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## PSYCHOLOGICAL PECULIARITIES OF POLICE PROFESSIONAL ACTS UNDER MARTIAL LAW

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**Abstract.** The article provides a comprehensive theoretical analysis of the impact of the full-scale armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine on the radical transformation of the content, forms, and psychological conditions of performing official duties by employees of the National Police of Ukraine. The scientific necessity of studying the psychological specifics of professional activity in the extreme conditions of martial law is substantiated as a fundamental factor for ensuring operational efficiency, a high level of stress resistance, and the adequacy of law enforcement agencies' response to the dynamic threats of wartime. Through a critical synthesis of a wide array of contemporary scientific research, it has been established that the professional actions of police officers during this period are characterized by extreme psycho-emotional tension. This tension is caused not only by the performance of traditional policing functions but also by direct involvement in assault and search operations in combat zones, participation in territorial defense, and the elimination of catastrophic consequences of armed conflict or emergency situations of a military nature.

A systematic analysis of the dynamics of personal psychological resources in situations as close as possible to combat has been conducted, where the permanent real threat to life and health acts as a catalyst for profound distress, depressive states, and chronic emotional exhaustion of personnel. Particular attention within the study is paid to the specifics of the psycho-traumatic experience that law enforcement officers acquire while working at sites of mass casualties, conducting complex exhumation activities, and meticulously documenting the atrocities and war crimes of the aggressor. It is established that such experience often exceeds the bounds of ordinary human perception and requires specialized mechanisms of psychological processing.

It is proved that the personality transformations of a police officer in wartime conditions have a direct and indirect determination on the quality of professional actions, influencing the moral-volitional sphere and cognitive decision-making processes. The conclusions formulated as a result of the analysis are of significant practical importance for the development and implementation of innovative psychological rehabilitation and decompression programs. The proposed approaches are aimed at improving internal self-control mechanisms, optimizing intellectual processes in critical situations, preventing professional deformation, and accelerating the adaptation of personnel to the high-risk environment of combat operations.

**Key words:** stress factor, psychological readiness, mental health, psycho-emotional tension, extreme activity, professional transformation, martial law, cognitive resources, law enforcement, psychological rehabilitation.

**Introduction.** The exercise of official powers under the legal regime of martial law causes a fundamental transformation of the life and professional environment of police officers, manifesting in significant changes to their personal structure, behavioral patterns, and the nature of social interaction. War-driven modifications of the individual psychological properties of law enforcement officers exert both direct and indirect influence on the quality of operational and service tasks. Modern challenges place increased demands not only on the cognitive component of professional suitability—namely, knowledge, skills, and abilities—but also on fundamental psychophysiological resources, the value-volitional sphere, and the moral and ethical qualities of the individual. In the context of a systemic crisis, the specialist's ability to effectively process exogenous and endogenous factors becomes particularly

relevant, ensuring adequate professional response and maintaining mental integrity under extreme operational conditions.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** The issue of the psychological characteristics of police officers' professional actions under martial law is at the center of attention of many domestic and foreign scholars. An analysis of scientific work indicates that the theoretical and methodological foundations of this problem were developed by: O. Bandurka, V. Barko, M. Budanova, O. Yevdokimova, Z. Kisil, O. Kudermyna, V. Lefterov, S. Miroshnychenko, V. Osiodlo, I. Okhrimenko, O. Timchenko, D. Shvets, A. Bártolo, E. Kolthoff, A. Marques, J. Noppe, F. Passos, A. Pereira, C. Queirós, C. da Silva, Van der Vijver Kees, A. Verhage, and others. Although the scientific community has devoted considerable attention to the psychology of law enforcement, the aspect of implementing professional police actions directly under martial law remains an under-researched segment. Analysis of the scientific literature suggests that despite existing studies, there is currently a lack of fundamental works that comprehensively highlight the influence of psychological specifics on the architectonics of police officers' professional actions precisely under martial law. Existing theoretical developments do not always correlate with today's dynamic and high-risk scenarios.

