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SELF-EFFICACY AND SELF-ESTEEM OF UKRAINIAN CITIZENS DURING THE WAR*

Introduction: War significantly limits people's autonomous functioning in many life aspects. As a result of the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine, the quality of life of Ukrainian citizens has significantly deteriorated. In times of war, self-efficacy and self-esteem play a key role in dealing with difficult, unpredictable situations. It is, therefore, important to undertake research in this area.

Research Aim: The aim of the conducted research was to diagnose self-efficacy and self-esteem of Ukrainian residents during the war, and to determine the relationship between these two variables.

Method: The authors have used a quantitative research approach and a diagnostic survey as a data collection method. The sample consisted of 1,783 respondents coming from all provinces of Ukraine. Two research tools were used: Schwarzer and Jerusalem's Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale and Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale.

Results: The analyses have shown that Ukrainian residents participating in the study display various levels of self-efficacy and fairly favourable self-esteem. The results of the study indicate the existence of a high positive correlation between the analysed variables.

Conclusions: Perceived self-efficacy impacts specific actions people take in unpredictable situations, whether they pay attention to opportunities or difficulties. In times of war, self-efficacy is prerequisite to being active when the situation requires one to engage in changing

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an unfavourable course of events. This activity is reinforced by the individual's possession of a positive self-esteem.

Keywords: self-efficacy, self-esteem, war, Ukraine, black swan

INTRODUCTION

On 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation invaded Ukraine in a major escalation of the war which started in 2014. Since that time, the lives of Ukrainian residents have changed dramatically in almost every aspect.

The ongoing war may be categorised as a black swan event, which in accordance with Taleb's theory, is a hardly predictable event having a major effect on one's life, fundamentally changing the way of thinking about the world and principles governing it. Black swans are phenomena and situations coming as a surprise, unlikely, unexpected, shocking, irregular, highly improbable, for which it is impossible to get prepared. Their major characteristic is unpredictability and they can often be inappropriately rationalized with the benefit of hindsight. Most often, these phenomena carry a massive impact on reality (Taleb, 2020). War is by nature unpredictable and its outcomes including, e.g. forcing people to leave their homes, great numbers of casualties in the theatre of operations, sudden loss of property and considerable deterioration of the quality of life, all evoke the feeling of omnipresent threat and anxiety. War in Ukraine has made numerous citizens stressed due to their fear of their own security and safety of other people, it has shattered the meaning of and control over one's life. Stress is also enhanced by the fact that it is very hard to foresee the date when war activities will come to an end. Life at war undermines the physical and mental health of Ukrainian inhabitants (Kokun, 2022). According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, n.d.), mental health is a state of physical, mental and social well-being in which an individual is able to develop, realize his or her own abilities through learning and work, cope with the normal stresses of life. In the case of Ukrainian citizens suffering as a result of the Russian invasion, their coping with different life situations, contribution to the community and productive work require development of new mechanisms for functioning in this situation or avoiding it by migration. What follows from data published in July 2024 by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is that due to war, 3.7 million people were displaced within Ukraine, more than 6 million Ukrainian refugees have been recorded across Europe, and 571,000 outside Europe, which globally totals nearly 7 million people who have fled their country because of war (United Nations, 2024). War changes one's world view, preferred values, it affects one's attitudes towards the self and others, the way one assesses different events, it gives rise to concern, anxiety and fear of real or imaginary risks. It may lead to the loss of the meaning in life (Voitsikh and Polovyk, 2022).

War as a traumatic event contributes to considerable restriction of autonomous functioning of people in numerous life areas, which consequently may reduce their self-efficacy consisting in an individual's belief in his or her ability to effectively cope in stressful, unequivocal and unpredictable situations. During the war, self-efficacy plays the crucial role in the functioning of humans, as it is related to their strategies of coping with emergency situations or traumatic events. On the other hand, an individual's attitude towards the self, that is self-esteem, determines his or her relationships with others, impacts the undertaken tasks, successes or failures. Self-esteem is one of the major factors determining the set life goals and assessments of the rightness of actions taken. Individuals with high self-esteem are in better health, have higher level of life achievement, are more persistent in the face of adversities and show more initiative in action. In a stressful situation, these individuals have more resources helping them overcome the adversities (Baumeister et al., 2003). Therefore, it is important to undertake research intended to determine self-efficacy and self-esteem in Ukrainian citizens in a war situation. The study presented in the paper is related to Ukrainian citizens who have not fled their country and who have been facing dangerous, unpredictable situations, threatening their feeling of security, their life or health on a daily basis.

