

PROBLEMATIC ASPECTS OF DIAGNOSING MENTAL DISORDERS AMONG MILITARY PERSONNEL OF THE ARMED FORCES OF UKRAINE

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Abstract: The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has resulted in the involvement of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians. The combat zone is characterized by high levels of intensity, tension, and dynamism, placing military personnel under immense psychological stress. Such conditions can lead to exhaustion, which in turn can reduce the effectiveness of activities performed during armed conflict. Additionally, exposure to extreme conditions can result in short- and long-term psychological trauma and mental disorders. The response of military personnel to the stressors present in the combat environment is influenced by the unique circumstances experienced by each individual, as well as by their specific coping mechanisms. The impact of particular stressors on the mental health of servicemen, as well as the potential for the development of psychological trauma as a result of combat experiences, is influenced by a range of factors. These factors include individual psychological and personal characteristics, levels of psychological and professional training for combat missions, the nature and extent of combat motivation, and individual perceptions of the significance of combat within the broader context of their personal and historical experiences. Developing and implementing effective conceptual frameworks for understanding mental disorders and creating reliable diagnostic tools are crucial tasks in the current context. Such tools are necessary to facilitate accurate diagnosis and improve the quality of rehabilitation and socialization for soldiers returning from combat zones and their families. Moreover, effective diagnosis of mental disorders can aid friends and family members in understanding the nature of the problem, identifying the goals and motives behind specific behaviors associated with psychological trauma, and laying the foundation for improving the physical and emotional well-being of military personnel and fostering healthier interpersonal relationships. This article aims to investigate the specific challenges involved in diagnosing mental disorders among individuals serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Drawing on the findings of this study, the article seeks to identify the key problem areas in the diagnosis of mental disorders among military personnel and to propose potential solutions to these challenges. Methodology. During this study, some analytical and bibliographic methods were employed to analyze the existing literature on the diagnosis of mental disorders. Additionally, the study utilized systemic and structural, comparative, logical, and linguistic methods, as well as techniques such as induction, deduction, analysis, information synthesis, abstraction, and idealization to examine, correlate, and process the collected data. Furthermore, the authors of this study conducted an online questionnaire survey to identify key issues related to the challenges associated with diagnosing mental disorders among military personnel. Results. The findings of this study revealed key theoretical aspects related to the diagnosis of mental disorders among individuals serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Additionally, the study gathered input from psychologists, psychotherapists, and military personnel serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine regarding critical issues associated with diagnosing mental disorders among military personnel.

Keywords: Psychological diagnostics, military psychology, psychological trauma, diagnostic methods, mental disorder, problems of diagnosis, mechanisms of psychological traumatization.

1 Introduction

The prevalence of mental disorders among military personnel, often accompanied by psychological trauma, manifests in various forms including acute stress reactions, post-traumatic stress disorder, physical and mental health disorders, chronic psychopathological personality changes, social maladjustment, and antisocial behavior. Given the significant socioeconomic consequences of these disorders for the country, it is imperative to implement and improve not only preventative and rehabilitative measures but also diagnostic measures for early identification and treatment.

Psychophysiological diagnosis of military personnel is a crucial aspect of medical and psychological rehabilitation at all stages. It enables the assessment of the type and severity of mental disorders, as well as the evaluation of important professional

qualities and individual adaptive reserves, which are necessary for determining the individual's fitness for duty or the need for treatment, rehabilitation, and other interventions.

The theoretical part of this study provides a comprehensive overview of the most prevalent scholarly perspectives on the intricacies of diagnosing mental disorders among military personnel.

This survey presents the outcomes of a questionnaire administered to respondents to evaluate the significance of proposed diagnostic issues, identify priority areas requiring attention, and determine patient characteristics that are diagnostically relevant as factors for assessing mental disorders. Additionally, the survey gauges the respondents' perspectives on the strategic direction for the development of the diagnostic sphere.