**Presentation of the main material.** According to research by S. Boichuk (2022), the performance of professional duties by police officers under martial law often occurs in situations of total or partial information deficiency and operational uncertainty. The specifics of service actions during this period are determined by the intensity and tension of circumstances, the dynamics of which are difficult to predict, yet which require an immediate and adequate response from law enforcement officers. The author emphasizes that the involvement of police officers in measures to counter the aggressor actualizes the need for a high level of psychological adaptability. A key factor in this context is tolerance for uncertainty—specifically, the individual's ability to maintain resilience in the face of unpredictable challenges, make balanced decisions under data shortages, and predict outcomes without losing psychological equilibrium or experiencing a sense of helplessness in unstructured situations.

Complementing this view, R. Bera (2021) emphasizes that extreme conditions of professional activity inevitably lead to psycho-emotional overload. The necessity for ultimate self-sacrifice and the constant mobilization of resources becomes an additional source of tension, accompanied by the destruction of the sense of basic security, internal imbalance, and value conflicts. Prolonged exposure to stress factors forms a state of permanent fatigue, which consequently determines a decrease in work capacity, deterioration in the quality of task performance, the development of professional maladaptation, and may lead to staff turnover due to resignation from service.

Analyzing the specifics of police activity, O. Skliar *et al.* (2022) classify key stressors as a combination of critical life circumstances, prolonged traumatic experience, and permanent professional problems. The authors highlight that since 2022, law enforcement officers have been working in a mode of extreme emotional tension caused by a high degree of danger and the principle of «continuity» of task performance, the intensity of which significantly exceeds usual standards. Specific pressure factors include the constant wearing of personal body armor and weapons, direct participation in rescue operations, providing pre-medical aid under fire, and interacting with a large number of armed individuals. The exceptional nature of the conditions—ranging from the threat of ballistic missile strikes to frequent air raid sirens—provokes a state of physical exhaustion, professional burnout, and the occurrence of panic attacks, which ultimately determines a decrease in motivation and the overall level of professional efficiency.

Supporting the thesis regarding the extremity of conditions, Z. Kisil & R.-V. Kisil (2021) note that police officers' presence in the liminal space "between life and death" serves as a basis for the development of acute and chronic forms of PTSD, unmotivated affective behavior, and depressive states. In turn, C. Porter & P. Gavin (2024) emphasize the cumulative effect of organizational and operational stressors, which systematically erode the mental health of personnel.

Assessing potential personality metamorphoses, M. Budanova (2023) asserts that martial law acts as an objective factor complicating professional activity, where the nationwide experience of war is superimposed onto ordinary psychological challenges. The researcher draws an important conclusion regarding the ambivalence of individual transformations: they can be positive (tempering resilience) or create serious obstacles to the officer's further reintegration into society upon returning to peacetime conditions. Military actions fundamentally transform the professional space of a law enforcement officer, changing their personality traits, habitual forms of behavior, and modes of social interaction. Such profound metamorphoses directly affect the quality of the officer's implementation of their primary function—ensuring and protecting the rights and freedoms of Ukrainian citizens.

As M. Lohvynenko (2024) points out, the professional activity of police officers in modern realities is inextricably linked with the escalation of various forms of crime: from organized and transnational crime to terrorist acts, corruption, cybercrime, and illegal arms trafficking. A further critical factor for Ukraine has been the full-scale armed aggression of the Russian Federation. The combination of these factors determines an increase in the number of fatalities, injuries, and disabilities among personnel, as well as provokes the development of psychosomatic disorders and suicidal activity. The intensification of violence directly threatens the safety of police officers' lives, creating critical risks to their mental health and professional capacity.

The armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine has radically increased the requirements for the professional fitness of police officers. In particular, the ability to perform tasks under enemy fire, interact with a large number of victims, and withstand extreme emotional tension while documenting war crimes has become paramount. Pursuant to the Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 64/2022 (2022), units of the National Police are involved in measures to repel armed aggression and ensure the territorial integrity of the state.

From the first days of martial law, police officers have been exercising their functions in zones of direct combat, in de-occupied territories, and in frontline settlements. Certain units participate directly in the liberation of territories, while others maintain law and order under constant artillery and mortar fire, provide aid to victims, and conduct the procedural documentation of the aggressor's atrocities.

