

Diagnosing the Negative Psycho-Emotional States among Students

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Abstract: The article deals with the problem of diagnostics of negative psycho-emotional states among students. The research done demonstrates that during the period of study at higher educational establishment students often experience states of stress, depression, apathy, fear, asthenia, rigidity, anxiety, aggression, frustration, etc. Such states are predetermined by the fact that new conditions of student's life lead to defensive reactions to various kinds of threats: threat to positive outcome of an important activity, threat to life, threat to well-being, threat to prestige. Negative psycho-emotional states affect various spheres of young people's lives and lead to a deterioration of their wellness, health condition as well as to the rise of psychosomatic and psychoneurological diseases. In order to get a better understanding of peculiarities of development and expression of negative psycho-emotional states the diagnostic research of all students at Khmelnytskyi National University whose major is Psychology has been done. The findings demonstrate that starting the first days of study at university the students undergo the effects of various negative psycho-emotional states such as: depressed mood, sadness, anxiety, concern, decreased intellectual productivity, unreasonable malaise, intermittent sleep, decreased working ability. However, while studying at university, they learn gradually to overcome and control their negative emotions and experiences. The findings also demonstrate that not all students, even in their final year of study, succeed in it. Therefore, the need to apply methods and means of psychoprophylaxis of negative psycho-emotional states among students has been developed and substantiated.

Keywords: *psycho-emotional state; students; diagnostics; higher educational establishment; psychoprophylaxis.*

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1. Introduction

1.1. *The research context*

The peculiarities of the student's age and a variety of tense and difficult situations that take place during the years of study at higher educational establishment are often accompanied with the fact that students experience stress states as a kind of reaction to the threat to the positive outcome of an important activity; depressive states as a protective reaction to the efforts of emotional factors; mental tension, apathy, fear of danger, threat to life, threat to well-being, threat to prestige; asthenia as a result of neuro-mental tension; rigidity, anxiety, aggression, frustration, social frustration, etc.

Nowadays, scientific resources have not come up with a unified definition to the concept of 'state of personality'; in addition, no consensus has been achieved regarding the priorities of the research into the issue of mental conditions. The idea of the states of psyche (as relatively stable psychic phenomena that have their beginning, certain duration of existence and the end) is considered to be the most widespread. The states of mental conditions are generally viewed as states of psyche that reflect the peculiarities of human nervous system functioning within a particular period of time or during adaptation process.

According to S. Ginger (2007), mental condition (condition of the subject) determines quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the mental processes, intensity of mental properties expressions, subjective manifestations of the state - feelings, emotions, mood (Ginger, 2007:67). The integral characteristic of the human psychic sphere (in a specific time-frame) is the state of the psyche (condition of the object).

Psycho-emotional state of the person can be defined as a special form of the mental state with the predominance of emotional reaction modelled on dominants. The person needs to act out his/her emotions in response to the reality in order to balance his/her overall state of health, wellness and the functional state. Excessive influence of emotional factors can cause the state of neuro-mental stress and the disruption of the higher nervous activity. Optimal emotional arousal means that the person is prepared for the efficient activity that will be of no danger for health (Volzhentseva, 2012).

In its turn, negative psycho-emotional state is a complex psycho-emotional state characterized by negative emotions (depressed mood, sadness, anxiety, concern), cognitive disorders (decrease in intellectual

efficiency), and somatovegetative disorders (all kinds of pain, malaise with no obvious reasons, intermittent sleep, decreased working ability). Negative psycho-emotional states affect different areas of individual's life. At the psychophysiological level, an individual may experience the deterioration of the overall state of health or any kinds of psychosomatic and psychoneurological diseases. From the perspective of cognitive sphere, an individual may get less involved into cognitive processes of relevant activity.

Low level of self-respect and self-esteem, anxiety, diffidence, shyness, anticipated condemnation from others, expression of mistrust, difficulty in finding friends, passivity, uncertainty, unrealistic expectations, severity of demands to him/herself are examples of negative psycho-emotional states that can be experienced by students.

