

The Peculiarities of Students' Subjective Social Well-being Puring the COVID-19 Pandemic Depending on Their University Attendance Mode

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Abstract. *The study examined the peculiarities of the subjective social and psychological well-being of general civil and military students during the Covid-19 pandemic, depending on the applied attendance modes: distance or face-to-face. General civil students had higher sleep quality, but they had less social contacts, compared to military students.*

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The integral indicator of subjective social well-being was average in general civil and military students, and the differences were determined only for "social approval" scale, whose value was significantly higher in general civil students.

The heaviest barrier in interpersonal communication for general civil and military students was inadequate expression of emotions; and inflexibility and vagueness of emotions were the least pronounced. Factors important for general civil students' psychological well-being were social approval, purposefulness in their aspirations and emotional matching. At the same time, three factors were determined for military students: perceived independence, social reassurance and emotional control during interactions.

Keywords: *subjective social well-being, psychological well-being, emotional barriers in interpersonal communication, military students, general civil students.*

Introduction

The issue of psychological well-being has been in the area of psychological interest for many years. But it is particularly acute when ordinary life is changing, long-lasting factors are appearing that provoke stress and radical changes in lives of very many people. In particular, the importance of our study is dictated by changes caused by epidemiological measures applied because of the Covid-19 pandemic and distance education introduced in many countries, which has both its advantages and disadvantages, affecting negatively, first of all, students' social contacts.

The phenomenon of well-being has been studied in psychology for more than a decade. At the same time, there is still difficulty both in formulating a single definition of this concept and in describing a clear list of factors that can influence it (Di Martino et al., 2018; Dodge et al., 2012).

Four theoretical approaches to understanding well-being are the most widespread: hedonistic, eudaemonic, quality of life and wellness (Cooke, Melchert, & Connor 2016; Arcidiacono & Di Martino, 2016). Recently, many studies have been conducted based on one of these approaches or their combination to understand the impact and psychological consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on personal well-being.

Obviously, the unexpected lifestyle changes occurring at the beginning of the pandemic became stressful for many people and affected their mental health in general and subjective experience of their own well-being in particular (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020; Esposito et al., 2021). Feelings of uncertainty and fear, isolation and forced social distancing negatively affected people's stress level and anxiety according to the performed research (Satici et al., 2020).

Similar correlations were also observed in the studies where samples consisted of university students. In the context of a pandemic, increased anxiety, decreased mood, feelings of uncertainty about the future, etc. were noted (Brooks et al., 2020). Later, international analytical studies were conducted, within which information was collected on the well-being and health of university students in many European and non-European countries (Esposito et al., 2021; Van de Velde et al., 2021).

During the pandemic, as it was quite expected, decreased awareness or even lost meaning of life was observed among students due to drastic changes in the way of their life, study conditions and social relations (de Jong et al., 2020). This was confirmed, in particular, by the study conducted in Poland during the first wave of the pandemic, according to which, the more a person was satisfied with his/her life, experienced subjectively its meaning, felt hope, the less anxiety and stress associated with the pandemic he/she had (Trzebiński et al., 2020). Some authors noted that students' well-being during pandemic was influenced by their satisfaction with the learning process (Milmeister et al., 2021).

Online learning conditions can increase students' stress or depression due to limited social contacts, can decrease their academic motivation, impact negatively on knowledge acquisition and, as a result, evoke students' fear of low grades (Rutkowska et al., 2022; Odriozola-Gonzalez et al., 2020). Decreased physical activity of students and their excessive communication with the Internet were also noted as consequences of the pandemic (Rutkowska, 2022; Kovalenko et al., 2020; Keles, McCrae & Grealish, 2020).

Students also pointed to other types of barriers to online learning during the pandemic. In particular, these were technical difficulties, such as disrupted access to Internet services or malfunctions in their work, changes in interaction with teachers (few possibilities to discussion comparing to face-to-face training, uncertain response time to asked questions, etc.) (Adnan, 2020).

