

## Hardiness among Ukrainians: challenges and opportunities

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### Abstract:

The article deals with the phenomenon of hardiness and its characteristics. The structural components of hardiness are identified as commitment, control, and challenge. It is analyzed that hardiness characterizes the ability of an individual to withstand a situation of acute or chronic stress, to maintain internal balance without reducing the success of activities. It is noted that hardiness can be considered as an analog of a person's vitality, which reflects the degree to which he or she overcomes certain life circumstances. The purpose is to study the hardiness among Ukrainians as a holistic personal formation, which is due to the interaction of personal resources. The sample consisted of 110 people from Ukraine. The Maddi and Kobasa Hardiness Test was used to diagnose the hardiness. The results show that a high level of hardiness of Ukrainians is associated with an active attitude to life, self-acceptance, using circumstances to one's advantage, evaluating life situations as consciously chosen, and interpreting stressful situations as an opportunity to gain new experience. It has been established that hardiness has little to do with a person's age, i.e. the development of hardiness can occur throughout life, starting from childhood, with the help of flourishing personal resources. According to the level of hardiness, 43.6% of Ukrainians had a high level, 35.5% - an average level, and 20.9% - a low level. The peculiarities of developing hardiness and maintaining the optimal level of this resource for personal effectiveness are related to worldview, personal goals, self-acceptance, mental health and activity.

**Keywords:** psychological stability, mental health, self-acceptance, personal resources, adaptability.

### Introduction:

The events currently taking place in Ukraine are stressful for everyone. These are military operations on the territory of the country, forced migration, blackouts, recent quarantine and self-isolation due to the coronavirus pandemic, which still have their negative consequences. It is estimated that up to 90% of people will experience at least one serious traumatic event in their lifetime (Southwick & Charney, 2022). For some people, the stress of negative life events will become chronic and long-lasting, while others will radically change their outlook, become depressed,

demoralized, withdrawn, angry, etc. However, many people will find ways to cope with the challenge of life and continue to live meaningful lives. For some time, adverse conditions may disrupt and shock people's normal way of life, but eventually they will return to normal and continue living. There are also people who will become even stronger and more experienced as a result of their experiences.

This problem is of utmost importance today, since the psychological hardiness of the population is a key element of their harmonious life, which

contributes to the formation of a strong, stable psychological foundation for further life in the war and post-war periods. Therefore, the study of the phenomenon of personality hardiness is an important area of modern psychological research, where the problems of quality of life, mental health, satisfaction with oneself, one's work and family have come to the fore. Much of the research focuses on the key prerequisites that allow one to maintain effective interaction with significant people, succeed in life, and be happy even in the face of adverse circumstances.

It should be noted that mental health is an integral part of psychological well-being and an important factor for hardiness. This close interaction between mental health and hardiness reveals the undeniable importance of mental health in shaping personality and overcoming difficulties. First of all, mental health determines the ability of an individual to adapt to changes in the environment. A person with stable mental health has the ability to effectively adapt to rapidly changing living conditions without feeling helpless or stressed. This gives him/her an advantage in the face of uncertainty and helps them to overcome obstacles to achieving his/her goals more easily (Chykhantsova, Kievišienė, Baranauskienė, & Agostinis-Sobrinho, 2022). In addition, mental health affects a person's inner world, shaping his/her views of himself/herself, others, and the environment. A person with a stable mental state has a more realistic perception of himself/herself, a higher level of self-acceptance and self-realization.

Thus, we view personality hardiness as a psychological analogue of a person's life core, which reflects the extent to which a person overcomes and adapts to internal and external circumstances, as well as the extent to which he or she makes efforts to work on oneself and on the circumstances of one's life. We understand hardiness as a multilevel, holistic formation, an integral property of a personality that includes levels corresponding to the hierarchical structure of personality traits (Чиханцова, 2021; 2023). We discussed the structure of hardiness in more detail in our previous works (Чиханцова, 2017; 2018;

2021). Hardiness, accordingly, is a holistic system of human relations with the world. Thus, hardiness is one of the key parameters of a person's individual ability to mature forms of self-regulation and self-acceptance (Сердюк, 2021). In fact, hardiness has emerged as a model of attitudes and strategies that together contribute to transforming stressful circumstances from potential failures into opportunities for personal growth. In a broad sense, hardiness is a reflection of the vitality of the individual that allows a person to survive the anxiety that accompanies the choice of the future, i.e. the unknown, rather than the past, which cannot be changed, in a situation of existential dilemma.