1.2. Literature review

The applied aspects of studying negative, psycho-emotional states (within specific branches and tasks of psychology) are disclosed in a range of studies by scientists (Aghavelian, 2004; Vilyunas & Kravchenko, 2002; Volzhentseva, 2012; Maksymenko, 2003; Ukhtomsky, 2008). The researchers define them as psychophysiological and functional states which are formed both in the course of professional activity and due to particular characteristics and features of personality. Some researchers point out that individual's mental conditions predetermine the course of intellectual processes (Lyusin, 2004; Neisser, 1998; Reikovsky, 1979; Rubinstein, 2002; Gabdreeva & Yusupov, 2013). Negative psycho-emotional state triggers one of the perception schemes and directs the individual's perception and other cognitive processes.

S. Rubinstein (2002) described the way mental states affect mental processes and compared them with the gateways which are put at the certain height and adapt the flow of cognitive, volitional, and other processes, determine the dynamic aspects of the activity, and are determined by their context.

P. Salovey, A. J. Rothman, J. B. Detweiler & W. T. Steward claim that positive emotional states may promote healthy perceptions, beliefs, and physical well-being itself (Salovey *et al.*, 2000).

S. Alaghmand, F. Mozaffar, S. B. Hosseini & B. S. Sedghpour in their research showed four factors affecting students' self-actualization at university spaces: 1- Understanding one's own nature. 2- Individual evolution. 3- Understanding facts and truths. 4- Seeking beauty (Alaghmand *et al.*, 2018).

The researchers A. D. Rowe & J. Fitness claim that we need an alternative perspective to scientific accounts of the role of academic emotions, with lay peoples' knowledge about the nature and course of emotions a valuable source of data about the functions these emotions play in educational contexts (A. D. Rowe & J. Fitness, 2018).

T. Pavliuk, M. Rozhko & O. Panchak believe that activity, vitality, observation, adaptability to the conditions of training activities in higher education, low anxiety, emotional stability, ability to perceive and analyze information are the signs of students' mental health. Young generation of Ukraine, especially students, that is an industrial and intellectual potential of our country, might be attributed to the group of risk because of the extremely high adaptational burden (Pavliuk, Rozhko & Panchak, 2017).

However, the analysis of existing scientific works demonstrates that not enough research has been devoted to the study of the causes and the peculiarities of negative psycho-emotional states development among the students of higher educational establishments.

1.3. Problem of Research

We believe that the results of our study will attract the attention of not only scholars but also practitioners (in particular, curators of academic groups, administrations and teachers of higher educational institutions), because there is a need to create a favorable psychological climate in student groups from the first day of their studying at the educational institution. After all, it is the psycho-emotional state of students that strongly influences their adaptation to the new conditions of study and is an important factor in their self-realization in learning, social activity, and future professional activity.

Therefore, the purpose of the paper is to investigate the peculiarities of development and manifestation of negative psycho-emotional states among students of higher education institution.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research techniques

The following techniques have been applied:

1. Theoretic techniques (analyzing, synthesizing, comparing, compilation, systematizing the existing academic research on the issue of the problem of negative mental states of students' age).

2. Empirical techniques (testing students using diagnostic methods: 'G. Eisenck's self-assessment of mental states test'; 'Orientated assessment

of emotional well-being'; 'Diagnostics of the research of emotional features and personality traits' (questionnaire by Olshannikova-Rabinovich).

3. Techniques of statistical processing of the experimental data.

2.2. Study procedure

Empirical and research work on diagnosing the peculiarities of negative psycho-emotional states development among first – fifth-year students took place at Khmelnytskyi National University. 90 students doing 'Psychology' program took part in the experiment. The students' age is 17 – 23 years old.