The review of scientific literature indicates that the issue of mental well-being of Ukrainian citizens in a war situation has not been widely addressed at the time of conducting this study by the authors. Studies have existed, however, on selected aspects of human functioning in times of war. The aforesaid examples include a study by Kravchuk (2018) investigating the question of resilience of young people in an armed conflict situation. Due to scarcity of research in this area, we have decided to focus our explorations on the topic presented in this paper.

RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTION

This study was intended to measure self-efficacy and self-esteem in Ukrainian citizens during the war, and to identify the relationship between the study variables. Therefore, the research problem is reflected by the following question: What is the level of self-efficacy and self-esteem of Ukrainian respondents participating in the study during the war, and what is the relationship between the study variables (if any)? In the conducted study, it was assumed that the correlation between self-efficacy and self-esteem will be positive. This hypothesis was formulated based on the study by Baumeister et al. (1996) or Predko et al. (2023).

The present study constitutes a part of the authors' original research project devoted to the functioning of Ukrainian citizens during the invasion on its territory by the Russian Federation, as the war has to a considerable extent changed the

educational or professional situation of many people and often times forced them to modify their personal future plans.

RESEARCH METHOD AND SAMPLE CHARACTERISTIC

The study was conducted in the form of a diagnostic survey in which two measures were used: the Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) and the Self-Esteem Scale (SES) by Rosenberg (1965). The Generalised Self-Efficacy Scale refers to Bandura's (1977) theory regarding self-efficacy beliefs developed by people. Self-efficacy is related to human activity and personal control over this activity. Therefore, it involves human competence with regard to pursuing specific actions. "Self-efficacy differentiates people in terms of their way of thinking, feeling and acting. [...] The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the goals people set for themselves and the firmer their commitment to them, even in the face of difficulties" (Juczyński, 2000, p. 11).

Self-efficacy "is a person's belief in their ability to complete a task or achieve a goal under new, unequivocal, unpredictable or even stressful circumstances. In other words, it is a belief in oneself, a generalised opinion of the »I can make it« type related to the ability to act in not definitively known circumstances" (Oleś, 2005, p. 213).

The Generalised Self-Efficacy Scale used in the study consists of 10 statements reflecting an individual's beliefs regarding their ability to cope in difficult situations. Respondents indicate their agreement with each statement by choosing a response rated from 1 to 4. Total score from all items presents respondents' general self-efficacy. The higher the score, the higher the self-efficacy.

The second analysed variable is self-esteem conceptualised by Rosenberg as a personalised construct based on perception and judgement of one's worth. It is a conscious attitude toward the self, depending both on emotions related to the self, as well as cognitive judgements about oneself. It is a relatively stable quality of an individual (Dzwonkowska et al., 2008). Rosenberg claims that high self-esteem is the belief that one is "good enough", a valuable man, which does not mean that the person finds himself or herself better than others. The Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale consists of 10 items in which respondents indicate their agreement with each statement on a four-point scale. Total score ranges from 10 to 40. When analysing the results, it should be remembered that positively worded items should be reverse scored so as to ensure that higher scores are given to responses pointing to higher self-esteem.

The study was conducted in Ukraine among 1,783 respondents, 1,333 of whom were female (74.8%) and 450 were male (25.2%), representing all provinces of Ukraine. The largest group in the sample were residents of the follow-

ing provinces: city of Kyiv and Kyiv province (21.1%), Khmelnytskyi (12.1%), Cherkasy (8.3%), Lviv (7.6%) and Sumy (7.6%) provinces. Vast majority of the respondents lived in cities (1,314 – 73.7%), whereas the remaining participants lived in rural areas (469 – 26.3%). The youngest respondent was 15 years old, whereas the oldest was 84; mean age of the respondents was 30 days and 2 months ($SD = 13.93$). The study was carried out in Ukraine from December 2022 until the end of 2023. Data were collected via an online survey created with the use of an Internet platform. The study was conducted using the snowball sampling technique, referred to as chain-sampling or chain-referral sampling (Crouse and Lowe, 2018). In this sampling technique, the existing study subjects recruit consecutive subjects.