### **Literature review and brief evaluation:**

According to O. Kokun (2023), the personality traits that characterize hardiness include high self-esteem, a clear sense of purpose in life, a calm attitude to danger, and a willingness to make mistakes. That is, hardiness is considered a stable personality trait, as well as a trait that characterizes the ability to protect oneself from negative stressful influences. Hardiness is also viewed as an internal reserve of the individual, which is determined by his or her potential. This aspect is also studied as the relationship between stressful situations in life and health, as well as the ability to adapt to different conditions. According to this concept, hardiness is similar to a person's psychological 'life core', which reflects their ability to overcome and adapt to certain circumstances, as well as the level of effort spent on self-development and organizing life (Чиханцова, 2018; Chykhantsova, 2023).

P. Bartone (2006) offers a viewpoint on psychological hardiness that differs somewhat from others. He sees it as a comprehensive concept rather than simply an attitude. According to him, psychological hardiness is a combination of emotional, behavioural and cognitive abilities. Psychological hardiness is a learned approach and it can't be determined by genetics (Panghal, Tejpreet, Sharma, 2023).

Psychological research considers various factors that affect the hardiness of an individual, such as

personal autonomy and independence, inner freedom, self-acceptance and self-realization, meaningfulness of life, readiness for internal changes, ability to perceive new information and develop own strategies, readiness for action and planning, adaptability to new conditions (Сердюк, 2018). Thus, according to S. Maddi (2002), hardiness is a special structure of attitudes and skills that allows transforming changes into opportunities. It reflects a person's effectiveness related to his or her motivation to overcome stressful situations in life. We share the scientist's opinion and believe that the basis of hardiness is the development of personal resources. According to S. Maddi (2004), a person is constantly making choices about his or her past, which is familiar and known, or the future, which is new and unpredictable, when under stress. In this case, hardiness is a necessary personal quality that a person can rely on when choosing his or her future. In this way, a person learns to see new opportunities and ways of self-realization and prospects for personal growth in constant changes (Emmons, 2004).

This phenomenon consists of three components: commitment, control, and challenge (Kobasa, 1979, Maddi & Kobasa, 1984). The first component of hardiness is 'commitment' - an important characteristic of a person's attitude to himself/herself, the world around him/her and the nature of interaction with it, which gives strength and motivates him/her to self-realization, leadership, healthy way of thinking and behavior; it makes it possible to feel significant and valuable enough to fully engage in solving life problems, ignoring the presence of stressors and changes. The second component of hardiness is 'control'. Control over circumstances organizes the search for ways to influence the results of stressful changes, as opposed to falling into a state of helplessness and passivity. The third component of hardiness is 'challenge'. It helps a person to be open to the world around them, other people, and society. Its essence lies in the person's perception of life events and problems as a challenge and test for themselves (Khoshaba, Maddi, 1999). Thus, hardiness is associated with a person's persistent

experience of surrounding events as interesting (commitment), as a result of personal choice and initiative (control), and as an important stimulus to accept new things (challenge). S. Maddi (2002; 2007) considers the phenomenon he discovered much more broadly, believing that the basis of hardiness is the development of personal attitudes, which he includes in the concept of 'hardiness' mentioned earlier. This phenomenon could become the basis for a more positive outlook on the world, improve the quality of life, and turn obstacles and stress into a source of growth and development.

Research on hardiness in line with S. Maddi's concept can be divided into three main areas: 1) studying the relationship between hardiness and psychological variables that reflect all kinds of problems and disorders (construct validity); 2) studying the relationship between hardiness and other positive personality characteristics and justifying their differences (discriminant validity); 3) studying the relationship between hardiness and behavioral variables - health, performance, etc.

In Lisa Firestone's book, co-authored by her father Dr. Robert Firestone and Joyce Catlett, 'The Self Under Siege: A Therapeutic Model for Differentiation' outlined that research on many groups - including soldiers, executives, athletes, and students - have replicated findings: that hardiness predicts success, adaptive coping, and well-being. The outlook and coping approach of hardy individuals is consistent with the traits of a fully differentiated individual (Firestone, Firestone, & Catlett, 2013).

In a narrow sense, hardiness can be viewed as a personal potential, a holistic systemic formation that allows a person to withstand a stressful situation while maintaining internal balance during any activity. Hardiness contributes to self-regulation not only under stressful conditions, but also during monotonous work. It is worth noting that the events and moods that are currently taking place in the country have led to the study of factors that affect the level and development of hardiness.

It should be noted that at the individual level, hardiness is characterized by such components as

commitment, control and challenge, and at the group level, we include personal properties such as values, goals, meanings, autonomy, self-attitude, self-actualization, self-efficacy and psychological well-being (Чиханцова, 2021).