Participants of the research agreed orally to be diagnostically studied and gave consent for information processing. The only condition was not to disclose their personal information. The techniques which have been used in the research are robust, authentic and accessible. All samplings were filled in by students outside study. Students were not exposed to special influences and they were not divided into control and experimental groups. After all, the purpose of our study was to investigate the manifestations of negative psycho-emotional states of students in conditions of their everyday life and studying at the university. It should be noted that this research was conducted within the framework of the research topic of the Department of Psychology and Pedagogy 'Transformation of the human vital world in terms of personal and professional development' and agreed by the Chair of the Department.

The following techniques were used to diagnose students' negative mental states: (1) 'Self-assessment of mental states' (Eisenck & Wilson, 2000) – this questionnaire was applied in order to measure such emotional states as anxiety, frustration, aggression, rigidity; (2) 'Orientated assessment of emotional well-being' (Ananyev, 2007) was used to investigate the indicators of students' emotional well-being: emotional comfort / discomfort, satisfaction / dissatisfaction with life, happiness / unhappiness; (3) methodology on diagnosing the emotional features and personality traits (questionnaire by Olshannikova-Rabinovich) (Rabinovich & Sterekhova, 2001). This questionnaire was used to identify how steadfastly students are able to experience three basic emotions: fear, anger and joy.

The survey was conducted over a two-month period (April-May 2019).

3. Research results

3.1. Interpretation of experimental data

According to the results obtained with the help of G. Eisenck's test 'Self-assessment of mental states' students demonstrate the medium level of development of such negative psycho-emotional states as anxiety, frustration, aggressiveness, and rigidity. This means that majority of students are emotionally unstable by nature, experience the internal anxiety, confusion, tension, insecurity, irascibility, impatience and tend to perceive situations as threatening to themselves.

Table 1 contains the results obtained with the help of G. Eisenck's test 'Self-assessment of mental states'.

Table 1. Research results of students' levels of anxiety, aggression, frustration and rigidity

Negative mental state	Levels					
	High		Medium		Low	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Anxiety	28	31,1	41	45,6	21	23,3
Aggressiveness	22	24,4	48	53,3	20	22,3
Frustration	36	40	42	46,7	12	13,3
Rigidity	25	27,8	54	60	11	12,2

However, it should be noted that such feelings were mostly typical for first-year students. This can be explained by the process of their adaptation to studying at higher educational establishment, their accession to a new system of relationships and their personal self-affirmation. The answers received from 30 first-year students are systematized in Table 2.

Table 2. Research results of first-year students' levels of anxiety, aggression, frustration, and rigidity

Negative mental state	Levels					
	High		Medium		Low	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Anxiety	14	46,7	9	30	7	23,3
Aggressiveness	16	53,4	7	23,3	7	23,3
Frustration	14	46,7	12	40	4	13,3
Rigidity	17	57,7	9	30	4	13,3

The use of methodology ‘Diagnosing the emotional features and personality traits’ (questionnaire by Olshannikova-Rabinovich) made it possible to identify students’ predisposition to experience three basic emotions: fear, anger and joy. As in the previous test results, students demonstrate the medium levels of the emotions mentioned above. Table 3 contains the findings we obtained.

Table 3. Research results of students’ levels of emotional features and personality traits

Mental state	Levels					
	High		Medium		Low	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Anger	11	12,2	52	57,8	27	30
Fear	22	24,4	45	50	23	25,6
Joy	36	40	38	42,2	16	17,8

It should be noted that the results of the diagnostic study by the methodology ‘Diagnosing the emotional features and personality traits’ (questionnaire by Olshannikova-Rabinovich) and the previous one (G. Eisenck’s test ‘Self-assessment of mental states’) have established the first-year students’ clear capacity to experience and feel fear, anger and joy. The answers received from 30 first-year students with the help of methodology ‘Diagnosing emotional features and personality traits’ (questionnaire by Olshannikova-Rabinovich) are systematized in Table 4.

