

# PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOL-LEAVERS' HARDINESS AT THEIR PROFESSIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION

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## **Abstract**

The article discusses the personal qualities of school-leavers that determine their hardiness at the stage of professional self-determination. It analyzes contemporary theoretical approaches to defining of the essence of the 'hardiness' concept. The factors are revealed that contribute to personal hardiness formation in the situation of professional choice. The article determines that hardiness components are related to the parameters of effective self-realization and personal subjective quality of life and hardiness is a key personality formation that mediates stress factor influence on psychological well-being and success in activities.

**Keywords:** *hardiness, hardiness components, personal potential, professional self-determination.*

## **Introduction**

The study importance is determined by existence of stress factors for school-leavers to learning activities: stressful situations related to final examinations at school and choosing of further direction of professional self-realization, which leads to the necessity to maintain a high level of intense intellectual activities during long time, to difficulties of the way of personal self-determination in the future professional environment, etc.

At the current crisis conditions of social development, the role of one risk factor among teenagers is increasing significantly: it is maintaining of mental health at adolescence, since this period is characterized by professional and social uncertainty of the future. That is why the task to identify psychological tools that help high school graduates to overcome such difficult situations without losing health is becoming more and more important (Maddi & Khoshaba, 1994).

Such a personal variable as hardiness plays a main role in person's successful resilience to stressful situations in educational and professional environment (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Obviously, learning activities can be the source of numerous stresses

for school-leavers, which can become significant barriers to full self-realisation and revealing of personal potential of school-leavers' personality.

The applied aspect of hardiness is determined by the role that its personal parameter plays in tolerance to stressful situations.

The problem of difficult and extremely difficult life situations has been developed by many authors, who referred to such concepts as coping strategies, strategies to overcome difficult life situations, post-traumatic stress disorders and so on. Hardiness has been also considered as a personal potential (Leontev, 2004; Maksimenko & Serdiuk, 2016), as a link between stressful life situations and diseases (Kobasa, 1979) and adaptation to the existing conditions (Maklakov, 2001; Haghightgoo, Besharat, & Zebardast, 2011).

So, hardiness is a kind of psychological analogue of a person's life core that reflects the extent of his/her overcoming of certain stress situations and adapting to given circumstances, as well as a measure of applied efforts for self-improvement and overcoming of unfavourable circumstances of his/her life. Therefore, personal potential of a personality can be considered as one of the properties that form the basis for hardiness formation. This assumption is based on a number of theoretical propositions that reflect the essence of hardiness, its structure and functions (Leontev, 2002).

The studies of the American psychologists Kobasa and Maddi (Kobasa, 1979; Maddi, 1994), who introduced the concept of hardiness for the first time, shows that this phenomenon consists of three components: commitment, control, and challenge. The first hardiness component 'commitment' is an important characteristic of person's attitude to him/herself, the surrounding world and interactions with it, which gives strength and motivates him/her to self-realization, leadership, healthy thoughts and behaviour; allow the person to feel important and enough valuable to be fully engaged in life problem solving without paying attention to stress factors and changes. The second hardiness component is 'control'. Control over circumstances helps to find ways to influence on outcome of stress changes contrary to falling into a state of helplessness and passivity. The third hardiness component 'challenge' helps a person to be open to the surrounding world, other people and society. Its essence lies in the perception by a person of his/her life events and problems as a challenge and test for him/herself. These scientists in their writings indicate the importance of intensity of all three components to maintain health, optimal level of work capacity and activity in stressful conditions (Khoshaba & Maddi, 1999; Kobasa, 1979; Maddi, 2004).

Hardiness is a complex category of the personality psychology, covering the phenomenology of personality formation and basic life attitudes, person's adaptive potential and behavioural strategies for overcoming of stress and existential anxiety. Hardiness is implemented through the mechanisms of estimation of life changes as less stressful; creating of motivation to overcome a situation in transformation (openness to new opportunities, readiness to act in stressful situations); to enhance an immune response; to strengthen responsibility as for own health and healthy lifestyles; to search active social support, which contributes to transformational overcoming. A personality hardiness structure is an important factor in the confrontation, creating resistance to stress influence. The hardiness studies show that people, having stable traits and not giving up easily under pressure, fall to illness less during stress experiencing (Maddi, 1994).

