

Specifics of the adaptation of future law enforcement officers to learning under martial law conditions

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ABSTRACT

In the context of full-scale war, the issue of socio-psychological adaptation of students has become particularly relevant. This concerns not only students who have been forced to change their educational environment but also cadets of higher education institutions with specific learning conditions who continue their training in Ukraine. Education in higher education institutions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs system combines intensive academic workload with high demands for discipline, physical training, and psychological resilience, while also involving significant restrictions on personal autonomy. Martial law conditions further complicate the adaptation process due to increased stress levels, security risks, and intensified psychological pressure. This article aims to examine the features of socio-psychological adaptation of first-year cadets to the conditions of study at a higher education institution of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine during martial law. An empirical study conducted among 89 first-year cadets showed that almost half of the respondents (49,4%) are in the «well-being zone», while the same proportion is in the «adaptation risk zone», and 1,2% demonstrate signs of maladaptation. It was found that the key resources for successful adaptation include peer support, unit cohesion, the presence of life-meaning orientations, and patriotic motivation. The study also confirmed that an important factor of successful adaptation is the level of internality and the cadets' ability for psychological self-regulation, which contributes to greater emotional stability and more effective coping with stress.

Keywords: Adaptation, Cadets, Self-regulation, Stress, Survey

Introduction

Training of cadets in higher education institutions with specific learning conditions combines an intensive academic workload with high requirements for discipline, physical fitness, and psychological resilience, as well as significant limitations on

personal autonomy. Under such conditions, there is a need for the rapid acquisition of professional roles and behavioral norms, which in the current realities of martial law is further complicated by increased levels of stress and psycho-emotional tension.

Traditionally, the period of adaptation during the first year of study is considered one of the most critical stages of professional development. Today, this period is accompanied by security threats, the involvement of cadets in duty assignments during air raid alerts, and the need to maintain high performance under conditions of uncertainty. Socio-psychological adaptation is a fundamental mechanism for ensuring the mental health of future law enforcement officers; however, under conditions of risk, the standard psychological resources of individuals may become depleted. This highlights the need to implement effective

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psychological counseling methods aimed at supporting the adaptive potential of cadets.

Materials and Methods

A methodological framework combining theoretical and empirical approaches was used to examine the features of cadets' socio-psychological adaptation to the specialized training conditions of higher education institutions.

The theoretical methods included analysis, systematization, and generalization of domestic and foreign scientific sources on the issues of socio-psychological adaptation of the individual, professional development of cadets, and psychological characteristics of personality functioning under stress. The use of these methods made it possible to clarify the content of the key concepts of the study, identify contemporary scientific approaches to understanding the process of adaptation, and establish the theoretical framework of the research.

The empirical methods included testing and questionnaires. To diagnose the level of socio-psychological adaptation, a modified scale of socio-psychological adaptation by C. Rogers and D. Raymond was used. This scale allows the assessment of indicators such as adaptability, emotional comfort, self-acceptance, acceptance of others, internality, and dominance.

In order to identify stress coping resources and the characteristics of social interaction within the cadet environment, the author's questionnaires «*Service Resource in Wartime Conditions*» and «*Socio-Psychological Climate of the Unit*» were applied. The questionnaire survey made it possible to obtain additional information regarding cadets' subjective perception of learning conditions, the level of support from the collective, motivation for service, and factors influencing their psychological state.

First-year cadets of a higher education institution within the system of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine participated in the study. The collection of empirical data was carried out in accordance with the principles of voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality.

Methods of mathematical and statistical analysis were used to process the obtained data, including quantitative and qualitative analysis of the research results. This made it possible to generalize the empirical data obtained, determine the level of respondents' adaptation, and identify the main trends and relationships between the studied indicators.

Results and Discussion

The results of the empirical study made it possible to determine the level of socio-psychological adaptation of first-year cadets to the educational environment of a higher education institution within the system of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine. According to the results of testing using the modified socio-psychological adaptation scale by Carl Rogers and Raymond Diamond, it was found that a significant proportion of

respondents demonstrate a sufficient level of adaptation to the new conditions of study and service.