Table 4. Research results of first-year students’ emotional features and personality traits

Mental state	Levels					
	High		Medium		Low	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Anger	8	16,7	15	50	7	23,3
Fear	15	50	10	33,3	5	16,7
Joy	6	20	12	40	12	40

The levels of students’ emotional well-being have been evaluated with the help of questionnaire ‘Orientated assessment of emotional well-being’. The following categories were taken into consideration: emotional comfort / discomfort, satisfaction / dissatisfaction with life, happiness /

unhappiness. The obtained results demonstrate that 27% of students have low level of emotional well-being, 53% of students experience medium level of emotional well-being, and 20% of those surveyed have high level of emotional well-being (Figure 1).

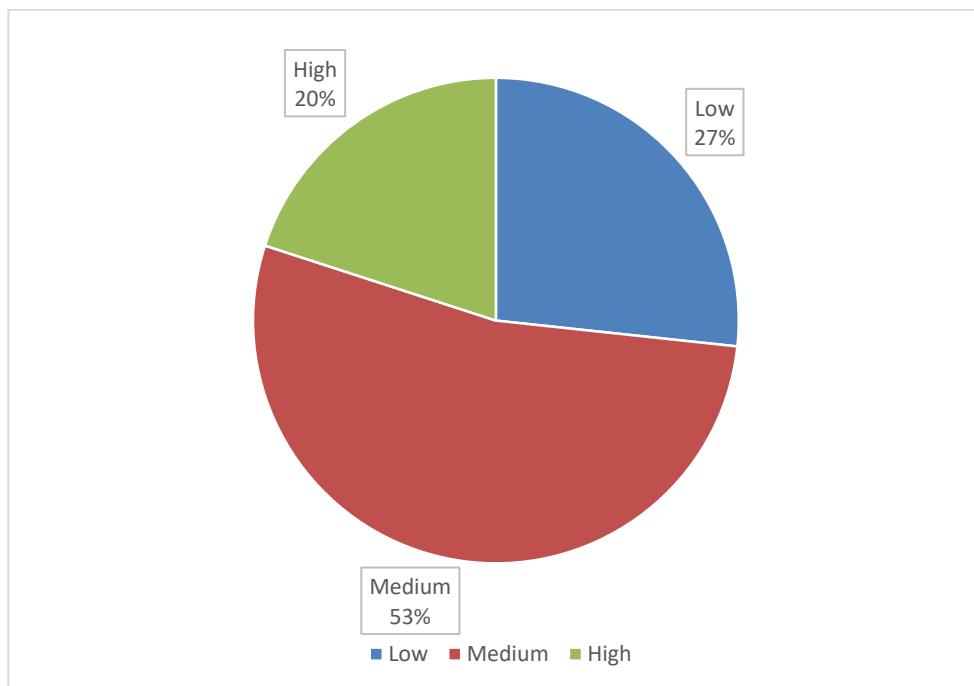


Figure 1. Levels of first-year students' emotional well-being

According to survey results, majority of students feel sufficient level of emotional well-being, comfort and life satisfaction. However, 24 students (27% of those surveyed) have been diagnosed with low level of emotional well-being, which finds its reflection in their dissatisfaction with interpersonal relationships, communication and activity.

Figure 2 contains the survey results of 30 first-year students on such expressions of emotional well-being as emotional comfort / discomfort, satisfaction / dissatisfaction with life, happiness / unhappiness.