S. Boichuk (2023) emphasizes that even in the initial stage of the invasion, police officers performed territorial defense tasks in besieged cities, escorted humanitarian convoys, conducted civilian evacuations, and countered the enemy's sabotage and reconnaissance groups. Performing professional actions in situations closely resembling combat, under the condition of a constant threat to life, causes a critical exhaustion of psychological resources. Continuous mental tension becomes a source of distress, depressive states, and deep emotional exhaustion. Particularly traumatic is the experience of working at mass casualty sites and participating in exhumation activities; the impressions gained therein exceed the limits of normative human perception and require specialized psychological processing mechanisms.

Service activity of police officers in areas close to combat zones is characterized by a constant existential threat due to the risks of enemy attacks and the use of lethal force (S. Maksymenko & V. Medvediev (2018)). While in peacetime, scholars such as D. Shvets (2024), O. Sashurina (2023), R. Wijayanti & H. Fauzi (2020) viewed extreme circumstances as a probabilistic element of professional activity, under war conditions, high-risk situations have been transformed into the permanent background for the implementation of official tasks.

Under martial law conditions, the quality of professional duty performance directly determines the preservation of human life and health. The war imposes uncompromising demands on representatives of the security and defense sector, obliging them to make critical decisions under severe time and information deficits. In such circumstances, the objectivity of the cognitive assessment of a situation and an adequate reflection of one's own resources in opposition to enemy forces acquire unprecedented significance.

Sharing the position of V. Barko *et al.* (2022) regarding the definition of policing as an «extremely stressful profession» it is necessary to note a deficit of empirical data concerning the impact of specific military stressors on tactical decision-making mechanisms. Researchers Z. Kisil & R. Kisil (2021) emphasize the unpredictability of daily challenges and acts of violence faced by law enforcement officers. Specifically, P. Galani, *et al.* (2021) detail these threats through resistance during arrest, physical aggression, and fire confrontation. In this context, L. Kryvoruchko *et al.* (2023) differentiate the concepts of "acute" and "chronic" stress, noting that while the latter is traditionally researched more actively, under war conditions, it is the acute stress reactions during task performance that require primary attention.

The results of empirical studies by I. Okhrimenko *et al.* (2023) indicate that professional stress among law enforcement officers is a consequence of an imbalance between the internal resources of the individual and the exogenous demands of the professional environment. This view is reinforced by C. Porter & P. Gavin (2024), who state that the cumulative impact of organizational and operational stressors negatively affects even the most resilient employees, who often conceal mental health difficulties.

According to the findings of Z. Kisil & H. Katolyk (2022), prolonged presence in a stress-inducing environment without proper psychological satisfaction leads to the development of psychosomatic disorders and maladaptive behavioral patterns. This manifests in the destruction of interpersonal bonds, the narrowing of the circle of social interaction, violations of official discipline, and the formation of addictions. Further escalation of delinquent behavior is driven by cognitive exhaustion: under excessive workload, prognostic potential deteriorates, the worldview horizon narrows, and behavior loses the necessary flexibility and adaptability.

Permanent and fundamental organizational transformations act as an additional stress-inducing factor in the context of martial law. Performing professional tasks in a high-risk environment determines negative consequences for police officers at physiological, emotional, and behavioral levels. At the same time, stress reactions can be both immediate (short-term) and prolonged (cumulative) in nature, progressing over time into more complex forms of psychological maladaptation.

According to the views of S. Boichuk (2022), in the realities of wartime, an individual's readiness for change acquires the status of an exceptional professional quality. It is a fundamental property that ensures the survival and effectiveness of a law enforcement officer, as practically every service scenario under such conditions contains elements of uncertainty and unpredictability. In turn, O. Skliar *et al.* (2022) emphasize the need to implement innovative approaches to the psychological training of personnel. Empirical data indicate that a significant portion of employees proved to be psychologically unprepared for full-scale combat operations. This manifested in difficulties making operational decisions in critical situations, as well as in psychological barriers regarding the use of lethal force. In the minds of many law enforcement officers, an acute internal conflict arose between the need to act according to legal requirements and the intense emotional pressure of the situation.

Summarizing these challenges, M. Budanova (2023) underscores that armed conflict exerts an objectively negative influence on the professional space of a law enforcement officer. This is positioned as a profound transformation of individual psychological traits, a revision of habitual behaviors, and a change in the very specifics of social interactions. A police officer's professional action in these conditions ceases to be merely a technical execution of a function, becoming instead the result of a complex internal struggle and adaptation to the extreme conditions of existence.