In particular, 49,4% of the cadets fall within the so-called «well-being zone», which is characterized by a relatively high level of self-acceptance and acceptance of others, a satisfactory emotional state, motivation for study and service, as well as the ability to interact effectively with members of the collective. At the same time, the same proportion of respondents (49,4%) is located in the «adaptation risk zone», which indicates the presence of certain difficulties in adjusting to new living conditions. This group is characterized by increased situational anxiety, emotional instability, and occasional difficulties in adapting to the strict regulation of everyday life.

A small proportion of respondents (1,2%) showed signs of maladaptation, manifested in a reduced level of emotional comfort, difficulties in social interaction, and an increased level of psycho-emotional tension.

The results of the questionnaire survey using the author's method «*Service Resources in Wartime Conditions*» showed that one of the leading resources of cadets' psychological resilience is the support provided by the collective and unit commanders. Most respondents indicated that platoon cohesion, mutual assistance, and informal friendly relationships contribute to reducing tension and facilitate the adaptation process.

The data obtained from the questionnaire «*Socio-Psychological Climate of the Unit*» indicate a predominantly positive perception of interpersonal relations within the collective. A significant proportion of respondents noted the presence of mutual support, a sense of belonging to the group, and a shared orientation toward achieving educational and service-related goals.

The analysis of the obtained results also showed that an important factor in successful adaptation is the presence of an internal locus of control (internality) and the cadets' ability for psychological self-regulation. Respondents with a higher level of internality demonstrate greater emotional stability, cope with stressful situations more effectively, and adapt more quickly to the new conditions of educational and service activities.

The term «*adaptation*» was first introduced in 1865 by the German physiologist Hermann Aubert within the context of biological science, referring to the organism's ability to adjust to changes in the external environment [1].

Modern scientific approaches to the study of adaptation are associated with the works of Walter Cannon, who investigated physiological changes in the organism under the influence of hunger, pain, fear, and anger. At the beginning of the twentieth century, he identified two primary reactions of living organisms to threat: fight or flight. It should be noted that he was the first to substantiate that the activation of the organism is determined not only by physical factors but also by emotional ones [2].

It is worth noting that today the concept of *adaptation* has long gone beyond the purely physiological context and has become an interdisciplinary term widely used in biology, pedagogy, sociology, and medicine. However, within psychological science, the study of this process remains a priority [3-11].

Therefore, at present, this phenomenon is considered much more broadly, namely as a complex dynamic mechanism that

enables an individual not only to become accustomed to new circumstances but also to maintain internal balance and effectiveness of activity even when surrounding conditions become extreme [12]. This becomes especially relevant for cadets of the Ministry of Internal Affairs system, for whom successful adaptation becomes the necessary foundation that allows them to integrate into a specific educational environment, maintain emotional balance, withstand significant service loads, and effectively master their profession under wartime conditions [13-16].

Admission to a higher education institution within the system of the Ministry of Internal Affairs becomes, for a recent school graduate, not merely a change of status but a radical transformation of their habitual way of life.

The first year of study is traditionally considered a crisis stage of professional development, since during this period there is a sharp transition from the relative freedom of civilian life to a clearly defined and strictly regulated service routine. Scholars note that adaptation at this stage is not only a guarantee of psychological comfort but also a fundamental condition for the effectiveness of learning activities. A cadet who fails to adjust to new requirements spends the majority of psychological energy on overcoming internal resistance and anxiety, which inevitably reduces cognitive capabilities and academic performance [17, 18].

Researchers S.V. Shevchenko, M.H. Horlichenko, and K.V. Burenkova emphasize that *«the difficulty of the initial period lies in the fact that all entrants to military higher education institutions have different pre-university preparation»*. In particular, they come from different social environments, family traditions, and value systems, and each of them has their own temperament, worldview, level of stress resistance, and life priorities [17]. For this reason, the adaptation process occurs differently for each cadet [19, 20].