Therefore, we believe, the phenomenon of personality hardiness includes much more than three components. Moreover, Maddi's research, which was in line with the theoretical views of existential psychology, received information about hardiness correlation with

personality formation. In addition, a number of other empirical studies determined hardiness correlations with life purpose orientations, positive self-attitude, with success-oriented motivation, formation of value orientations etc.

Considering hardiness as a complex integral trait of a personality, we understand it as a *multi-levelled, complexly organized, holistic formation*; it is a holistic open self-organizing and self-determined system of relationship with the world and a necessary resource that can help improve persons' physical and mental health, his/her successful adaptation in difficult life situations, situations of a choice related to self-realization, self-determination and personality transcendence.

So, it is important to study hardiness as a person's resource of stability that enables him/her to meet properly all social challenges, to overcome difficult situations and to implement optimally his/her potential in different conditions of life. Moreover, the important factors and, at the same time, the individual components of the 'hardiness' are (Maksimenko & Serdiuk, 2016):

- *personal autonomy* that describes a person as a self-directed and independent agent, who is able to withstand external influences, to determine his/her own behaviour and to assess adequately his/her capabilities;
- *self-efficacy*, that describes how competent and confident a person feels performing a certain activity, it is an important determinant of personal self-realisation;
- *self-attitude*, as a personal trait closely linked to life and activity goals, values orientations, is an important factor of stabilization and integrity;
- *future prospects* (including life goals and meanings) that arise from the motivational goal-setting processes and determine integration of the past, present and future in a personal psychological life space.

The impact of these complementary components of the traditional understanding of the personality hardiness structure is, in our opinion, self-determinant and self-organizing.

**The object of the research is** personality hardiness as a holistic phenomenon of self-determination.

**The aim of the research is** to determine the psychological characteristics and factors that determine school-leavers' hardiness at their professional self-determination.

#### **Methods and organization of the research**

The following methods were used for the comprehensive study of the hardiness phenomenon:

Questionnaire of Person's Self-Attitude developed by Pantylyeyev and Stolin (Stolin & Pantylyeyev, 1988);

General Self-efficacy Scale of Schwarzer and Jerusalem (Shvarcer, Erusalem & Ramiok, 1996);

Hardiness Survey of Maddi, adapted by Leontiev and Rasskazova, designed to determine personal ability and willingness to act actively and flexibly in situations of stress and difficulties (Leontev & Rasskazova, 2006);

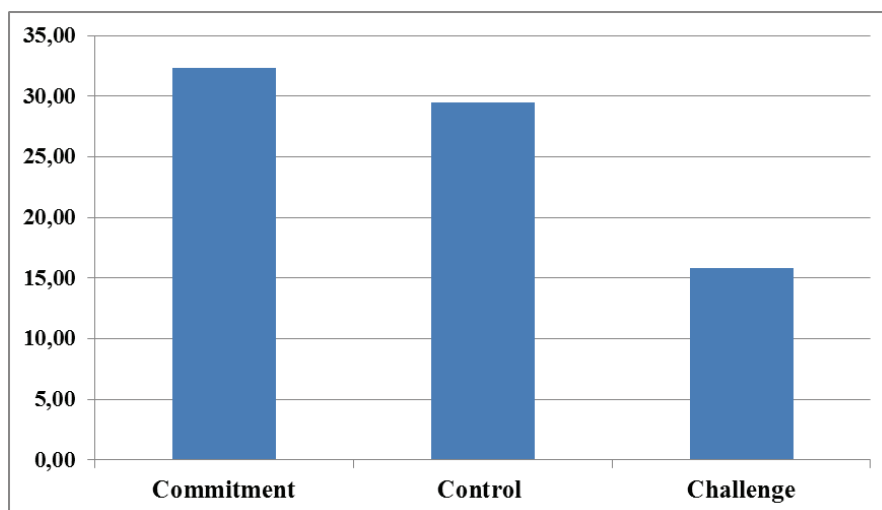
Self-Determination Test of Osin for estimation of person's subjective experience how he/she determines his/her life course and how his/her life meets his/her desires (Osin & Leontev, 2008).

Processing of the empirical results was carried out using statistical software package SPSS 21.0 for Windows.