**The main idea of the study** is that hardiness is viewed as a systemic psychological phenomenon that covers the process of formation of a personality and its basic life attitudes and is formed and developed as a holistic personal formation.

**The purpose of the article** is to study the hardiness of a personality as a holistic personal formation, which is conditioned by the interaction of personal resources. We consider the features of personality hardiness and identify personal resources that affect it.

### **Participants of the research:**

The sample of our study consisted of 110 people (men - 21.7%, women - 78.9%) engaged in different professional activities, with different professional experience, and living in Ukraine. The respondents are aged 17 to 65. The survey was conducted in the summer of 2020.

The processing of the obtained empirical data was carried out using the statistical software package SPSS 21.0 for Windows.

### **Methodology:**

To diagnose the components and level of personality hardiness, we used the methodology developed by S. Maddi та S. Kobasa 'The Hardiness Scale' (HS). The questionnaire includes valid and reliable questions and has three subscales: commitment, control, and challenge. The results of the hardiness test allow us to assess a person's ability and willingness to act actively and flexibly in a situation of stress and difficulties, or his/her vulnerability to stress. According to Cronbach's alpha criterion, the following reliability values were obtained: the 'commitment' scale was 0.79; the 'control' scale was 0.74; the 'challenge' scale was 0.75; the overall hardiness score was 0.89. Also we used J. Krambo's, L. Maholik's Purpose in Life Test (PIL) that was created to assess how purposeful a person feels in

their life. Ryff's scale of psychological well-being was used to determine autonomy of Ukrainians.

### **Result and discussion:**

Hardiness is a factor that contributes to the optimal experience of situations of uncertainty and anxiety. Hardiness beliefs create a kind of protection against really difficult experiences. It is important that hardiness affects not only the assessment of the situation, but also the activity of a person in overcoming this situation.

James A. Sheppexd and Javad H. Kashani (1991) note in their work 'The Relationship of Hardiness, Gender, and Stress to Health Outcomes in Adolescents' that some researchers have revealed gender differences in the incidence of various psychiatric problems, with men being more vulnerable to some disturbances and women being more vulnerable to others. These findings suggest that gender is an important predictor of psychological disturbances. Nevertheless, most investigations of hardiness have focused on only one gender. The few studies that have examined both males and females have produced equivocal results. For example, Rhodewalt and Agustsdottir (1984) found no gender difference in the relationship between hardiness (albeit, global hardiness) and psychological distress. But the key finding of P. Mund and M. Mishra's study (2023) is that women corporate professionals demonstrate greater hardiness as compared to their male counterparts. In P. Panghal, K. Tejpreet, and S. Sharma Seema study (2023) results revealed that boys were found to be more committed than girls and had a higher level of psychological hardiness as compared to girls.

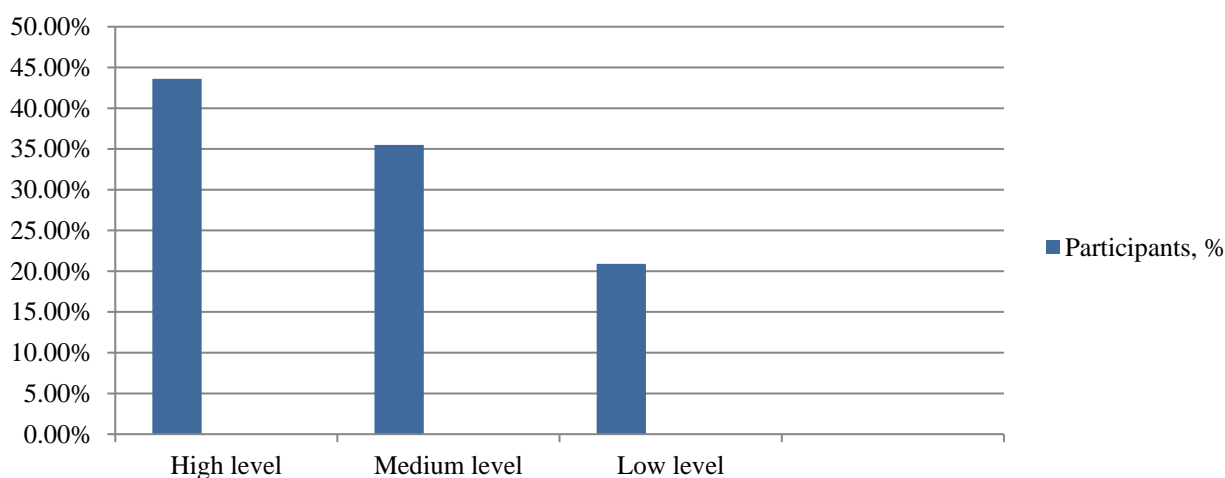
Our sample was previously divided by gender, as we assumed that the level of hardiness may depend on it. However, our study did not find any correlations between gender and hardiness. It should be noted, that hardiness may be expressed differently by its components in women and men, as there is a general consensus that they assess and respond to life events differently. After analyzing the hardiness indicators using Pearson's correlation, we also found that hardiness has