STATISTICAL DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

Prior to commencing detailed research explorations related to statistical inference procedures, the authors verified their assumptions on the normal distribution of study variables, that is self-efficacy and self-esteem. To that end, they measured skeweness and kurtosis, as in the case of large samples (in this case, 1,783 persons) these measures are used instead of the Shapiro–Wilk or Kolmogorov–Smirnov normality tests. This procedure was determined by the fact that the larger the sample size, the more “normality tests tend to show significant results even with minor deviations from normal” (Józefacka et al., 2023, p. 232). Descriptive statistics related to the study variables were also presented in the study. Due to the absence of standards determining the level of study variables, that is self-efficacy measured using GSES and self-esteem measured using SES developed for Ukrainian citizens, in further analyses we have used the procedure of setting standards in reference to a given study sample. To that end, raw scores from both scales were converted into sten scores in accordance with the procedure described by Brzeziński (2019). It was assumed that 1–4 sten scores will be regarded as low, 5–6 sten scores as average, whereas 7–10 as high. The correlation between the variables was measured using Pearson’s correlation coefficient (r). In the conducted analyses, we have verified the reliability of both measures used in their Ukrainian versions. The reliability of both scales was measured using the internal consistency coefficient – Cronbach’s alpha (α). It is assumed that acceptable values of reliability of a scale range from 0.7 to 0.95 (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011). For the Generalised Self-Efficacy Scale Cronbach’s alpha was .87, whereas for the Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale, Cronbach’s alpha was 0.78. Statistical analyses were run using IBM SPSS Statistics, PS IMAGO PRO 10, software, version 29.02.

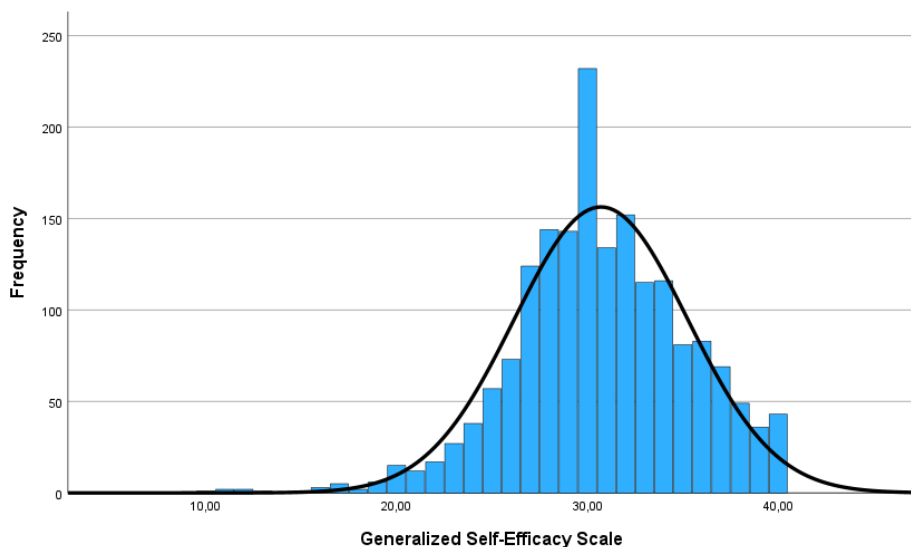
RESULTS

Research results using the Generalised Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES)

In order for a quantitative study to be performed correctly, the researchers are required to verify their assumptions concerning empirical data. Therefore, prior to commencing the determination of respondents' self-efficacy, the obtained results were investigated for normal distribution. This is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Distribution of respondents' self-efficacy results (N = 1,783)



Source: Authors' own study.

Descriptive statistics related to the research results for respondents' self-efficacy have shown that the obtained scores range between 10 and 40. The mean was $M = 30.71$; standard deviation (SD) = 4.55; skeweness (Sk) = -0.36 whereas kurtosis (K) = 0.83. It may, therefore, be concluded that normality assumptions regarding the obtained study results were met. The next step was to convert the raw scores into sten scores (Table 1), and subsequently determine respondents' self-efficacy (Table 2).

Table 1.

Generalised Self-Efficacy Scale: temporary Ukrainian standards (N = 1,783)

| Sten scores | Raw score | Sten scores | Raw score |
|-------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| 10 | 40 | 5 | 29 |
| 9 | 38–39 | 4 | 27–28 |
| 8 | 35–37 | 3 | 24–26 |
| 7 | 33–34 | 2 | 21–23 |
| 6 | 30–32 | 1 | 10–20 |

Source: Authors' own study.

In this study, for interpretation purposes we have adopted categories in accordance with Brzeziński's classification (2019) by assigning raw scores to a relevant sten score, and then interpreting sten scores using the division into low (1–4 sten scores), average (5–6 sten scores) or high (7–10 sten scores).

Table 2.

