a spiritual and value component. Research by the American Psychological Association shows that resilient people are more likely to have developed spirituality, belief in a higher meaning, and moral and ethical orientation, which helps them withstand extraordinary stress (American Psychological Association, 2014). In the Ukrainian context, especially in wartime, the spiritual component takes on special significance. Psychologists who have a stable system of moral and religious beliefs cope better with stress because they rely on higher meanings, service to others, and the idea of defending their homeland as a mission.

Another important component of professional resilience is the role of personal identity. Studies show that the more clearly a specialist's professional identity is formed, the more they feel their significance, responsibility, and the inner meaning of their professional activity, which directly affects resilience. The formation of professional identity occurs gradually – through experience, reflection, professional training, and support from mentors and colleagues.

Professional resilience is also closely linked to psychological well-being. K. Peterson and M. Seligman, within the framework of positive psychology, have determined that resilience is supported by a number of personal traits: optimism, perseverance, belief in justice, the ability to forgive, and a sense of humor (Peterson, 2004). These qualities act as buffers against burnout and maintain motivation to overcome difficulties.

This is especially important for psychologists working in the field of counseling: meaning often becomes the only energy that sustains the professional.

S. Kobasa also made a significant contribution to the study of resilience, arguing that a resilient personality is not simply the result of skills or experience, but a specific personality configuration based on a sense of control, activity, and responsibility for one's own life (Kobasa, 1979: 1). Her ideas have been confirmed by numerous empirical studies in various professional environments, including healthcare, the military, and emergency services.

Recent research in child development (in particular, the work of E. Werner) also shows that resilience can be formed even in very unfavorable conditions – if an individual has had at least one long-term positive relationship, an inspiring adult role model, or a stable sense of security (Werner, 1995: 81). This is also important for adult professionals: the presence of support, role models, and trusting relationships increases their resilience.

Taking the above into account, the following generalizations about the essence of professional resilience can be formulated:

- It is not a fixed trait, but a dynamic quality that develops throughout life.
- It is based on the interaction of internal personal resources and the external environment (team, organizational culture, management).
- It has a multi-level structure, including emotional, cognitive, motivational, moral-ethical, spiritual, and behavioral components.
- It depends on the professional context: working conditions, stress levels, the nature of the target group (in the case of psychologists, these are traumatized, vulnerable categories of people).
- It is determined by the readiness to overcome challenges, not just survival.

An analysis of scientific approaches gives grounds to assert that professional resilience is a multi-dimensional psychological construct that combines a number of interrelated internal personality traits and external conditions that ensure its effective functioning in conditions of increased professional workload, stress, crisis, or threat.

The key elements of professional resilience are:

- emotional self-regulation – the ability to manage one's emotions in difficult situations;
- stress resistance – the ability to adapt to external pressure without destructive consequences;
- Reflectivity – the ability to be aware of and reflect on one's own actions, emotions, and professional position;
- Motivational stability – the presence of an internal sense of purpose in one's profession and a sense of the significance of one's work;
- Social support – an environment that promotes the preservation of mental resources;
- Moral and ethical maturity – the presence of an internal value system that provides stability in crisis situations;
- Spiritual and meaningful orientation – the ability to maintain integrity based on worldview or religious beliefs.

Modern psychological science considers professional resilience not as an innate ability, but as a dynamic process that can be developed through personal growth, professional experience, training, supervisory practice, reflection, and support at the organizational level.

This concept is particularly relevant in the context of the activities of psychologists in the security and defense sector of Ukraine, who work daily in conditions of increased risk, stress, and exposure to traumatic events. In such circumstances, resilience is not only a prerequisite for professional effectiveness, but also a factor in personal survival and the preservation of psychological health.

Professional activities in the fields of security, defense, health care, emergency situations, and humanitarian aid are usually carried out in conditions characterized by high levels of risk, uncertainty, stress, psychological tension, and moral and ethical challenges. For psychologists working in this field, extreme conditions are not an exception, but often an everyday professional environment. In such conditions, professional resilience is a key psychological characteristic that ensures not only the preservation of functional effectiveness, but also the stability of the specialist's personality.

#### *Extreme conditions: psychological specifics*

According to A. O. Zazykin, extreme conditions are those in which activities are associated with risk to life, psychophysiological stress, social responsibility, and a lack of time and resources for decision-making (Zazykin, 2012). From the point of view of activity psychology, extreme conditions

create the basis for the activation of protective, mobilizing, and compensatory mechanisms of the psyche, but at the same time, they are catalysts for maladaptive phenomena if the individual lacks the appropriate resources.

For professionals working in these conditions, the key psycho-emotional challenges are:

- constant exposure to the suffering and trauma of others;
- the need to make quick decisions in conditions of moral uncertainty;
- high responsibility for the lives and well-being of other people;
- personal involvement in the context of events (sometimes – loss, injury, evacuation, death of loved ones);
- limited resources for mental recovery.

As S. M. Southwick notes, in the context of combat operations or catastrophic events, resilience determines a specialist's ability not only to act effectively, but also to remain morally, cognitively, and emotionally stable (Southwick, Charney, 2012).

*Professional resilience as a function of adaptation and internal balance*

Professional resilience in these conditions serves as a mechanism for self-preservation, adaptation, emotional stabilization, and ensuring adequate behavior. It can be viewed as a kind of psychological immunity that allows a person to avoid mental degradation, professional burnout, or moral disorientation.