The research discovered that contemporary challenges in diagnosing mental disorders include insufficient attention given to the victim's physical condition, superficial assessments of patients, and inadequate consideration of all the consequences of psychological trauma.

2 Literature review

When diagnosing the impact of stressors on the health of military personnel, it is common practice for psychologists and medical professionals to utilize various indicators, including blood pressure, heart rate, short questionnaires to assess well-being, and compact psychological tests. However, on-site diagnostic tests have limitations in their applicability for certain methods, thus, they must meet requirements for compactness and high information content, as well as the ability to provide clear information. The ideal way to use them is through computerized methods, both on-site and later in hospitals or centers for medical and psychological rehabilitation, allowing for dynamic monitoring of changes over time (Williamson et al., 2022), (Chu et al., 2018), (Britt et al., 2020a).

Psychophysiological and psychological diagnosis of military personnel is a crucial preventive measure in medical and psychological rehabilitation. Such diagnostic measures aid in determining the fitness for further service, as well as the need for rehabilitation, treatment, and psycho-prophylaxis (Finnegan & Randles, 2022), (Campbell-Sills, Sun & Kessler, 2023), (Ibrahim et al., 2022).

Effective diagnostics enables the early identification of military personnel with reduced adaptive potential and a high likelihood of experiencing severe and early symptoms of psychological trauma and its subsequent consequences. It also enables the development of personalized tactics and preventive and recovery methods for each evaluated individual (Alonso et al., 2018), (Dabovich, Elliott & McFarlane, 2021), (Forbes et al., 2019).

The findings from the diagnosis of the mental state of military service professionals can be utilized to evaluate the prevalence and patterns of health disorders within this demographic. Additionally, these results can contribute to the examination of the quality of medical care provided to military personnel, the optimization of preventative measures for mental illnesses, and the improvement of treatment approaches for patients (Leightley et al., 2018; Wickersham et al., 2019).

Due to the elevated risks inherent in their professional responsibilities, servicemen and women are susceptible to experiencing physical and psychological ailments, primarily attributed to the development of mental health issues arising from traumatic events (Britt, 2020b).

When investigating psycho-trauma in military personnel, researchers consider not only physiological symptoms but also the dynamic nature of mental health disorders, which enables them to better predict the course of combat stress and mitigate its adverse effects. Scientists categorize military personnel with signs of psychological trauma into three groups:

- with an active tendency to overcome stress;
- with a prolonged stress reaction;
- self-destructive behavior (destructive reactions, alcohol addiction, etc.) (Fikretoglu et al., 2022), (Adler et al., 2020), (Boulos & Fikretoglu, 2018).

In the diagnostic process of mental trauma, psychotherapists pay particular attention to the long-term changes in the structure of the individual's personality, the manifestation of neurotic reactions, and neuroses that were diagnosed during the acute phase of the mental disorder. These factors are indicative of a decline in the primary indicators of the quality of life of military personnel (Britt et al., 2020b), (Rhead et al., 2020).

Given the limited possibilities for research and the absence of an effective system for psycho-diagnostics of mental disorders among military personnel, the level of study on this issue is

considered insufficient and requires a focused and meaningful investigation (Cox, Martinez & Southam-Gerow, 2019), (Hom, Bowers & Björgvinsson, 2021).

3 Aims

The present study aimed to investigate the perspectives of psychologists, psychotherapists, and military personnel of the Armed Forces of Ukraine regarding the diagnosis of mental disorders among serving personnel.

The research methods employed in the study were grounded in widely accepted approaches to psychological assessment, involving interviews and observations.

4 Methods and materials

In April 2023, a pragmatic investigation of contemporary trends regarding the diagnosis of mental disorders in military personnel was carried out. This study encompassed interviews with 192 private psychologists and psychotherapists, alongside 94 active military personnel stationed in the Sumy, Chernihiv, Cherkasy, Poltava, Rivne, Zhytomyr, and Kyiv regions of Ukraine (Table 1).