Respondents' self-efficacy scores

| Sten score | N | % | Level | N | % |
|------------|-------|-------|---------|-------|-------|
| 1 | 38 | 2.13 | Low | 530 | 29.73 |
| 2 | 56 | 3.14 | | | |
| 3 | 168 | 9.42 | | | |
| 4 | 268 | 15.03 | | | |
| 5 | 143 | 8.02 | Average | 661 | 37.07 |
| 6 | 518 | 29.05 | High | 592 | 33.20 |
| 7 | 231 | 12.96 | | | |
| 8 | 233 | 13.07 | | | |
| 9 | 85 | 4.77 | | | |
| 10 | 43 | 2.41 | Total | 1,783 | 100 |
| Total | 1,783 | 100 | | | |

Source: Authors' own study.

As shown by the data presented in Table 2, every third respondent displayed high self-efficacy – 33.20%. A considerable proportion of the respondents (37.07%) obtained an average self-efficacy score. Low self-efficacy on the other hand, was recorded in 29.73% of the participants. It can, therefore, be stated that Ukrainian

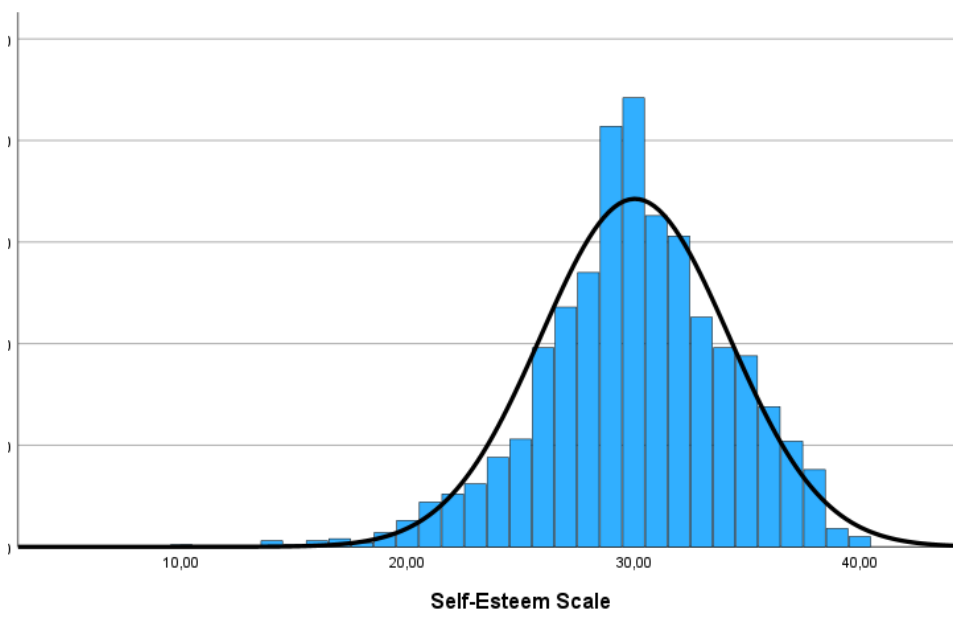
residents participating in the study displayed various levels of general beliefs about their ability to cope with difficult situations.

Research results using Self-Esteem Scale (SES)

The other variable under study was self-esteem. Just like with self-efficacy, the analysis of study results was preceded by verification of normality assumptions. Figure 2 presents distribution of self-esteem results.

Figure 2.

Distribution of respondents' self-esteem results (N = 1,783)



Source: Authors' own study.

Descriptive statistics related to the research results for respondents' self-esteem have shown that the obtained scores range between 10 and 40. The mean was $M = 30.06$; standard deviation (SD) = 4.15; skewness (Sk) = -0.41 and kurtosis (K) = 0.68. Conducted analyses show that obtained distribution of results is approximately normal. Just like with self-efficacy analyses, also with regard to self-esteem of Ukrainians participating in the study, raw scores were converted into sten scores (Table 3), and then sten scores were interpreted accordingly (Table 4).

Table 3.
Self-Esteem Scale: temporary Ukrainian standards (N = 1,783)

| Sten scores | Raw score | Sten scores | Raw score |
|-------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| 10 | 38–40 | 5 | 28–29 |
| 9 | 36–37 | 4 | 26–27 |
| 8 | 34–35 | 3 | 24–25 |
| 7 | 32–33 | 2 | 21–23 |
| 6 | 30–31 | 1 | 10–20 |

Source: Authors' own study.