**Participants of the research.** The empirical study involved 56 school-leavers of school No 283 in Kyiv (Ukraine).

### Results of the research

Figure 1 presents the obtained data about expressiveness of the hardiness basic components.



**Figure 1.** The hardiness basic components of school-leavers

Comparing the data with normative parameters (Leontev & Rasskazova, 2006), we should note that a significant proportion of the surveyed show the determined components below average values. The data frequency distribution show that 60% of school-leavers have the commitment component slightly lower than the standard one. This means that these respondents do not get enough pleasure from their own activities. Perhaps, the reason is because of lack of knowledge and experience and confidence to implement their capabilities.

As for control and challenge, these components are formed at the above average levels at 52 and 58% of the respondents, respectively.

That is, the most school-leavers are convinced that they can influence on their lives courses, are confident in their own abilities. They believe that they can independently make important life choices, are open to gain experience, think that obtained experience will guarantee their life success.

Having the aim to identify the factors influencing the school-leavers' hardiness at professional self-determination, we performed a correlation analysis of hardiness components with important personality parameters. These are:

- self-attitude and its components: self-esteem, auto-sympathy, expected attitude of others, self-confidence, self-acceptance, self-direction, self-blaming, self-interest and self-understanding;
- components of psychological well-being: positive relationship with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, self-acceptance;
- indicators of self-determination: self-efficacy, autonomy, self-expression.
- The obtained results in accordance with the described plan have been analyzed.

1. We can see the presence of significant stable correlations with almost all personal self-attitude indicators analyzing correlations of hardiness components with self-attitude indicators (see Table 1), excluding self-direction and self-understanding that correlate with hardiness in a lesser degree.

**Table 1.** Correlations of school-leavers' hardiness with self-attitude

	Integral self-attitude	Self-esteem	Self-sympathy	Expected positive attitude from others	Self-confidence	Self-acceptance	Self-direction	Self-blaming	Self-interest	Self-understanding
<b>Commitment</b>	0.71**	0.57**	0.41*	0.78**	0.55**	0.66**	0.14	-0.38	0.50**	0.48*
<b>Control</b>	0.56**	0.65**	0.53**	0.59**	0.69**	0.63**	0.35	-0.45*	0.46*	0.24
<b>Challenge</b>	0.55**	0.59**	0.47*	0.64**	0.63**	0.61**	0.23	-0.36	0.49*	0.24
<b>Total hardiness</b>	0.68**	0.66**	0.51**	0.76**	0.69**	0.71**	0.26	-0.44*	0.54**	0.38

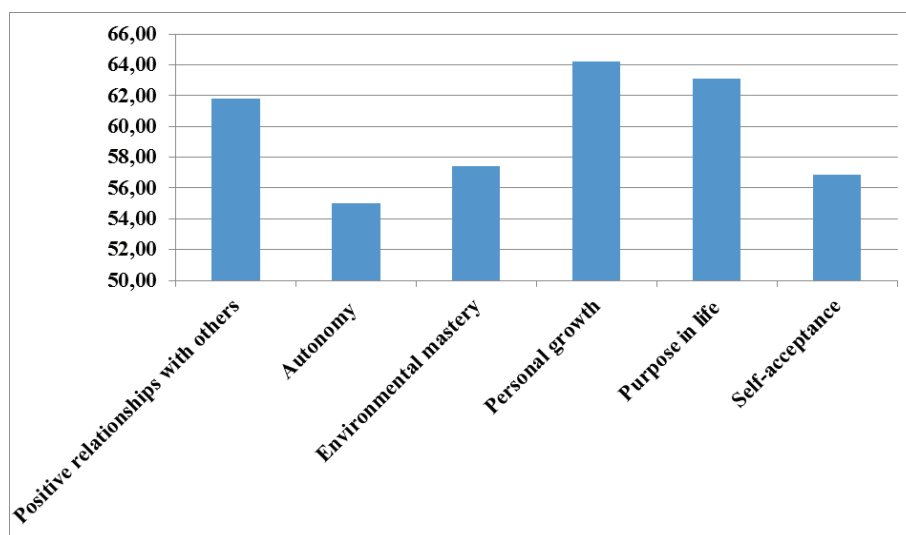
Note: hereinafter \* – correlation and dependence on significant level of 0.05;  
\*\* – correlation and dependence on significant 0.01 level.

