

Adaptation Peculiarities of the First-Year Students to University Life: Study on Stress Resistance

Oleh TOPUZOV¹,
Anzhelika SHAMNE², Oleksandr
MALYKHIN³, Nataliia
ARISTOVA⁴, Tetiana OPALIUK⁵

¹ Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, Institute of Pedagogy of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine, proftop@ukr.net

² Doctor of Psychological Sciences, Pereyaslav-Khmelnytsky Hryhoriy Skovoroda State Pedagogical University, Pereyaslav-Khmelnytsky, Ukraine, shamne@ukr.net

³ Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, Institute of Pedagogy of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine, malykhinalex1972@gmail.com

⁴ Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, Institute of Pedagogy of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine, n.aristova.na@gmail.com

⁵ Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, Kamyanets-Podilsky Ivan Ohienko National University, Kamyanets-Podilsk, Ukraine, pidgorna87@ukr.net

Abstract: The paper is aimed at investigating adaptation peculiarities of the first-year students to university life. Among 105 first-year students selected for taking part in research 57 were internal migrants who had to change their place of residence and move to a student residential complex and 48 were original city residents who continued living at home. The research took place in 2018/2019 academic year at two Ukrainian universities. To promote research and collect data several diagnostic tools were used. To understand the leading concepts of research the methods of scientific literature analysis were applied. To process and interpret the obtained results the authors used the methods of mathematical statistics. The obtained results showed that stress resistance was the main source of successful adaptation of the first-year students to university life. Being self-resistant students-internal migrants seemed to know better how to deal with problems concerning their study and to be more open to interactions with their peers, family members and university teachers. At the same time facing unusual problems students-original city residents were not able to cope with them in a proper way and were more vulnerable to different stressors concerning university and personal life. The conducted research made it possible to define the difference between stress resistance of students-internal migrants and students-original city residents and to prove the correlation between adaptation and stress level.

Keywords: *Adaptation; higher education institution; stress; stress-resistance; students-internal migrants; students-original city residents; university life.*

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1. Introduction

The main task of higher school system is to create a challenging educational environment for providing students with all possible opportunities to realize their abilities and skills (Bates, 2015). It also concerns students' adaptation peculiarities to university life and specificities of educational process in higher school. They are closely connected with the problem of students' integrating into university both as a social institute and an institute strongly influencing their socializing (Aristova, 2015; Clinciu, 2013; Latipov et al., 2017; Shamne & Kovalevska, 2018; Topuzov, Malykhin & Opaliuk, 2018; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). The scientific review makes it possible to claim that after entering the university both academic and everyday life of the first-year students changes dramatically (Gonta & Bulgac, 2019; Javed, 2019; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). What is more, many scientists are also unanimous in their belief that *these changes require psychological adaptation to the new learning and teaching environment* (Gonta & Bulgac, 2019, p. 35) and it means that the very start of their adapting to studies conditions at higher education institutions turns into one of the most difficult periods in their whole lives.

While agreeing with A. Turkpour & V. Mehdinezhad (2016, p. 54) that the main aim of adaptation lies in establishing a psychologically satisfying relationship with one's environment, the first-year students' adaptation to university life can be regarded as an individual's ability to conform to values and norms of behavior typical for a definite university environment which enables them to co-exist harmoniously with all the members of such an environment.

While trying to make the right choice of the higher education institution for getting a Bachelor's Degree as the first step and a Master's Degree as the second one on the way of putting into life, a dream to become a qualified specialist in the very field and to start a successful career for life, university entrants commonly face the task of taking a decision if they want to stay on living in their parents' home, communicating within the circle of friends, family members and relatives they have been communicating since their birth or if they want to change everything in their lives fundamentally.

University entrants who are non-residents of big cities are influenced greatly by not too very comfortable conditions which they have been experiencing through being brought up in their native places (mostly small towns and villages). In their desire to change their lives for better they are ready for dramatic changes mostly regarding and strongly believing that it just depends on their decision to move to a big city and enter the university.

As for university entrants who are original city residents we should just note that their decisions are not so much dependant on the conditions they are living in but are mostly under the impact of the relations with their parents i.e. if they are very close and non-conflict or they are the ones they would like to avoid continuing. And that is one of the main reasons why university entrants who are big city residents decide to move to some other big cities and start their new lives after entering higher education institutions.

The thoughts mentioned were proved by generalized data from the first-year students' explanations why they decided to move to study to a big city that is not the place of their birth. But right here we should also mention the group of the first-year students who are native residents of big cities and who made a decision to stay on living home and studying in their native city. And the shared idea that native city residents have all the mostly favorable preconditions for better adaptation to university life turned into absolutely contradictive findings obtained by the study presented.