Table 1. Characteristics of the research sample

Oblast of Ukraine	Sex		Occupation of the survey participants						In total
			Psychologists		Psychotherapists		Military personnel		
			Age distribution of the research sample						
			Under 30 y.o.	After 30 y.o.	Under 30 y.o.	After 30 y.o.	Under 30 y.o.	After 30 y.o.	
Sumy oblast	M	15	4	1	5	3	1	1	44
	F	29	8	2	9	3	5	2	
Chernihiv oblast	M	16	4	1	4	2	1	4	47
	F	31	8	3	5	4	8	3	
Cherkasy oblast	M	16	4	3	1	1	5	2	58
	F	42	12	0	6	11	9	4	
Poltava oblast	M	25	8	1	2	5	1	8	57
	F	32	8	0	9	1	10	4	
Zhytomyr oblast	M	11	1	1	4	1	1	3	36
	F	25	7	1	5	1	8	3	
Kyiv oblast	M	18	3	4	6	4	1	0	44
	F	26	4	3	8	1	6	4	
In total		286	71	20	64	37	56	38	286

According to Table 1, the majority of the respondents were women under the age of 30, with around a third of them coming from the Cherkasy, Poltava, and Chernihiv regions of Ukraine. The online survey was administered using the Google Forms service.

5 Results

The study aimed to evaluate the types and priority of problems that might arise during the diagnosis of mental disorders in military personnel. To achieve this, various methods were used to diagnose the mental state of servicemen, including the Multilevel Personality Inventory (MPI) "Adaptability-200", the "Scale for Assessing the Level of Reactive (Situational) and Personal Anxiety by C. D. Spielberger - Y. L. Khanin", the Brief Anxiety, Depression, and PTSD Scale, and the Mississippi Posttraumatic Reactions Scale (military version). The survey involved assessing the views of the study participants on certain characteristics of the methods and problematic issues that arose during the study of the mental state of AFU military personnel. The respondents were presented with a list of problems that arose during the diagnosis, and they rated each of them as "Most important," "Important," or "Less Important." Additionally, the

survey sought to establish the respondents' point of view on the priority of tasks for reforming the diagnostic sphere and the degree of influence of social and individual characteristics of patients that are diagnostically important as factors in assessing mental disorders. The survey was conducted with the use of the Google Forms service. The majority of respondents were women under the age of 30, and approximately one-third of them came from the Cherkasy, Poltava, and Chernihiv regions of Ukraine.

The results obtained after the test were analyzed by counting the number of responses provided and calculating the proportion of the total number of responses from all survey participants. This allowed the researchers to determine the frequency of each response and the overall distribution of responses for each question or item in the survey.

During the survey conducted in the context of this study, participants identified primary difficulties encountered during the diagnosis of the mental state of patients. In addition to selecting the type of problematic moment, respondents evaluated the degree of its severity as "Most important," "Important," or "Less important," under the terms of the survey (Figure 1).