As the obtained results show, all hardiness components are associated with the set of personality parameters that determine person's attitude to him/herself – self-esteem, self-confidence, self-acceptance, self-understanding and expected positive attitudes from others.

The empirical data are, in our view, the evidence of a dynamic equilibrium between positive and negative processes aimed at maintaining of the personality integrity and positive development of self-attitude. Obviously, positive social experiences, expanding the scope of social influence, stimulate the emergence of positive personal experiences (self-attitude), increase a degree of personal identity differentiation.

2. Personal psychological well-being is an important criterion of school-leavers' hardiness and, at the same time, the interrelated phenomenon. Personal psychological well-being means subjective self-perception of own integrity and meaningfulness of own existence (Ryff, 1995).

The level of psychological well-being formation of school-leavers, by indicators, is presented in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Indicators of school-leavers' psychological well-being

All indicators of school-leavers' psychological well-being are formed at average levels, as the comparison of average values and standard deviations of the obtained data with the normative ones shows (Ryff, 1995).

Figure 2 shows that the 'autonomy' and 'self-acceptance' indicators are characterized by slightly lower values, which is quite natural because the respondents are young and experience the life period of personal and professional self-determination.

The correlation between hardiness components and psychological well-being of high school students (see Table 2) shows that:

'Commitment' to activities giving the maximum chance to find in life something interesting and important for a person significantly correlated with positive relationships with others, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, availability and awareness of life purpose and life meaningfulness;

'Control', the belief that a person chooses his/her own path and directions of own realization, which is especially important at the stage of professional self-determination, correlated significantly with a sense of personal autonomy, as well as with self-acceptance, availability and awareness of life purpose and life meaningfulness;

'Challenge', the belief that all happening with a person contribute to his/her development through knowledge gained from experience, correlated significantly with environmental mastery, and also with self-acceptance, availability and awareness of life purpose and life meaningfulness.

**Table 2.** Correlation of school-leavers' hardiness with their psychological well-being

	Psychological well-being	Positive relationships with others	Autonomy	Environmental mastery	Personal growth	Purpose in life	Self-acceptance	Balance of affect	Meaningfulness of life	Person as an open system
<b>Commitment</b>	0.65**	0.41*	0.26	0.57**	0.37	0.41*	0.71**	-0.67**	0.44*	0.14
<b>Control</b>	0.56**	0.08	0.58**	0.52**	0.23	0.51**	0.56**	-0.44*	0.51**	-0.05
<b>Challenge</b>	0.72**	0.35	0.35	0.63**	0.32	0.56**	0.76**	-0.58**	0.64**	0.21
<b>Total hardiness</b>	0.71**	0.33	0.43*	0.63**	0.34	0.54**	0.75**	-0.64**	0.55**	0.11

So, in general, we can say that existence of life goals, meanings, self-confidence and believe in own capabilities are important and contribute to personal hardiness that makes it possible for a person to make vital choices confidently and correctly.

Of course, an external support is important and significant for school-leavers, not just faith in themselves, to strengthen confidence in implementation of personal potential, as evidenced by a slightly lower correlation of the hardiness components with the personal growth indicator.

Moreover, we should note the negative correlation coefficients of all components of school-leavers' hardiness with such an important parameter as the 'balance of affect'. Since, as we already mentioned above, most hardiness components are above average, this correlation suggests that the school-leavers are not enough satisfied in general with their lives and their own capabilities.

Absence of significant correlations of hardiness components with the 'person as an open system' indicator says that in school-leavers a comprehensive, realistic view of life, sufficient openness to new experience, spontaneity and experience naturalness have not formed.

3. The analysis of correlation of components of school-leavers' hardiness with the indicators of self-determination (see Table 3) shows, in our view, that a subjective feeling of personal autonomy is extremely important for school-leavers' hardiness formation. Autonomy means a degree of choice, i.e. a degree of person's belief that he/she has real opportunities to make life choices and that he/she makes such choices him/herself, determining the course of own life.