The specificity of the educational environment in the system of the Ministry of Internal Affairs for future police officers creates a unique set of stressogenic factors that are not encountered by students of civilian higher education institutions. Among the key factors are strict subordination, the necessity of unquestioning obedience to orders, living in barracks with limited personal space and time, as well as combining intensive study with duty shifts lasting 24 hours [21]. Under such conditions, adaptation means the cadet's ability to quickly switch between the roles of a *«student»*, who must acquire knowledge, and a *«police officer»*, who is obliged to perform service duties.

In her scientific work, O.O. Dobrovolska identifies the following main difficulties of the cadets' adaptation process: experiences related to the transition from school to adult life; the absence or uncertainty of final professional motivation; insufficient psychological preparation for independent living, decision-making, and taking responsibility for one's actions; inability to perform psychological self-regulation of behavior and activity, which is intensified by the absence of the usual daily parental control; new conditions of cadet activity in higher education institutions training future police officers, which represent a qualitatively different system of the relationship between

responsibility and dependence, where the need for independent regulation of one's behavior comes to the forefront; the search for an optimal balance between work and rest under new conditions; organization of everyday life and self-care, especially when transitioning to dormitory living; lack of independent learning skills; and the specific nature of the educational institution's activities [22].

The problem becomes particularly acute under the conditions of martial law currently in force in Ukraine. Contemporary studies (M. O. Slyva and V. O. Naida, as well as L. A. Hachak-Velychko, I. B. Kuzyk, and Ye. V. Didukh [23, 24]) show that for current first-year cadets the adaptation process is complicated by the constant threat of missile attacks and the need to respond to air raid alerts, which frequently interrupt the learning process or night rest. According to research findings, sleep deprivation increases the risk of anxiety disorders 17 times and the risk of depressive states 10 times. Persistent sleep disturbances provoke social isolation and problems in other areas of life [23]. A. M. Lypyuk and L. M. Zakharenko note that under wartime conditions the educational activity of students is characterized by their awareness of a *«new normal of life»*, in which they often experience exhaustion, disorganization, and indifference toward learning activities, as well as certain difficulties in organizing their studies, which significantly affects their life and well-being [25]. Thus, under conditions of chronic sleep deprivation and emotional tension, the level of adaptation determines whether a cadet will be able to mobilize their resources to effectively master educational material or fall into a state of professional burnout and apathy already during the first year of service.

Psychological research convincingly demonstrates that the effectiveness of a cadet's learning activity directly depends on their level of adaptation. Under conditions of maladaptation, when the psyche remains in a state of constant tension, there is a sharp decline in cognitive functions: concentration deteriorates, the capacity of working memory narrows, and thinking processes slow down. A cadet who does not feel safe and confident within the collective spends intellectual resources not on mastering legal and specialized disciplines but on internal struggles with anxiety and fear of making mistakes [26]. As a result, a paradoxical situation may arise: even a capable cadet may demonstrate low academic performance due to an inability to concentrate.

In addition to the cognitive aspect, the motivational component is critically important. Adaptation acts as the foundation upon which professional identity is built. If a first-year cadet successfully integrates into the collective, feels the support of fellow cadets, and understands the meaning of service-related restrictions, their motivation to study increases. They begin to perceive difficulties (duty shifts, early wake-ups, physical loads) not as punishment but as a necessary stage in strengthening the character of a future officer [26]. Conversely, a low level of adaptation leads to disappointment in the chosen profession and a desire to leave the program, which is a typical problem during the first months of study.

The influence of the socio-psychological climate within the unit (training platoon or group) should also not be overlooked. An adapted cadet is capable of building constructive relationships

with fellow cadets and leadership, which creates a favorable environment for knowledge exchange and mutual assistance.