When determining self-esteem in the responding Ukrainians, we have used the same procedure as in the case of identifying their self-efficacy.

Table 4.
Respondents' self-esteem results

| Sten score | N | % | Level | N | % |
|------------|-------|-------|---------|-------|-------|
| 1 | 34 | 1.91 | Low | 426 | 23.89 |
| 2 | 79 | 4.43 | | | |
| 3 | 97 | 5.44 | | | |
| 4 | 216 | 12.11 | | | |
| 5 | 342 | 19.18 | Average | 726 | 40.72 |
| 6 | 384 | 21.54 | | | |
| 7 | 266 | 14.92 | High | 631 | 35.39 |
| 8 | 192 | 10.77 | | | |
| 9 | 121 | 6.79 | | | |
| 10 | 52 | 2.92 | | | |
| Total | 1,783 | 100 | Total | 1,783 | 100 |

Source: Authors' own study.

Data presented in Table 4 show that Ukrainian residents participating in the study report on having quite good self-esteem, for as many as 35.39% of respondents display high self-esteem indicating a positive attitude towards the self. A considerable group of respondents, i.e. as many as 40.72% obtained an average score. Nearly every fourth respondent (23.89%), on the other hand, reported on low self-esteem manifested in a negative attitude towards the self, interpreted by Rosenberg as dissatisfaction with oneself.

In this study, the authors sought answers to the question whether there was any correlation between self-efficacy and self-esteem in the responding Ukrainian

residents in a war situation, and about the nature of this correlation, if any. Table 5 presents results of the investigation for a correlation between the study variables.

Table 5.
Relationship between respondents' self-efficacy and self-esteem

| Variables | Pearson correlation coefficient | Significance (bilateral) | N |
|---------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|-------|
| Self-efficacy | 0.50 | <0.001 | 1,783 |
| Self-esteem | | | |

Source: Authors' own study.

Results of the analysis indicate the existence of a high positive correlation between the study variables. It may, therefore, be concluded that persons with higher self-esteem believe more strongly in their ability to succeed, which makes them get more engaged in the performance of tasks, ultimately leading, to a large extent, to achievement of the set goals. These persons are more active and persistent in overcoming difficulties, they show improved preparedness to face the challenges and the risks.

DISCUSSION

Studies on self-efficacy of Ukrainian citizens during the war have been conducted by Kokun (2022, 2024). In his study conducted in 2022, the author obtained similar self-efficacy results for Ukrainian citizens as those obtained by the authors of this paper. Kokun (2024) points out that self-efficacy has been one of the potential factors protecting civilians against deterioration of their mental health during the war. Similar conclusions can be drawn from a study by Kokun and Bezverkhyi (2024) on a group of university students. Research on self-efficacy among Ukrainian university students was also conducted by Dryhus (2024). Her findings show that the belief in one's ability to succeed is a determinant of an individual's development and mental health in times of crisis.

Impact of war on mental health and well-being of Ukrainian university students was also studied by Kholostenko et al. (2023). The aforementioned studies have shown that war forces people to rethink their priorities, it impairs their independent and critical thinking abilities, and decision-making skills. War escalates confusion, helplessness and conformity, and undermines self-efficacy and ability to influence one's life. Negative effects of war on the functioning of university students were also presented by Radjabova et al. (2022). Based on their studies, the scholars have revealed the impact of mental exhaustion, high anxiety caused by general unrest in the country on learning abilities, health and psychological well-being of students. A revealing study of mental health of Ukrainian citizens in

times of war, with consideration of self-esteem as a predictor of mental health, was conducted in 2023 by Predko et al. The authors have found a significant correlation between self-esteem and mental health.

Results of the study presented in this paper converge with previous conclusions regarding the functioning of Ukrainians during the war, as they point to the existence of a relationship between self-efficacy and self-esteem, that is important determinants of an individual's mental health.

CONCLUSIONS

Perceived self-efficacy impacts specific actions people take in unforeseeable situations – whether they pay attention to possibilities or rather to difficulties. In times of war, self-efficacy is a prerequisite to being active when the circumstances require one's engagement in changing the adverse course of events. Positive self-esteem strengthens an individual's willingness to be active. Confidence in one's own ability may help one overcome various obstacles on their way to a pursued objective. It should be noted that persons having less confidence in their own ability withdraw from challenging tasks in fear of being threatened by the challenge. When they have doubts, they lose their ability of analytical reasoning and thinking in logical terms, which reduces their efficacy in different social situations. It can, therefore, be concluded that self-efficacy is a prerequisite for being active when the circumstances require one's engagement in changing the adverse course of events. Self-efficacy significantly affects one's well-being and it is one of the major predictors of human behaviour.