**Table 3.** Correlations between self-determination indicators and hardiness components of school-leavers

	Self-efficacy	Autonomy	Self-expression
<b>Commitment</b>	0.16	0.50**	0.49**
<b>Control</b>	0.39*	0.60**	0.09
<b>Challenge</b>	0.12	0.44*	0.51**
<b>Total hardiness</b>	0.25	0.46*	0.41*

It is indisputably important at this life stage to provide school-leavers with effective psycho-pedagogical tools supporting their feeling that their lives are subject to their own

control; they are agents in their lives, able to make decisions and to choose ways of further self-realization. It will help to development of their responsibility for their own lives and their own self-development.

As for absence of significant correlation between school-leavers' hardiness and self-efficacy, it is, obviously, because self-efficacy as well as self-determination are the traits of a mature personality. Self-efficacy, as one of the central components of the social-cognitive theory proposed by Bandura (1997), means that people are afraid of and avoid social situations that they believe they will not be able to cope; they behave actively if they are confident in their capabilities and believe in the success of their actions. Such confidence is not yet been formed at school-leavers.

Thus, the results of our empirical research show personal resources of school-leavers' hardiness and, at the same time, their successful future career choices and professional self-fulfilment.

### Conclusions

The results of our study are the basis for hardiness determination as a complex integrated trait of a personality.

*Hardiness* means a multi-levelled, complexly organized, holistic formation; a holistic open self-organizing and self-determined system of relationships with the world and a necessary resource that can help improve persons' physical and mental health, his/her successful adaptation in difficult life situations, situations of a choice related to self-realization, self-determination and personality transcendence.

Such understanding of the hardiness phenomenon extends the existing traditional idea (Khoshaba & Maddi, 1999; Maddi, 1994; Maddi, 2004), which mainly reduces it to the three-component structure and determines abilities to maintain health, optimal level of working efficiency and activity in stressful conditions.

The most important psychological attribute of the hardiness phenomenon is its functioning as an open dynamic system based on self-organization and self-determination.

The leading role in personal hardiness development belongs to personal traits, providing at least three functions: *personal resistance to adverse challenges of society, freedom of choice and the possibility of self-realization*, related with the motivational-meaning and cognitive-affective structures of a personality.

The important factors and, at the same time, the components of school-leavers' hardiness at the stage of professional self-determination are:

1. school-leavers' positive self-attitude, in particular, self-esteem, self-acceptance, self-interest, self-control;
2. presence of goals for the future, the desire to plan own future, meaningfulness of future prospects, ability to determine a path of self-development;
3. personal autonomy, providing ability to withstand external influences, helping to determine own behaviour and to assess adequately own capabilities;
4. positive relationships with others, facilitating formation of social competence of a personality.

Moreover, the result of school-leavers' hardiness at profession choices is manifested through a positive view of life, life meaningfulness, improvement of life quality, effective self-regulation and self-realization through adaptation to society, and the ability and willingness to withstand a stressful situation without compromising activity success.



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### Summary

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Hardiness is a psychological analogue of a person's life core that reflects the extent of his/her overcoming of certain stress situations and adapting to given circumstances, the components of which are related to the parameters of effective self-realization and personal subjective quality of life.

American psychologists Kobasa and Muddi introduced the concept of hardiness for the first time and showed that this phenomenon consists of three components: commitment, control, and challenge.

The phenomenon of hardiness of the school-leavers in terms of integrated individuality was analyzed. According to the object of our research the personality hardiness as a holistic phenomenon of self-determination was examined. So, we understand hardiness as a multi-levelled, complexly organized, holistic formation. Hardiness is a complex category of the personality's psychology, covering the phenomenology of personality formation and basic life attitudes, person's adaptive potential and behavioural strategies for overcoming of stress and existential anxiety.

A correlation analysis of hardiness components was performed with important personality parameters such as: self-attitude and its components (self-esteem, self-sympathy, expected attitude of others, self-confidence, self-acceptance, self-direction, self-blaming, self-interest and self-understanding); components of psychological well-being (positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, self-acceptance); indicators of self-determination (self-efficacy, autonomy, self-expression).

According to the analysis of the results the important components of school-leavers' hardiness at the stage of professional self-determination are: positive self-attitude, self-esteem, self-acceptance, self-interest, self-control; presence of goals for the future, the desire to plan own future, meaningfulness of future prospects, ability to determine a path of self-development; personal autonomy, providing ability to withstand external influences, helping to determine own behaviour and to assess adequately own capabilities; positive relationships with others, facilitating formation of social competence of a personality.