After entering a higher education institution the first-year students have to communicate with new people, establish social contacts and meet the increase in the workload related to educational process. All of that can be the reason for social and emotional maladjustment, anxiety and affective disorders and even suicidal behaviors. Research conducted by some scientists shows that the high level of academic and interpersonal stress among the first-year students correlates with emotional alienation and high risk of suicide (Kholmogorova et al., 2009). T. Rieznik (2002) is convinced that the first- and the second-year students are even at increased risk of suffering from affective disorders and the greatest risk is achieved when they become the third-year students.

As practical experience shows students-internal migrants experience following difficulties: the lack of parents and friends, the lack of school monitoring system, some household and material problems etc. Risks of maladjustment of the first-year students who change their place of living can be manifested at pedagogical (low performance and poor university level), individual (the development of negative emotional conditions, the alteration of behavioral pattern, fundamental values, ethnical identification and higher levels of conflict) and psychosomatic (chronic fatigue syndrome, loss of appetite etc.) levels. The reduced work capacity, fatigue, headache, anxiety or vice versa hyperactivity, absenteeism, breach of discipline, decline in learning motivation can be the signs of low adaptation level of the first-year students. That's why the situation connected with educational migration makes higher demands to the first-year students-internal migrants. Besides the adaptation to a higher education establishment, students have to adapt to socio-cultural

conditions of their living in a city. Among individual characteristics that might be pre-conditions for successful adaptation to university life stress-resistance plays a very important role. So, the statements listed above became the background for developing the research methodology and organizing the investigation described in the paper.

1.1. Purpose and Tasks of Research

The research was aimed at defining the difference between stress-resistance of the first-year students-internal migrants and the first-year students-original city residents and proving the correlation between adaptation and stress level of students mentioned above.

To achieve the main aim the following tasks are to be solved:

- 1) to select the adequate set of diagnostic tools for conducting research;
- 2) to reveal the main stressors of the first-year students participating in the research;
- 3) to test empirically the first-year students' adaptation peculiarities to university life depending on if they are internal migrants or original city residents.

1.2. Research Methodology

The research which lasted for two semesters (academic year 2018/2019), took place at the National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine (Kyiv, Ukraine) and at Kamyanets-Podilsky Ivan Ohienko National University (Kamyanets-Podilsk, Ukraine).

The population of the research conducted comprised 105 first-year students who studied at the National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine and at Kamyanets-Podilsky Ivan Ohienko National University. The sample of research was distributed on two groups i.e. 57 were internal migrants who had to change their place of residence and move to student residential complex and 48 were original city residents who continued living at home. The demographic distribution of research sample is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample demographics

Variable	Number (N=105)	Percentage (100%)
Gender		
Male	39	37.14%
Female	66	62.86%

Age		
<18	17	16.19%
18	77	73.33%
>18	11	10.48%
Field of Study		
Psychology	32	30.48%
International Relations	20	19.05%
Social Work	15	14.28%
Philology	38	36.19%
Educational Degree Level		
Bachelor's Degree	105	100.00%
Place of living		
Student Residential Complex	57	54.29%
Home	48	45.71%

Source: own study

N=105

In our study the methodology of investigating adaptation peculiarities of the first-year students to university life through the prism of their stress resistance as an individual psychological characteristic is based on the systemic approach and implies the application of the complex of diagnostic tools. To define the difference between stress resistance of the first-year students – internal migrants and original city residents and to prove the correlation between adaptation and stress level of students mentioned above, the authors used the following diagnostic tools to be exact “My Main Stressors” (Shcherbatykh, 2007), “Perceived Stress Scale” (Cohen, 1994) and a questionnaire for determining stress-resistance level and the risk of social maladjustment called “Projection-2” (Rybnikov, 1990, pp. 132-135; Rybnikov, 2000).