The above studies reflected two aspects of well-being: on the one hand, assessments of subjects' functioning in society (the so-called "social well-being"), and on the other hand, their subjective assessments and attitude towards their life and themselves ("subjective well-being"). In view of this, the theme of our study is subjective social well-being, which is considered as an integral social-psychological formation, reflecting a subjective assessment (positive experience) of an individual's successful functioning in the social environment (Danylchenko, 2017). The author considers it as a dynamic formation, the key criterion of which is achievement by a person of subjective equilibrium (optimal balance) between those parameters whose expression in his/her ideas determines such features of social behaviour that can lead to the satisfaction of personal needs, and, accordingly, can increase a positive affect. Social reflection (an act of cognition) and social self-determination (awareness, finding personal meanings) are the main psychological mechanisms of experienced subjective social well-being (Danylchenko, 2016).

The study object is subjective social well-being.

The study subject includes factors of subjective social well-being of students who were transferred to distance education during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The study aims to compare the factors of subjective social well-being of distance studying general civil students and military students who continued to study face-to-face during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Research Sample and Participants

164 people aged 18 to 20 took part in the study, including: 83 students of various faculties studying remotely since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, and 81 military students of the Military Institute, whose attendance mode did not change and they continued to study face-to-face. All respondents were students of Taras Shevchenko National University in Kyiv. The research was conducted in April-May 2020.

Methods of the Research

In order to determine the features of students' subjective social and psychological well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic, the following measures were used: T. Danylchenko's measure "Subjective social well-being" (Danylchenko, 2016); C. Ryff's scales of psychological well-being (adapted by T. Shevelenkova and T. Fesenko) (Ryff, 1995); V. Boyko's method "Examination of emotional barriers in interpersonal communications" (Fetytskin, Kozlov, & Manujlov, 2002), as well as the questionnaire revealing changes in life, general state and social contacts.

The following methods were used for mathematical and statistical processing of the obtained data: descriptive statistics, Mann-Whitney U-test (for comparing two samples), correlations and factor analyses. Empirical data processing was carried out using SPSS 28.0 computer program.

Analysis of the Research Results

The Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic is an external factor that significantly changed the lives of very many people globally. In particular, it affected the well-being and physical condition of some people, caused stress, increased anxiety, limited social contacts and changed in a usual lifestyle. Namely these changes were revealed in students' lifestyles during our survey.

By analysing the questionnaire data, we determined that 35% of remotely studying students did not change their lives after the quarantine introduction, 45% noted its deterioration, and 20% noted that their lives changed for the better. Such indicators of improvement, in our opinion, can be explained precisely by the features of distance education and the fact that students have found the opportunity to combine studies with various types of other activities (for example, work), as well as the fact that they did not have to spend time traveling to the university.

The quality of sleep did not change after the introduction of quarantine restrictions in 45% of the studied general civil students, it worsened in 30%, and 25% noted an improvement in their quality of sleep. At the same time, 90% of students who started studying remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic noted decreased contacts with others due to quarantine restrictions, and 10% of the studied mentioned that their contacts remained the same as before the quarantine introduction.

The quality of sleep did not change in 67% of military students, deterioration was observed in 27% of the respondents, and 6% noted improvement.

The contacts with others because of the quarantine decreased in 51% of military students, it remained without significant changes in 49%.

The obtained percentage distribution by groups of general civil students studied remotely during the pandemic and military students continued to study face-to-face is confirmed by the analysis of the average values for the examined indicators and the significance of differences (Table 1).

Table 1

Average values of life change assessments during quarantine depending on the attendance mode

Scales	General civil students (distance education)	Military students (face-to-face education)	Mann-Whitney U-test	P
Changes of life after quarantine	2,50	2,24	417,0	,296
Changes in sleep quality	2,30	1,65	354,5	,040
Contacts with others	1,10	1,49	321,0	,003

Significant differences were found in changes in sleep quality and contacts with others. General civil students during the quarantine showed higher life changes, but not statistically significant. Military students had more contacts with others, compared to general civil students, because they continued to study face-to-face. However, the sleep quality of military students significantly worsened with the onset of quarantine, compared to general civil students.

Danylchenko's (2016) measure was used to find out the features of subjective social well-being in two examined groups (Table 2).