Investigations of self-efficacy and self-esteem in Ukrainian residents during the war have shown that the respondents display fairly high self-efficacy and self-esteem. This is likely to have an impact on their mental health which depends, among others, on coping with various life situations, positive social participation and personal functioning. Armed conflicts involve trauma and loss, which may result in emotional wounds, grief, guilt, depression or even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Many people may experience retrospection, nightmares, over stimulation and panic attacks (Halevi et al., 2016; Gartland et al., 2019). This body of experience affects an individual's ability to function in the society, his or her interpersonal relationships, ability to learn, develop one's career, work professionally. It can be stated that it significantly disturbs people's everyday life. For this reason, it is important to ensure support and proper assistance to individuals affected by the adversities of war (van Reisen et al., 2022; Kholostenko et al., 2023).

Human adjustment to wartime reality is a complex process involving emotional responses, psychological strategies and cognitive mechanisms. It requires an individual to have numerous resources, in order to adjust to the rapidly changing cir-

cumstances and requirements/demands (Amplieieva and Taraniuk, 2023). Many Ukrainian citizens attempt to live a normal life during the war; they are meeting their friends, they cultivate family traditions, they celebrate national and religious holidays. It is hard, however, to call their life normal when they need to observe the curfew, sirens are hooting, there is no electricity and many people mourn or fear for their close ones. Research on psychosocial functioning of Ukraine residents during the war appears to be important also in view of the organisation of psychological support for those who are not able to cope with this traumatic situation. Therefore, it is very important to develop and implement support programmes for Ukrainian citizens the objective of which should be stress reduction, increasing their ability to cope and ensure optimum mental health. The conducted study should be regarded as preliminary and requiring further empirical verification in subsequent research projects.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

During the study, the authors had limited access to the respondents, in particular to male respondents, therefore, the presented study results offer no gender-based analysis. It should be stressed that this research was conducted in Ukraine during the ongoing war, which made it difficult for the researchers to carry on with the study. If the addressed topic is continued under different social and political conditions, the war context should be taken into account as it significantly affected the obtained study results.

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POCZUCIE SAMOSKUTECZNOŚCI A SAMOOCENA OBYWATELI UKRAINY W CZASIE WOJNY

Wprowadzenie: Wojna w znacznym stopniu przyczynia się do ograniczenia autonomicznego funkcjonowania ludzi w wielu obszarach życia. W wyniku inwazji Federacji Rosyjskiej na Ukrainę nastąpiło znaczne pogorszenie jakości życia obywateli Ukrainy. W czasie wojny poczucie własnej skuteczności i samoocena odgrywają kluczową rolę w radzeniu sobie z trudnymi, nieprzewidywalnymi sytuacjami. Ważne zatem jest podejmowanie badań w tym zakresie.

Cel badań: Celem przeprowadzonych badań była diagnoza poczucia własnej skuteczności oraz samooceny mieszkańców Ukrainy w czasie wojny, a także określenie związku między tymi zmiennymi.

Metoda badań: Badania przeprowadzono w paradygmacie ilościowym w oparciu o metodę sondażu diagnostycznego. Objęto nimi 1783 mieszkańców wszystkich obwodów Ukrainy. Wykorzystano dwa narzędzia badawcze: Skalę Uogólnionej Własnej Skuteczności (*Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale*) Schwarzera i Jerusalema oraz Skalę Samooceny Rosenberga (*Self-Esteem Scale*).

Wyniki: W toku analiz ustalono, iż badani mieszkańcy Ukrainy przejawiają zróżnicowany poziom poczucia własnej skuteczności oraz dość korzystną samoocenę. Wyniki badań wskazują na istnienie wysokiej, dodatniej korelacji między analizowanymi zmiennymi.

Wnioski: Postrzeganie własnej skuteczności ma wpływ na to, jakie działania podejmuje jed-

nostka w sytuacjach nieprzewidywalnych, czy zwraca uwagę na możliwości czy trudności. W czasie wojny poczucie własnej skuteczności to niezbędny warunek podejmowania aktywności, gdy sytuacja wymaga zaangażowania się w zmianę niekorzystnego biegu wydarzeń. Aktywność tę wzmacnia posiadanie przez jednostkę pozytywnej samooceny.

Słowa kluczowe: poczucie samoskuteczności, samoocena, wojna, Ukraina, czarny łabędź