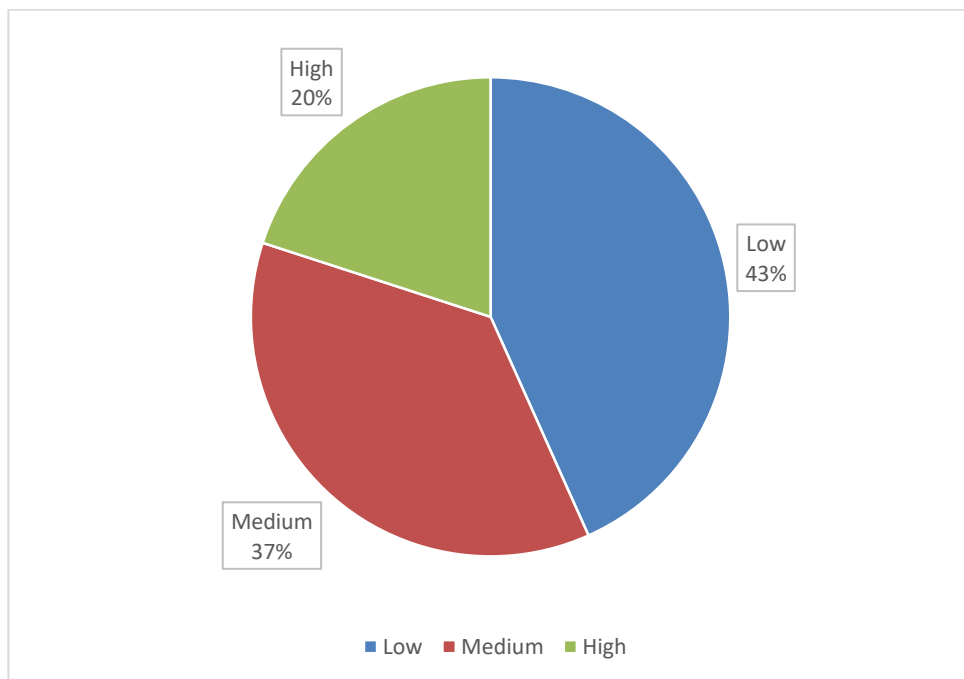


Figure 2. Levels of first-year students' emotional well-being

Considering the experimental data received and mentioned above, the following conclusion can be made. More than 50% of students experience negative psycho-emotional states at the medium level with the tendency towards increasing (up to the high level). At the same time, less than 20% of students demonstrate low level of negative psycho-emotional states.

We have also identified a certain dynamics of development of students' negative emotional states while studying at higher educational establishment. It starts when first-year students have feelings of fear, anger, confusion, tension, insecurity, irascibility, impatience, emotional discomfort and dissatisfaction with relationships and learning activity. It ends when senior students feel happiness, emotional comfort, and life satisfaction.

3.2. Recommendations

According to the research results, while studying at higher educational establishment, modern students need to have their negative psycho-emotional states prevented with the help of psychoprophylaxis. It is the psychoprophylaxis of negative psycho-emotional states which serves as

one of the conditions of making full use of students' abilities, possibilities of realization of personal resources, needs, interests and professional needs from the very first day of studying at higher educational establishment.

Specific purpose, action plan, means of control and timely regulation are important components for regulation and management of psycho-emotional states as for any other kind of activity. In this regard, a set of methods and tools of psychoprophylaxis of negative psycho-emotional states among students of higher educational establishments have been suggested:

1. Relaxation psycho-techniques that serve as an effective tool in the prevention of chronic long-term distress. Relaxation is opposite to stress and is especially useful during periods of intensive activity. There is a variety of relaxation psycho-techniques:

a) deep relaxation that presupposes the complete state of relaxation achieved over quite a long period of time;

b) relaxation that can activate over a relatively short period of time;

c) technologies based on auto-training methods;

d) techniques of physical therapy.

While deciding on which of the relaxation psycho-techniques to apply, individual predominance of leading analyzers (that intake information) and peculiarities of emotional-volitional processes, imagination processes, imaginative thinking need to be taken into consideration.

The formation of individual experience in emotional and volitional stability and self-regulation, ability to mobilize, concentrate and consciously overcome feelings of fear, anxiety, agitation and uncertainty while performing professional duties make up an integral part of students' psychological training.

2. Mastering the ways and skills of positive constructive thinking. Positive thinking is of paramount importance as it helps to live for today, to look into the future fearlessly, not to be hooked on problems and weak points. Each event has both negative and positive sides usually seen by the person him/herself. The position is considered to be successful when the virtues are in the first place and the positive sides of any situation or problem are viewed at first. If there is a tendency to concentrate on drawbacks, the situation may end up being hopeless.