Table 2

Average values for subjective social well-being scales depending on the attendance mode

Scales	Attendance mode		Mann-Whitney U-test	P
	Distance (general civil students)	Face-to-face (military students)		
Social visibility	44,75	46,84	547,5	,446
Social distance	23,00	24,00	523,5	,657
Emotional acceptance	39,50	39,35	490,0	,987
Social approval	38,50	35,20	343,0	,049
Positive social beliefs	20,40	18,29	367,0	,103
Subjective social well-being	120,15	116,37	428,5	,416

A significant difference was revealed between the groups of general civil and military students for the “social approval” scale: general civil students’ scores were significantly higher than those of military ones. So, general civil students had a high need for approval and they were dependent on reference groups, needed in trusting relationships during social interaction. At the same time, such high need in social approval, as well as high positive social belief in general civil students compared to military ones was determined in our previous study organized even before the Covid-19 pandemic (Kovalenko *et al.*, 2020).

A person’s social well-being is inseparable from his/her psychological well-being. Therefore, we used Ryff’s (1995) method to identify psychological well-being of the respondents. A comparative analysis was carried out with this method for general civil and military students, so that depending on the attendance mode during the pandemic (Table 3).

Table 3

Average values of students’ psychological well-being indicators depending on the attendance mode

Scales	Attendance mode		Mann-Whitney U-test	P
	Distance (general civil students)	Face-to-face (military students)		
Positive relations with others	57,65	56,47	482,0	,915
Autonomy	55,15	53,92	443,0	,533
Environmental mastery	57,50	54,92	371,5	,116
Personal growth	53,65	52,49	450,0	,596
Purpose in life	53,40	54,53	537,0	,533
Self-acceptance	47,60	50,37	599,0	,148
Psychological well-being	332,05	328,35	470,0	,791
Affect balance	100,90	107,92	595,5	,163
Awareness of life	92,70	88,94	369,0	,109
Human as an open system	69,20	63,53	331,0	,035

The general civil and military students showed mostly average psychological well-being (the main scales: positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, self-acceptance, general psychological well-being; additional scales: affect balance, awareness of life and human as an open system).

A statistically significant difference existed only for the “Human as an open system” scale: general civil students had higher values for this scale. This testifies to their ability to integrate certain aspects of one’s life experience, to assimilate new information, to form a realistic and holistic view of life, openness to new experiences, etc.

In order to determine factors of social and psychological well-being, we examined emotional barriers in interpersonal communication with V. Boyko's (Fetytskin et al., 2002) method (Table 4).

Table 4

Average values for the scales of emotional barriers in interpersonal communication

Scales	Attendance mode		Mann-Whitney U-test	p
	Distance (general civil students)	Face-to-face (military students)		
Inability to manage emotions, to dose them	1,60	1,94	529,5	,313
Inadequate display of emotions	2,55	2,29	439,5	,492
Inflexibility and vagueness of emotions	1,15	1,59	593,5	,157
Dominance of negative emotions	2,00	1,43	341,0	,042
Reluctance to get close to people on an emotional basis	2,00	1,67	406,5	,245
Emotional problems in communication	9,30	8,92	442,0	,523

General civil students had a significantly higher dominance of negative emotions compared to military ones. As for other indicators, we did not find significant differences between the two examined groups as for emotional barriers in interpersonal communication. At the same time, the values of emotional problems manifested in communication in the group of general civil students during the Covid-19 pandemic were above average. This means that emotions could, to some extent, complicate interaction with others and hinder effective communication. For military students, the values of this scale were at an average level. The higher barrier for the both group was inadequate expression of emotions, and the least barrier was inflexibility and vagueness of emotions.

By performed correlation analysis, we determined the correlation pleiades for the scales of subjective social well-being, psychological well-being and emotional barriers in interpersonal communication depending on attendance modes during the Covid-19 pandemic.