S. Kobasa emphasizes that resilience in extreme conditions is closely related to factors such as:

- internal locus of control (sense of influence over events);
- sense of competence and effectiveness;
- ability to see a crisis as a challenge rather than a threat (Kobasa, 1979: 1).

In turn, research by G.A. Bonanno shows that resilience is the norm rather than the exception, and most people are potentially capable of adapting to extreme conditions provided they maintain personal autonomy, support, flexibility of thinking, and access to resources (Bonanno, 2004: 20).

*Factors influencing professional resilience in extreme environments*

A review of the literature allows us to identify the following groups of factors that influence the level of professional resilience in extreme conditions:

1. Personal (internal):

- emotional stability;
- stress resistance;
- self-regulation;
- motivational orientation toward helping;
- professional identity;
- cognitive flexibility.

2. Professional and organizational (contextual):

- working conditions (schedule, duration of workload);
- availability of supervision and intervision;
- institutional support;
- clarity and acceptability of management decisions.

3. Social and psychological:

- team support;
- trust in management;
- level of solidarity within the group;
- availability of personal supportive relationships.

4. Meaningful and spiritual:

- the presence of a value structure;
- religious beliefs;

- a sense of mission, calling;
- belief in the higher meaning of activity.

#### *Practical examples of professional resilience in extreme conditions*

The work of psychologists in Ukraine's security and defense sector clearly demonstrates the necessity and importance of a high level of professional resilience. During combat operations, evacuations, and psychological support for affected civilians and military personnel, specialists face daily challenges that require maximum mobilization of internal resources. In these circumstances, psychologists themselves find themselves in a situation of "secondary trauma" – that is, indirect trauma due to deep involvement in their clients' problems (Hobfoll, 1989: 513).

The practice of military psychologists in the Joint Forces Operation (ATO) zone in Ukraine has proven that resilient specialists:

- make decisions faster in critical situations;
- are less likely to show signs of professional burnout;
- retain empathy and professional effectiveness;
- are able to regulate their own state through self-regulation techniques, recovery, and spiritual practices.

Some of them develop their own methods of stabilization: mini-rituals of returning to calm, conscious relaxation, internal dialogue with ethical guidelines, prayer, visualization of supportive images.

According to empirical research, the most resilient psychologists are those who have: a high awareness of their own mission, a clear value system, a developed sense of professional responsibility, and the ability to be self-deprecating and reflective. These characteristics contribute to their effectiveness and resilience in their professional activities.

#### *The relationship between professional resilience and burnout*

The most common negative consequence of a lack of professional resilience in extreme conditions is professional (emotional) burnout syndrome. According to K. Maslach, burnout occurs as a response to prolonged exposure to chronic stress, when an individual loses control over the situation, resources, and their own emotions (Maslach, 1981: 34).

Professional resilience, accordingly, is a counterbalance to burnout because it:

- supports the intrinsic meaning of the activity;
- helps maintain psycho-emotional balance;
- promotes constructive coping (coping strategies);
- allows one to maintain high self-esteem and a realistic perception of difficulties.

S. Hobfoll's research indicates that the preservation of key personal resources (time, energy, support, respect) directly affects the ability of an individual not to lose themselves under prolonged pressure (Hobfoll, 1989: 513). When resources are depleted and recovery does not occur, the risk of maladjustment increases.

#### *Adaptive behavior models in stressful conditions*

Professional resilience is closely related to adaptation mechanisms, which are implemented through:

- psychological flexibility (willingness to change strategies);
- adaptive coping (realistic understanding of the situation);
- resource mobilization (use of support, self-calming techniques);
- metaphysical beliefs (faith, meaning, spirituality)

S. M. Southwick and D. S. Charney point out that professionals with a high level of resilience demonstrate high cognitive organization, the ability to make rational decisions even under pressure, and at the same time the ability to empathize without losing their professional role (Southwick, Charney, 2012).

In crisis intervention practice, the following adaptation models are effective:

- control model – dominant in individuals with an internal locus of control;

- meaning model – characteristic of religiously or spiritually oriented psychologists;
- partnership model – when a specialist feels support from the team, colleagues, and structure;
- heroism model – more risky, associated with hyper-dedication, which can lead to exhaustion (it is important to maintain balance).

All these models, with flexible regulation, can work to support professional effectiveness, but require awareness and critical self-assessment on the part of the psychologist.

**Conclusions.** Professional resilience in psychology is seen as a complex integrative personality trait that shows up in a specialist's ability to stay effective, mentally healthy, motivated, and emotionally balanced in tough, unusual, extreme professional situations.

In extreme environments (war, disaster, crisis response, combat operations), resilience acts as an adaptive resource that determines the boundary between professional effectiveness and the risk of personality destruction.

Professional resilience includes several interrelated levels: emotional, cognitive, behavioral, moral-ethical, and spiritual-meaningful.

The main factors that ensure professional resilience are self-regulation, stress resistance, flexibility of thinking, social support, professional identity, value integration, supervision, faith, or a reliable philosophical/ethical system.

Professional resilience is the key antithesis of professional burnout. Its formation and maintenance is not only a personal but also a systemic task for organizations working in the field of security and defense.

In the context of martial law in Ukraine, the need to strengthen the professional resilience of psychologists has become strategically important, as it determines the preservation of human resources, the moral resilience of society, and the capacity for national recovery.

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