Thus, the use of the diagnostic tool “My main stressors” (Shcherbatykh, 2007) made it possible to define the reasons for stress among respondents and to understand which of them create more emotional and psychological problems. Respondents were asked to make a list of stressors and then to evaluate their impact on their lives. The “Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10)” (Cohen, 1994) containing a 10-item questionnaire was used for measuring respondents’ stress-resistance level. All respondents were asked to assess the perception of their stressful experiences over the previous month according to a five-point Likert scale (0 – never, 1 – almost never, 2 – sometimes, 3 – fairly often, 4 – very often). The Perceived Stress Scale included 10 questions, namely: *In the last month, how often have you been upset*

because of something that happened unexpectedly? In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life? In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and “stressed”? In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems? In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way? In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do? In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life? In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things? In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control? In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them? (Cohen, 1994)

In order to find out the first-year students’ stress-resistance level projection and the risk of social maladjustment we used a “Projection-2” questionnaire (Rybnikov, 1990; Rybnikov, 2000) that contained 86 questions. Respondents had to answer the suggested questions positively “yes” or negatively “no”.

To find out the adaptation peculiarities of the first-year students to university life, the responses given by 57 students-internal migrants and 48 students-original city residents were analyzed quantitatively. All the researchers were directly involved in conducting surveys and all the respondents were guaranteed complete anonymity.

1.3. Results and Discussion

The obtained results regarding the reasons for stress among respondents and understanding which of them create more emotional and psychological problems are given in Table 2.

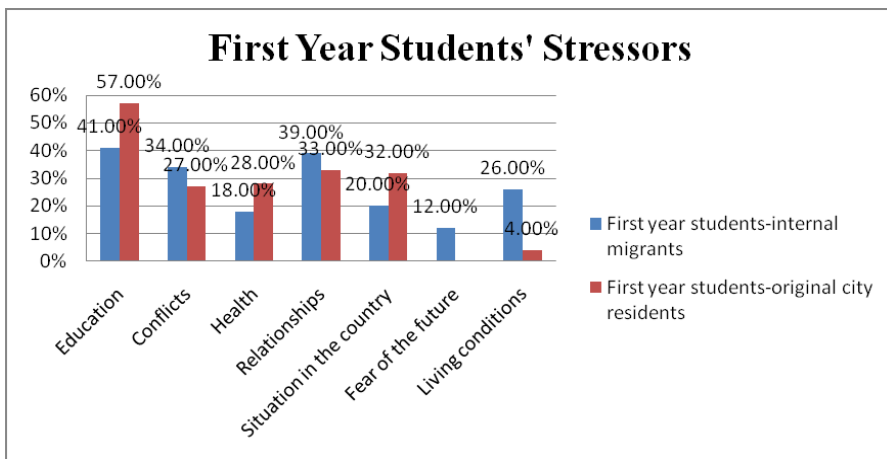
Table 2. First-year students’ stressors

Groups of respondents	Education (%)	Conflicts (%)	Health (%)	Relationships (%)	Situation in the country (%)	Fear of the future (%)	Living Conditions (%)
Internal migrants	41.00	34.00	18.00	39.00	20.00	12.00	26.00
Original city residents	57.00	27.00	28.00	33.00	32.00	–	4.00

Source: own study
n=105

Thus, the stressors that concern students-internal migrants and students-original city residents are approximately the same. Representatives of both sample groups listed such stressors as “Education”, “Conflicts”, “Health”, “Relationships”, “Situation in the country” and “Living conditions”. It should be noted that students-internal migrants also mentioned one more stressor, namely, “Fear of the future”. The quantifiable measure of the impact of determined stressors among respondents in both groups is slightly different. Thus, the analysis of findings shows that such stressors as “Education” (57.00%) and “Health” (28.00%) are more marked among students-original city residents. Such stressors as “Living conditions” (26.00%), “Conflicts” (34.00%) and “Relationships” (39.00%) are more marked among students-internal migrants who live in a student residential complex. 32.00% of students-original city residents mention that such stressor as “Situation in the country” is the most influential, at the same time for 12.00% of students-internal migrants the most influential stressor is “Fear of future”. However, statistically significant differences are identified on the stressor “Living conditions” (0.05).

The comparison between the level of importance of the revealed stressors to the first-year students-internal migrants and original city residents is illustrated in Figure 1.



Source: own study

Figure 1 The comparison between the level of importance of the revealed stressors to respondents