For the group of general civil students, we found that subjective social well-being correlated inversely with affect balance ($r=-.637$; $p\leq 0.01$), reluctance to get close to people on an emotional level ($r=-.661$; $p\leq 0.01$), emotional problems in communication ($r=-.655$; $p\leq 0.01$), inflexibility, vagueness of emotions ($r=-.515$; $p\leq 0.05$) and did directly with awareness of life ($r=.596$; $p\leq 0.01$) and a human as an

open system ($r=.722$; $p\leq 0.01$). This indicates that these students' subjective social well-being increased because of predominant positive self-esteem, acceptance of oneself with all advantages and disadvantages, existing life goals and life meanings, evaluation of oneself as a purposeful individual, openness to new experiences, the ability to absorb new information, lowered emotional barriers during interaction with others, flexibility of emotions, the ability to express emotions depending on a situation, etc.

The following scales of subjective social well-being: social visibility (assessment of one's own social significance, social status, as an agent of social relations), social approval (external recognition of one's status), emotional acceptance (satisfaction with relationships, support and help from the social environment) directly correlated with the following scales of psychological well-being: awareness of life ($r=.797$; $p\leq 0.01$; $r=.692$; $p\leq 0.01$) and a human as an open system ($r=.670$; $p\leq 0.01$; $r=.752$; $p\leq 0.01$; $r=.462$; $p\leq 0.05$). At the same time, social visibility directly correlated with personal growth ($r=.557$; $p\leq 0.05$), purpose of life ($r=.517$; $p\leq 0.05$), self-acceptance ($r=.581$; $p\leq 0.05$).

The following scales of emotional barriers in communication: inflexibility of emotions, reluctance to get close to people on an emotional level, emotional problems in communication inversely correlated with awareness of life ($r=-.626$; $p\leq 0.01$; $r=-.626$; $p\leq 0.01$; $r=-.472$; $p\leq 0.05$) and a human as an open system ($r=-.722$; $p\leq 0.01$; $r=-.824$; $p\leq 0.01$; $r=-.644$; $p\leq 0.01$). At the same time, reluctance to get close to people on an emotional level and emotional problems in communication directly correlated with affect balance ($r=.516$; $p\leq 0.05$; $r=.552$; $p\leq 0.05$), while personal growth inversely correlated with reluctance to get close to people on an emotional level ($r=-.491$; $p\leq 0.05$) and inflexibility and vagueness of emotions ($r=-.515$; $p\leq 0.05$). Thus, we determined that increased emotional barriers to communication in the group of general civil students was associated with the deterioration of their psychological well-being, expressed in negative self-esteem, dissatisfaction with the circumstances of one's life, awareness of insufficient personal development, low self-realization and unbelief in possible changes and achievements.

In order to reduce the dimensionality of the initial data on psychological well-being and to determine the factor correlation structure, we applied factor analysis using the method of principal components and the Varimax method with Kaiser normalization for factor rotation. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.589, which was an acceptable result for the interpretation of the obtained data. The factor model of psychological well-being for distance learning students contains three factors that explain 65% of the combined variance.

The first factor (34% of the variance) included: subjective social well-being (.935); the desire to get close to people on an emotional basis (-.848); absence of emotional problems in communication (-.847); social approval (.827); human as an open system (.795); low affect balance (-.724); social visibility (.715); emotional acceptance (.704); short social distance (-.675); flexibility and expressiveness of emotions (-.664). This

factor was named “social approval”; it characterized one’s determination of his/her social existence as optimal with mostly positive feelings because one’s own demands corresponded to the level of satisfaction of social needs, self-acceptance, positive self-esteem, self-acceptance, focus on interaction with other people and establishing contact with them on an emotional level.

The second factor (23% of the variance) included: psychological well-being (.990); self-acceptance (.920); purpose in life (.841); environmental mastery (.808); autonomy (.773); personal growth (.726); awareness of life (.685). The factor was called “purposefulness in aspirations”; it was expressed in the acceptance of oneself as a whole personality, orientation at planning for the future and setting goals with reliance on past experience as a resource, a tendency to act independently and resist conformity if necessary.

The third factor (7% of variance) included adequate expression of emotions (-.763); positive social judgments (.615); autonomy (.500). The factor was called “emotional matching”; it was expressed in the harmonious relationship between a situation and one’s attitude towards it on an emotional level, orientation towards positive social interaction and one’s own capabilities and efforts during decision-making and task performance.