Under conditions of martial law, there is also the need to develop combat resilience. Adaptation to the learning process today is inseparably connected with readiness to act in extreme situations. A cadet who has learned to maintain self-control during an air raid alert and quickly return to the learning process after the all-clear demonstrates greater effectiveness than one who remains psychologically “stuck” in traumatic experiences [27].

It is also necessary to consider the so-called «physiological cost» of adaptation. Scholars such as O. M. Kokun, as well [12] as T. Ye. Komisova and A. V. Mamotenko [28] warn that if a student (cadet) is unable to cope with the workload psychologically, the body begins to react at the somatic level. Frequent colds, headaches, sleep disturbances, or exacerbation of chronic diseases during the first semester often represent not merely a medical issue but a direct consequence of disrupted adaptation. A cadet experiencing health problems misses classes and falls behind in the academic program, which further increases stress and creates a «vicious circle» of maladaptation.

In addition, successful learning in the system of the Ministry of Internal Affairs is impossible without well-developed communicative competence. A cadet who cannot build relationships within the collective (platoon or company) is at risk of social isolation or conflicts. Research shows that the ability to engage in constructive communication and cooperation is a key indicator of adaptation [29]. Those cadets who quickly establish mutual understanding with their peers and commanders assimilate educational material more easily, since they can rely on the support and assistance of the group in difficult situations. Under wartime conditions, the concept of «effective learning activity» acquires a new meaning. It involves not only obtaining academic grades but also developing psychological readiness for extreme situations. An adapted cadet is capable of critical thinking and decision-making even under the pressure of external threats (shelling, power outages, uncertainty). It is precisely during the adaptation to learning that the foundation of the future professional resilience of a police officer is formed: the ability to maintain self-control, act according to established procedures, and avoid panic [30].

Summarizing the above, it can be argued that the level of adaptation of a first-year cadet is a determining factor in their academic success. It serves as a filter through which all educational and developmental influences pass. A high level of adaptation enables a cadet to effectively utilize their intellectual abilities, maintain health, and preserve motivation for service. Conversely, a low level of adaptation becomes a major obstacle to professional development and requires timely intervention and psychological support [31].

To diagnose the level of adaptation among first-year cadets, a modified methodology for diagnosing socio-psychological adaptation (SPA) developed by Carl Rogers and Raymond Diamond [32] was used, along with an author-developed questionnaire assessing wartime stress factors. The research

sample was formed using a random selection of three groups (platoons). The study involved 89 first-year cadets.

According to gender distribution, the majority of respondents were male (81 individuals, or 91%), while 8 participants (9%) were female. The age range of participants varied from 17 to 22 years, with an average age of 17,7 years, indicating relative homogeneity of the group and the participants’ developmental stage of early adulthood.

According to the results of the quantitative analysis of the integral adaptation indicator, the sample was distributed as follows:

A high level of adaptation («Well-being zone») was identified in 49,4% of the surveyed cadets. These students successfully overcame the initial stage of integration into the collective, fully accepted the norms of statutory life, and demonstrated emotional stability. They are also characterized by adequate self-esteem, a relatively high level of motivation for service, and the absence of a pronounced internal conflict between «desire» and «duty».

Medium level of adaptation («Adaptation risk zone») was also recorded among 49,4% of respondents (44 cadets). This indicates that half of the first-year personnel remain in a state of unstable balance. Although they outwardly fulfill their service duties, the process is accompanied by significant psycho-emotional tension. This group of cadets often demonstrates periodic doubts about the chosen profession, increased fatigue, and situational irritability. This category represents the primary target group for preventive psychological work conducted by psychologists.

A low level of adaptation («Maladaptation zone») was identified in only one respondent (1,2%). Such a low level of maladaptation indicates the effectiveness of the professional psychological selection conducted during the admission stage, which filtered out candidates with insufficient stress resistance before the beginning of training (**Figure 1**).