3. Activating a sense of humor by trying to look at even a difficult serious situation with humorous approach: imagine aggressive partner in a comic situation (how he/she would look like, in this state, on the beach, in the zoo cage or wearing a baby hat, etc.), forgive his/her mistakes, irascibility and emotionality.

4. The use of calming breathing exercises (calming breathing, deep breathing). This tool helps to relieve the tension of body and brain, create a state of rest and balance.

5. Developing the ability to assess the situation adequately. Individual characteristics guide the nature of assessment of forecasting events and their consequences in either positive or destructive direction. It is necessary to enrich the issue or the situation (with the help of information), choose the right moment for decision-making and take appropriate actions. Decisions taken are not objective and they are usually predetermined by dominant states in mainstreaming the negative mental states.

6. Building-up the ability to concentrate attention on the process of activity. According to York-Dodson law, reducing motivation to achieve results contributes to reduction of mental tension, increased efficiency and success. Rejecting the objective and its importance, and redirecting the attention to peculiarities of doing the task, technical aspects of activity, and tactics are effective steps for a certain period.

7. Development of retreat system. The fall-backs of behavior and retreat strategies help to reduce mental tension and change behavior flexibly. In case of failure, alternative plans of behaviour make it possible to accept and maintain positive mood easier. Such tactics helps to reduce the feeling of fear before an important significant event and creates positive activity background.

8. Use of 'progressive relaxation' method or E. Jacobson's neuromuscular relaxation (NMR). Gradual reduction of tension and relaxation of the major group of muscles are at the core of this method. Relaxing of a certain group of muscles reduces emotional and mental stress. This effect is achieved by experiencing contrasting sensations: maximum strain of muscles followed by their relaxation that is accompanied by further feelings of warmth and heaviness.

9. Music therapy can be used as a method of direct regulation of negative psycho-emotional states. It is possible to establish a balance in the functioning of nervous system with the help of musical rhythm. In particular, it is possible to restrain unnecessary excitation or, on the contrary, to increase activity, stimulate inert and apathetic people. Music can be used to reduce fatigue and reduce emotional stress due to changes in its pitch, strength, timbre, nature (major, minor) and combination with a certain tempo. The mental state of a person is influenced by any kind of music; nature of emotions and feelings caused by it is quite different.

10. Dance therapy is based on spontaneous release of emotions and improvisation and helps to respond to negative feelings, mental stress; such exercises charge with positive emotions and facilitate group communication.

Among the methods and techniques used to neutralize negative psycho-emotional states we can also single out: method of rationalization of future events - repeated detailed thinking playback of a certain future situation until it becomes familiar and predictable; simulation games – playing specific roles before probable future events take place; method of selective positive retrospection - consistent and detailed mental repetition of situations that have already ended successfully ('filling' the psyche with positive experience and building-up self-confidence); method of the strongest mental intensification of failure and negative emotions.

It should be noted that methods and means of negative psycho-emotional states psychoprophylaxis should be selected for each student individually. To begin with, one should experiment with what suits the young person in terms of his or her individual and typological characteristics and identify the methods that he / she liked the best.

3. Conclusions

3.1. Outcomes

Diagnostic research results are: starting the first days of studying at higher educational establishment students experience various expressions of negative psycho-emotional state which are characterized by negative emotions (depressed mood, sadness, anxiety, excitement), cognitive disorders (decrease in intellectual efficiency), and somatovegetative disorders (all kinds of pain, malaise with no obvious reasons, intermittent sleep, decreased working ability).

While studying at higher educational establishment, young people learn to overcome and control their negative emotions and experiences; however, according to the results of diagnostic research, not all students succeed. Even senior students face difficulties at managing their psycho-emotional state and its negative expressions. In view of this, we recommend for both students and curators of student groups to use the methods and means of negative psycho-emotional states psychoprophylaxis that we have developed.

3.2. Research prospects

A formative stage of experiment with the help of which the effectiveness of suggested means of negative psycho-emotional states

psychoprophylaxis among students can be determined is seen as further plans of research.

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