As for the group of military students who continued face-to-face education during the pandemic, we found significant inverse correlations of subjective social well-being with emotional barriers to communication, namely: dominance of negative emotions ($r=-.484$; $p\leq 0.01$) and inflexibility, vagueness of emotions ($r=-.629$; $p\leq 0.01$). The scales of subjective social well-being and psychological well-being are the following: social distance, affect balance directly correlated with the dominance of negative emotions ($r=.446$; $p\leq 0.01$; $r=.387$; $p\leq 0.01$), inflexibility of emotions ($r=.401$; $p\leq 0.01$; $r=.373$; $p\leq 0.05$); these emotional barriers of communication inversely correlated with emotional acceptance ($r=-.384$; $p\leq 0.01$; $r=-.477$; $p\leq 0.01$), social approval ($r=-.409$; $p\leq 0.01$; $r=-.481$; $p\leq 0.01$), social visibility ($r=-.308$; $p\leq 0.05$; $r=-.514$; $p\leq 0.01$). At the same time, the emotional barrier such as the dominance of negative emotions was associated with life changes after the quarantine introduction ($r=.376$; $p\leq 0.01$) and changes in the sleep quality ($r=.383$; $p\leq 0.01$) in military students.

Awareness of life ($r=-.350$; $p\leq 0.05$), human as an open system ($r=-.428$; $p\leq 0.01$) inversely correlated with inflexibility, vagueness of emotions.

That is, the inability to maintain positive relationships with others, to learn new skills and abilities increased, the belief in one’s own strengths or opportunities and amount of social interactions and life satisfaction decreased with the growth of military students’ emotional barriers in communication.

In order to determine the factor model of the psychological well-being for military students’ who studied face-to-face during the Covid-19 pandemic, we applied factor analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.577, which allowed us to interpret the obtained model, consisting of three factors and explaining 62% of the combined variance.

The first factor (27% of the variance) consisted of psychological well-being (.990); autonomy (.878); environmental mastery (.835); personal growth (.824); purpose of life (.822); positive attitude (.812); self-acceptance (.770); awareness of life (.752). The factor was called “perceived independence” because it characterized the desire to control one’s life and the factors that can affect it, the clarity of the definition of what one wanted, and acceptance of oneself as he/she was.

The second factor (23% of variance) included subjective social well-being (.926); social approval (.834); social visibility (.775); emotional acceptance (.727); human as an open system (.703); flexibility, expressiveness of emotions (-.692). This factor was called “social confirmation”; it characterized one’s social activity, the desire to be recognized by others, a realistic view of life, and openness to new experiences.

The third factor (12% of the variance) consisted of emotional problems in communication (.892); dominance of negative emotions (.746); inability to manage emotions, dose them (.626); not wanting to get close to people on an emotional level (.624). The factor was named “emotional control of interaction”; it expressed the presence of problems during interactions with others.

Thus, we determined that the correlative structure between subjective social well-being and psychological well-being was different in groups of general civil and military students. In particular, a greater variability of connections was found in the group of general civil students compared to military ones. In the group of military students, subjective social well-being associated with emotional communication barriers and changes occurred in life due to quarantine restrictions. In the group of general civil students, subjective social well-being was most often linked with openness to new experiences, the ability to learn new information, existing life goals and life meaning, self-acceptance, personal growth and approval from the social environment, etc. At the same time, both groups did not show correlations between the integral indicators of subjective social well-being and psychological well-being.

Discussion

According to the results of our research, general civil and military students had an average level of subjective social well-being, regardless their university attendance mode. Similar trends were found in other studies, where students’ psychological well-being was at a normal level (Nisma et al., Iram & Omama, 2022; Capone et al., 2020).

In the group of military students, subjective social well-being was associated with emotional communication barriers and changes occurred in life due to quarantine restrictions. Although they can be of a permanent nature and be associated with limited life activities in a closed social group, which is a demand of training organization in the Military Institute. We revealed a significant difference between the groups of general civil and military students for the “social approval” scale. Distance studying students had significantly higher scores than military students. So, students had higher need for

approval and were dependent on reference groups, needed for trusting relationships during social interaction. At the same time, such high need in social approval, as well as high positive social belief in general civil students compared to military ones was determined in our previous study organized even before the Covid-19 pandemic (Kovalenko et al., 2020).