insignificant relationships with a person’s age ( $r = 0.383$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). This means that the development of hardiness can occur throughout life, starting in childhood, with the help of flourishing personal resources.

According to the results, we can say that the values of the indicators of the hardiness components of Ukrainians are at an average level and are within the normal range. This indicates the severity of all components of a person’s hardiness. Such indicators characterize a person’s attitude to change, as well as his or her ability to use available

internal resources that help to effectively manage it, and determine how well a person is able to cope with the difficulties and changes he or she faces on a daily basis.

The following indicators were found in terms of hardiness (see Fig. 1). 43.6% of the participants had a high level, 35.5% - had an average level, and 20.9% - had a low level. Almost half of the participants have a high level of hardiness, which indicates their activity, self-confidence, infrequency of stress, and ability to effectively deal with it without losing their mental balance.



**Figure 1. Hardiness levels of Ukrainians**

The average level of general hardiness (35.5% of participants) indicates involvement in life, control and challenge. This is due to the perception of the future as an uncertain stage with important events. Almost every fifth respondent (20.9% of participants) has a low level of hardiness. These respondents are not confident in their strengths and abilities, and even a little stress can cause serious anxiety, deterioration of health and performance. The severity of all three components of hardiness is important for maintaining mental health and optimal performance in everyday life.

The personality variable of hardiness characterizes the extent to which an individual is able to withstand a stressful situation while maintaining internal balance and not reducing performance. This construct was identified in the course of research when considering what psychological

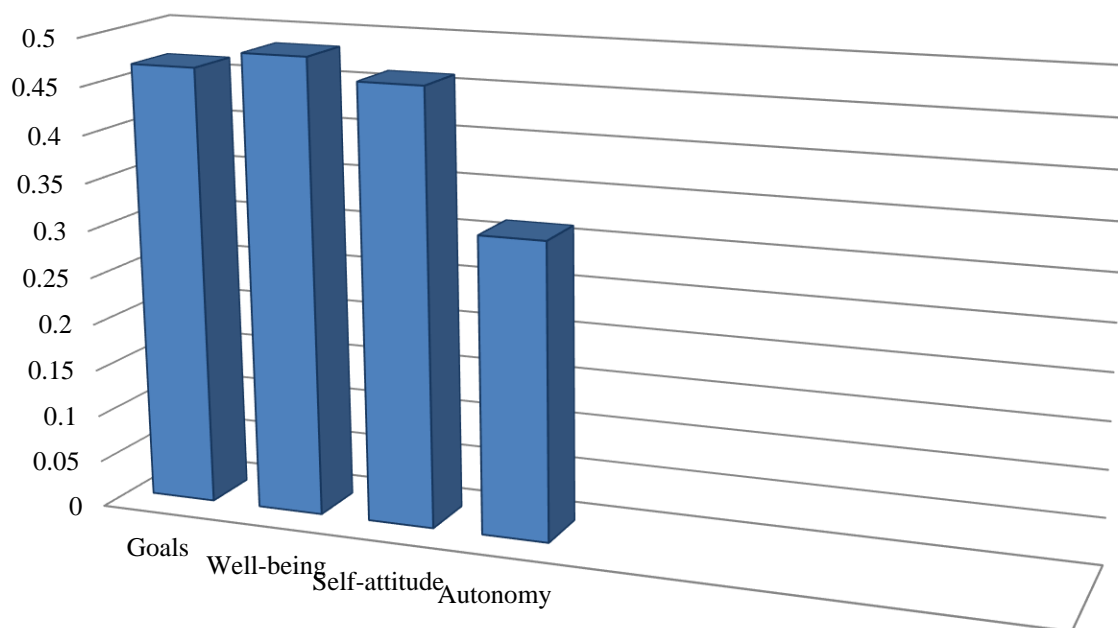
factors help to successfully overcome stress and reduce internal tension.