A detailed analysis of the structure of adaptation according to individual scales of the methodology (average score on a 5-point scale) allowed the identification of strengths and weaknesses among the cadets [33-38].

The highest score was obtained on the «Acceptance of Others» scale (4,04 points), indicating a high level of cohesion within training platoons. Shared difficulties (barracks regime, field training, duty shifts, air raid alerts, etc.) contributed to the formation of a form of «corporate unity» and comradeship. As a result, cadets perceive the collective as a resource for support rather than a source of threat [39-42].

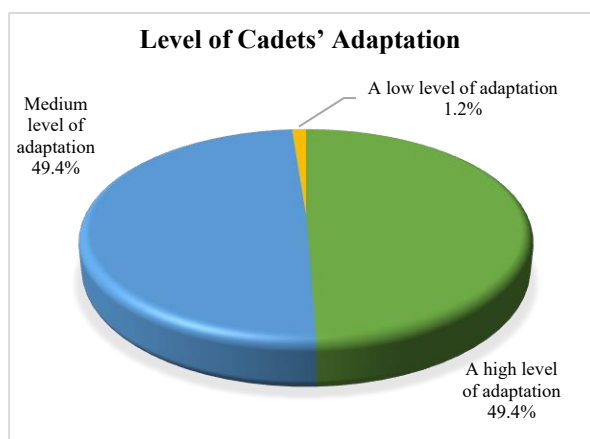


Figure 1. Level of cadets' adaptation.

A high level was also recorded on the «Adaptation» scale (3,98 points), confirming the readiness of young people to comply with the requirements of discipline and hierarchy. A high indicator was also observed on the «Self-acceptance» scale (3,9 points), indicating a positive relationship between the climate within the platoon and overall communicative competence.

The lowest indicator (although still within the normative range) was identified on the «Emotional Comfort» scale (3,74 points). This serves as a marker of the so-called «cost of adaptation»: cadets cope with the workload, but it requires significant emotional effort, which manifests itself in background anxiety and psychological exhaustion.

The analysis of the results of the «Service Resources in Wartime Conditions» block allowed the identification of specific sources of stress and resources.

Stress factors

About one third of respondents (33,7%) acknowledged that the real conditions of service were more difficult than they had expected. This indicates the phenomenon of «broken illusions», when romanticized perceptions of police service confront the everyday routine of training.

16,9% of cadets reported feelings of helplessness caused by news about the war, indicating vulnerability to informational stress.

Interestingly, only 7,9% acknowledged experiencing tension during air raid alerts or discomfort due to the absence of private space. Such a low percentage may indicate the operation of psychological defense mechanisms (denial of fear) or reluctance to complain («I am a future police officer»).

Resource factors

The absolute majority (80,9%) reported that communication with friends and humor helps them cope with stress. This once again confirms that horizontal social ties within the collective represent the main anti-stress factor.

75,3% of cadets are motivated by the understanding that the skills they acquire will be necessary for work during wartime. Awareness of the practical value of education serves as a powerful stimulus for adaptation.

For a deeper analysis, a comparison of adaptation indicators across different groups of respondents was conducted.

First, gender-based analysis revealed that female cadets (average score – 79,1) demonstrate a slightly higher level of overall adaptation compared to male cadets (78,6). Although the numerical difference is minor, qualitative analysis suggests that female cadets tend to demonstrate greater responsibility in adhering to the daily routine, which helps them compensate more effectively for physical workloads. Studies by S.P. Hireenko and colleagues [43] also emphasize the behavioral maturity of female cadets, including patience, resilience, and self-control.

Second, analysis of methodological indices (comparison between the «Adaptation Index» and the «War Stress Index») revealed a clear pattern. Cadets who demonstrate higher adaptation scores show significantly lower stress levels when performing service tasks (duty shifts, responding to alerts).

This is confirmed by the fact that respondents who highly evaluated resource-based statements (such as «Understanding the importance of my future service for the country during wartime gives me strength» and «I realize that the skills I am acquiring now will actually be necessary for work in wartime conditions») demonstrate greater emotional stability. In other words, meaning-of-life orientations and awareness of the significance of one's future profession act as a real psychological protection mechanism against the traumatic effects of war.