To comprehensively understand the nature of the difficulties arising in the professional activity of police officers under martial law, it is necessary to classify the key stress factors according to their functional content:

1. *Cumulative traumatic experience.* The nature of the service involves systematic interaction with manifestations of violence, human tragedies, and lethality. Despite professional readiness for such

situations, traumatic events have the capacity to accumulate (cumulative effect), which, without proper psychological correction, becomes a pathogenic basis for the development of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and the destruction of personal resources.

2. *High responsibility in operational and tactical decision-making.* In the realities of war, law enforcement officers are forced to make instantaneous decisions in life-threatening circumstances. The critical significance of such actions and their potential irreversibility (eventual consequences) create intense cognitive and emotional burdens, as the price of an error in extreme conditions is maximally high.

3. *Intense public scrutiny in the digital environment.* The current state of technological development allows for the recording and public analysis of any action taken by a police officer. Constantly being under close public scrutiny (the «microscope effect») acts as an additional source of stress. This is felt particularly acutely in situations involving reputational risks, where officers face bias, public condemnation, or distorted interpretations of their professional actions.

According to the findings of Z. Kisil *et al.* (2019), the consequences of police professional activity under martial law—in the absence of proper psychological support and timely intervention—acquire a critical and sometimes tragic character. Extreme stressors associated with constant risk determine the development of a range of negative states:

1. *Formation of addictive behavior.* The use of psychoactive substances (alcohol, narcotic drugs, or precursors) often becomes a destructive coping mechanism for some officers—an attempt to independently manage traumatic experiences. This inevitably leads to the formation of persistent chemical dependency and professional degradation.

2. *Depressive disorders.* The cumulative effect of prolonged exposure to traumatic events, combined with high-intensity service pressure, provokes the development of clinical depression. This state is characterized by a loss of motivation, emotional inhibition, and a decrease in the overall resilience of the law enforcement officer.

3. *Occupational burnout syndrome.* Chronic psycho-emotional overload and a lack of organizational support lead to burnout, which manifests through emotional exhaustion, depersonalization (a cynical attitude toward the objects of one's activity), and reduced personal accomplishment (a sense of professional inefficiency).

4. *Suicidal risk.* The most tragic consequence is the emergence of suicidal ideation. The inability to independently process intense psychological pain and a sense of hopelessness lead to a loss of meaning in both professional and personal existence, making suicide prevention a primary task for psychological services.

It should be noted that under martial law, the issues of optimizing psychological training and professional support for personnel, as well as strengthening team cohesion during service tasks, acquire particular relevance. To ensure high performance, a police officer must possess a multifunctional set of competencies: from the ability to de-escalate social tension and maintain public order to the effective execution of functions declared in Article 2 of the Law of Ukraine «On the National Police» under extremely difficult circumstances. Maintaining high standards of professional activity while preserving mental health requires exceptional resilience to wartime challenges from employees.

**Conclusions.** Summarizing the results of the theoretical analysis of scientific works by domestic and foreign researchers, it should be stated that the professional activity of police officers under martial law is characterized by exceptional complexity, multifactorial nature, and extreme conditions. The specifics of law enforcement professional actions during this period are determined not only by the intensity of psycho-emotional stress but also by the necessity of performing tasks in liminal «borderline» situations of life and death, which require the immediate recording and processing of traumatic events. The synergistic interaction of stress-inducing determinants—among which high-risk actions and high responsibility for the consequences of decisions hold a key place—shifts the officer's psyche into a mode of unprecedented mobilization of internal resources.

Theoretical study of modern aspects of police activity has allowed for the identification of fundamental features of unit functioning in wartime, including: a persistent need to apply enforcement measures under conditions of uncertainty, the ability to operate effectively under information and time deficits, and a readiness for the transformation of professional roles. The performance of daily duties in this context is inevitably accompanied by high levels of psychological traumatization and conflict-prone situations, as the wartime framework forces law enforcement officers to simultaneously counter domestic crime and participate directly in national defense measures. In light of this, the strategic vector for further scientific research should be the development of effective practical recommendations aimed at strengthening the stress resistance and psychological endurance of personnel, which is a prerequisite for maintaining the professional effectiveness of the police during a prolonged military conflict.

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