According to the results of the study, in the group of participants with low and medium levels of hardiness, the component involvement prevails, which indicates that involvement provides the maximum chance to find something interesting in life, is a source of strength and motivation for realization, a healthy way of thinking and behavior. The group with a high level of hardiness is dominated by the control component. The development of hardiness components contributes to the formation of a positive attitude towards oneself and life events. In our opinion, hardiness is also manifested as a person’s attitude to himself/herself, the world around him/her and the nature of interaction with it. It gives strength for self-actualization and self-realization, leadership,

self-respect and self-acceptance, a healthy way of thinking and behavior. It allows individuals to feel significant and valuable enough to be fully involved in solving life problems without being distracted by the presence of unfavorable factors and changes.

Also, in our study, we found that a high level of hardiness contributes to the preservation of mental

health in various situations, which can be considered as a condition for preventing a stressful state. Based on the results obtained, we assume that the formation of hardiness among Ukrainians is influenced by such personal parameters as: goals, values and meanings; well-being, self-attitude, and autonomy. Preliminary results show the following (see Fig. 2).



**Figure 2. The value-semantic aspects of hardiness**

We would like to comment on the results of the study. The pursuit of goals aligned with personal values and meaningful endeavors significantly contributes to the development of hardiness among Ukrainians. Goals provide direction and purpose, while values serve as guiding principles that shape attitudes and behaviors. When individuals identify and pursue goals that resonate with their values and offer intrinsic meaning, they are more likely to exhibit hardiness in the face of adversity. Well-being, encompassing both physical and mental aspects of health, plays a vital role in fostering hardiness among Ukrainians. A sense of psychological well-being, characterized by positive emotions, resilience, and a sense of purpose, enables individuals to cope effectively with

stressors and challenges. Moreover, maintaining physical health through proper nutrition, exercise, and rest contributes to overall resilience and hardiness. The formation of hardiness among Ukrainians is intricately linked to their self-attitude, encompassing self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-compassion. Individuals with a positive self-attitude perceive themselves as capable and worthy, empowering them to confront difficulties with confidence and perseverance. Cultivating self-compassion fosters hardiness by promoting self-kindness and understanding, thereby mitigating the impact of setbacks and failures on mental well-being. Autonomy, the capacity for self-governance and independent decision-making, is a fundamental aspect of hardiness formation among Ukrainians.

The ability to assert autonomy in various domains of life empowers individuals to navigate challenges and setbacks autonomously, fostering a sense of control and mastery over their circumstances. Autonomy enables Ukrainians to adapt flexibly to changing environments and assert agency in pursuing their goals and aspirations.

Therefore, it is very important to study hardiness as a factor contributing to individual resilience. This quality allows people to effectively accept various societal challenges, navigate difficult circumstances, and use their abilities effectively in different life scenarios (Serdiuk, Danyliuk, Chykhantsova, 2019).

### Conclusion:

The article presents the results of an empirical study of the levels of Ukrainians' hardiness and analyzes its main structural components. We conclude that the study of the phenomenon of hardiness, ways and means of its formation and development is important for the individual in many life events. It should be noted that it is important to distinguish the place and role of each component of hardiness, which in themselves can be considered as integral properties of the individual and ensure the successful formation and development of hardiness in difficult life situations.

It has been found that hardiness has not significant relationship with a person's age, i.e., the development of hardiness can occur throughout life, starting in childhood, with the help of flourishing personal resources. According to the level of hardiness, 43.6% of the participants had a high level, 35.5% of the participants had an average level, and 20.9% of the participants had a low level. No correlations between hardiness and gender were found in our study. Thus, based on the results obtained, we can conclude that the level of hardiness of Ukrainians affects life activity, especially in difficult situations. The peculiarities of developing hardiness and maintaining the optimal level of this resource for personal effectiveness are related to the person's worldview, goals, self-acceptance, mental health, and activities. The formation of hardiness among

Ukrainians is influenced by a constellation of personal parameters, including goals, values, meanings, well-being, self-attitude, and autonomy. By aligning goals with personal values, nurturing psychological and physical well-being, fostering a positive self-attitude, and cultivating autonomy, Ukrainians can enhance their hardiness and thrive in the face of adversity. Understanding and harnessing these personal factors are essential for promoting hardiness and fostering individual well-being in Ukrainian society.

It is also important to note that mental health determines a person's hardiness. Taking responsibility for one's mental state, developing emotional resilience, and the ability to effectively solve problems are important components of a successful and happy life. Thus, taking care of your mental health is an important factor in developing hardiness. The prospect of further study of this problem is an empirical study of the structural components of the hardiness of Ukrainians in the face of uncertainty and the development of a program for the development of hardiness in the post-war period.

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