The third stage of the empirical study focused on examining the external conditions of adaptation, particularly the psychological atmosphere within training platoons. Analysis of responses obtained through the author's questionnaire allowed identification of the specifics of interpersonal interaction among cadets during training and barracks living.

When assessing the overall socio-psychological climate, the majority of respondents (62%) described it as «mostly positive, though not perfect». Another 28% described the atmosphere as «comfortable and meeting expectations». Only 10% reported tension or conflicts, which correlates with the group of cadets identified earlier as having a medium level of adaptation (**Table 1**).

Table 1. General Socio-Psychological Climate

Assessment of socio-psychological climate	Percentage of respondents
Mostly positive, though not perfect	62%
Comfortable and meeting expectations	28%
Tension or conflicts	10%

Among the most frequently mentioned collective characteristics were:

- cohesion and cooperation (75%);
- mutual respect (55%);
- competition as a dominant feature was indicated by only 12% of respondents.

The results regarding conflict-generating factors are also noteworthy. When asked about the causes of misunderstandings, respondents identified the following:

- the most common reason (45%) was individual personality differences.
- the second most common factor (30%) involved organizational and everyday issues, such as unequal distribution of duty shifts and unfair allocation of cleaning responsibilities.
- only 15% indicated unfair punishment or actions by commanders as the source of conflict.

An important indicator of the safety of the educational environment is the issue of bullying. The absolute majority of cadets (92%) responded negatively. However, 8% admitted that they had encountered instances of harassment (either personally or involving others), which represents a concerning signal and requires monitoring by psychological officers.

Analysis of the system of relationships demonstrated clear differentiation in communication patterns. Relations with fellow cadets are evaluated as positive and friendly by 92% of respondents. Relations with the leadership (course commander or platoon curator) were described by the majority (65%) as formal or service-oriented, which corresponds to the requirements of subordination within a militarized educational institution.

Thus, the socio-psychological climate within the studied groups can be characterized as generally favorable, although studies on polarized narratives suggest that latent tensions within groups may still emerge under conditions of social stress [44]. The dominant tendencies are cohesion and mutual support. At the same time, the main sources of tension arise not from interpersonal hostility but from everyday organizational difficulties and the natural process of personality adjustment during the formation of a new collective.

Conclusion

According to the results of the theoretical analysis of domestic and foreign scientific sources and a survey of first-year cadets of a higher education institution within the system of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, the specific features of cadets' socio-psychological adaptation to studying in a higher education institution with specific learning conditions were examined. Adaptation was defined as a dynamic process of interaction between the individual and the social environment aimed at harmonizing personal needs with the requirements of educational and service activities.

It was established that the adaptation of first-year cadets has specific characteristics determined by the combination of the roles of a student and a police officer, strict regulation of daily routines, living and studying in closed collectives, and early professionalization. Under the conditions of martial law, this process becomes more complicated due to the influence of security-related factors and increased psychological workload.

The results of the empirical study (89 cadets) showed that 49,4% of respondents fall within the «*well-being zone*» and demonstrate a sufficient level of adaptation. At the same time, 49,4% of cadets are located in the «*adaptation risk zone*», while 1,2% demonstrate signs of maladaptation manifested through emotional instability and situational anxiety.

It was found that the key resources for successful adaptation include collective support, platoon cohesion, the presence of meaningful life orientations, patriotic motivation, and awareness of the social significance of future service. At the same time, the most vulnerable sphere remains emotional comfort, which manifests itself through increased anxiety and psychological exhaustion.

The research hypothesis was confirmed: the success of cadets' adaptation under wartime conditions is associated with the level of internality and the ability for psychological self-regulation. Cadets with a high level of subjective control demonstrate greater emotional stability and cope with stress more effectively.

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