Earlier, the negative impact of quarantine restrictions on students' emotional state and social interaction was determined by some researchers. In particular, as Rutkowska, Cieřlik, Tomaszczyk and Szczepańska-Gieracha noted, changing the usual forms of education has become a real challenge not only for teachers, but especially for students (Rutkowska et al., 2022). This was manifested in long-term social isolation and limitation of interaction with peers and, as a result, increased loneliness among young people. The lost sense of security was also noted among the psychological consequences of the pandemic, which led to a strong emotional response, causing aggression, fear, irritability, frustration, etc. (Chaturvedi, 2020). Although the Internet allows young people to communicate and learn during anti-epidemiological measures, but significantly prolonged time of social networking correlated with increased psychological distress (Keles, McCrae & Grealish, 2020) and reduced physical activities, which is an important factor of psychological health (Rogowska et al., 2020). Also, more than half of examined students noted decreased academic motivation and a negative impact of online learning on their academic success (Rutkowska et al., 2022).

The other studies showed that self-isolation was associated with reduced psychological well-being, increased feelings of loneliness and anxiety. At the same time, an opportunity to work at home for some respondents had a positive effect on the quality of their sleep (Allen et al., 2022), which was also confirmed by the results of our study: less than a third of general civil and military students experienced deteriorated quality of sleep, while its quality in others improved or remained unchanged.

Some studies were devoted to clarifying the advantages and disadvantages of online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, the lack of direct communication with classmates and teachers was highlighted among the most pronounced negative consequences; this fact was also confirmed in our study in the group of distance learning students. The negative consequences also included difficulties in mastering practical disciplines, an excessive amount of time spent in front of a monitor or smartphone screen. Among the main advantages of online education, students pointed to the availability of learning material (as opposed to the traditional educational forms), the use of innovative educational forms, etc. The correlations revealed in the study carried out by Stecuła and Wolniak confirmed that the better students oriented in new forms of online interaction, in modern technologies and had the appropriate resources to participate in various online educational activities, the more advantages they found in such forms of education (Stecuła & Wolniak, 2022). We assume that the found by us orientation of online studying students towards openness to new experiences and their ability to absorb new information, self-acceptance, etc. can be related to this.

Conclusions

During the study, we identified the peculiarities of the subjective social and psychological well-being of general civil and military students during the Covid-19 pandemic, depending on the attendance modes: distance or face-to-face.

The Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic brought certain changes to students' lives: general civil students had higher sleep quality, but they had less social contacts, compared to military students, which was associated with their attendance mode changed from face-to-face to distance learning.

Distance studying general civil students and face-to-face learning military students had average integral indicator of subjective social well-being. But we determined that, as for "social approval" scale, general civil students showed significantly higher data than those of military students; so that general civil students had higher need for approval and stronger dependence on reference groups, they needed trusting relationships during social interaction.

As for barriers in interpersonal communication, a significant difference was found only for the scale of dominance of negative emotions: general civil students showed significantly higher values. At the same time, general civil students during the Covid-19 pandemic showed an above-average level of emotional problems in communication, which indicated the negative impact of emotions on interaction with others and communicative effectiveness. The highest barrier for both types of students was inadequate expression of emotions, and the least one was inflexibility and vagueness of emotions.

We determined that the correlative structure between subjective social well-being and psychological well-being was different in groups of general civil and military students. In particular, a greater variability of connections was found in the group of general civil students compared to military ones. In the group of military students, subjective social well-being associated with emotional communication barriers and changes occurred in life due to quarantine restrictions. In the group of general civil students, subjective social well-being was most often linked with openness to new experiences, the ability to learn new information, existing life goals and life meaning, self-acceptance, personal growth and approval from the social environment, etc. At the same time, both groups did not show correlations between the integral indicators of subjective social well-being and psychological well-being.

The factors of general civil students' psychological well-being were social approval, purposefulness in aspirations and emotional matching. At the same time, three factors were determined for military students: perceived independence, social confirmation and emotional control of interaction.

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