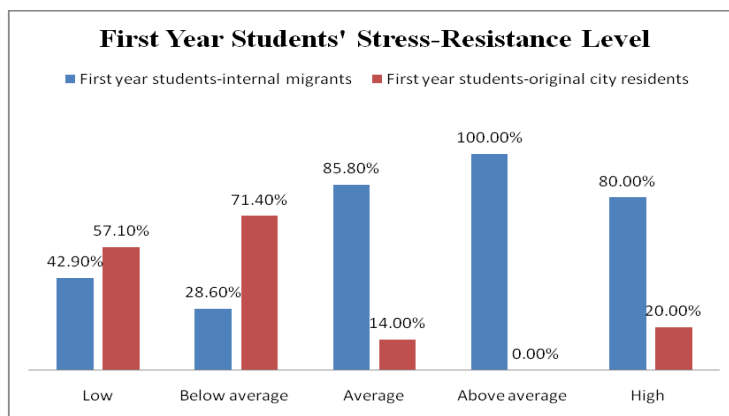
As it can be seen from Table 3, among the first-year students whose stress-resistance level is low, 42.90% live in a student residential complex and 57.10% live at home with their parents. The stress-resistance level of 28.60% of students-internal migrants and 71.40% of students-original city residents is below average. As the results show, 85.80% of students-internal migrants and 14.30% of students-original city residents have the stress-resistance level which is average. 100% of students whose stress-resistance level is above average are internal migrants. And 80% of the first-year students whose stress-resistance level is high live in a student residential complex (internal migrants) and 20.00% live at home (original city residents). Thus, the analysis of the obtained results demonstrates that stress symptoms of the first-year students who live in a student residential complex is less pronounced than of the first-year students who live at home with their families.

Table 3. Respondents' stress-resistance level

Respondents' stress-resistance level	Students-internal migrants	Students-original city residents
Low	42.90%	57.10%
Below average	28.60%	71.40%
Average	85.80%	14.20%
Above average	100.00%	0.00%
High	80.00%	20.00%

Source: own study
n=105

The comparison of the stress-resistance level between the first-year students-internal migrants and the first-year students-original city residents can be seen in Figure 2.



Source: own study

Figure 2 Comparison of the stress-resistance level between the first year students-internal migrants and the first year students-original city residents

The projection of respondents' stress-resistance level is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Respondents' Stress-Resistance Level Projection

Respondents' stress-resistance level to adaptation peculiarities to university life	Groups of respondents	
	Students-internal migrants (%)	Students-original city residents (%)
Very favorable	80.00	20.00
Favorable	57.20	42.80
Not very favorable	50.00	50.00
Unfavorable	25.00	75.00

Source: own study
n=105

Based on the conducted analysis of the obtained results, it can be stated that 80.00% of the first-year students who are internal migrants and 20.00% of the first-year students who are original city residents have a very favorable level of stress-resistance. Among the first-year students whose stress-resistance level is favorable, 57.00% are internal migrants and 42.80% are original city residents. 50.00% of students-internal migrants and 50.00% of students-original city residents show a not very favorable level of stress-resistance. It is worth noting that the unfavorable level of stress-resistance

was demonstrated by 25.00% of students-internal migrants and 75.00% of students-original city residents.

Thus, we can see that the moving into a student residential complex becomes one of the most influential factors that affects the process of students' adaptation to university life. In most cases student residential complexes have previous traditions, forms of self-governance, rules of behavior and a special daily regime and the first-year students have to follow them and act in accordance with them. One more peculiarity of living in a student residential complex is the necessity to live with a stranger or strangers in one room. In this case the first-year students who live in a student residential complex have to reach out to their room-mates, learn to assign different responsibilities, take mutual decisions and, what is more important, to give and take on sensitive and disputed questions.

1.4. Conclusion

The research aimed at defining the difference between stress-resistance of the first-year students and proving the correlation between adaptation and their stress level shows that students-internal migrants are less non-resistant, their level of social and emotional maladjustment connected with adaptation peculiarities to university life is lower, they adapt to training process and conditions of living quicker and demonstrate higher level of stress-resistance than their group-mates who are original city residents. Unlike students-internal migrants, students who are original city residents are more vulnerable to stress situations connected with adaptation peculiarities to university life. Moreover, it should be noted that the obtained findings are rather paradoxical since students-internal migrants have to adapt not only to social and cultural conditions of a megapolis but also to living and cultural conditions of student residential complexes both of which are basically new for them. In this connection the communicative aspect of cohabitation of students in a student residential complex is worth noting. The life of students-internal migrants in a student residential complex creates favorable conditions for communicating and sharing information about structure, traditions and different study opportunities and thereby contributes to social aspect of the first-year students' adaptation to university life.

Thus, there is every reason to believe that the first-year students' successful adaptation to university life does not only depend on training strategies but social and psychological potential of their stress-resistance. Single information environment created in a student residential complex reduces students-internal migrants' stress level, deepens their common

interests and promotes social cohesion. Moreover, living in a single information environment promotes confidence, assists in overcoming fear and anxiety and provides them with social and psychological resilience.

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