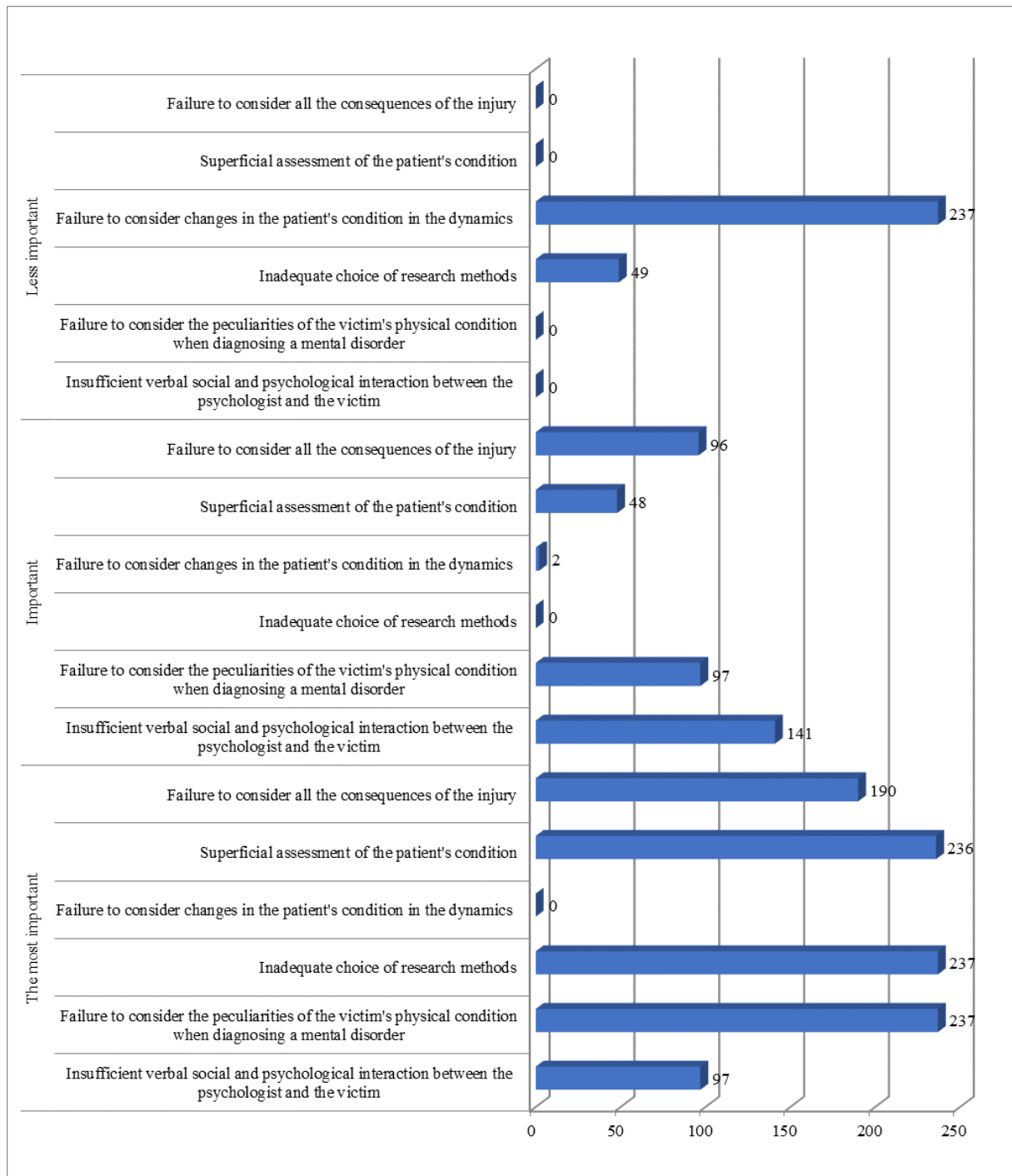


Figure 1. Problems that occurred during the diagnosis of patients' mental state, %.
 Source: compiled by the authors based on Annex 2.

As Figure 1 indicates, the most crucial diagnostic challenges according to the respondents are the following: failure to consider the peculiarities of the victim's physical condition while diagnosing a mental disorder, superficial assessment of the patient's condition, and failure to consider all the consequences of the trauma.

Additionally, the majority of the respondents rated the issue of inadequate verbal social, and psychological interaction between the psychologist and the victim as "of medium importance".

The survey participants identified less important problematic aspects of diagnosis, such as failure to consider the victim's physical condition when diagnosing a mental disorder and inadequate selection of methods.

Furthermore, the survey allowed the participants to identify issues that require attention to optimize the diagnosis of mental disorders in the AFU. The respondents were asked to prioritize these issues as short-term, medium-term, and long-term (Figure 2).

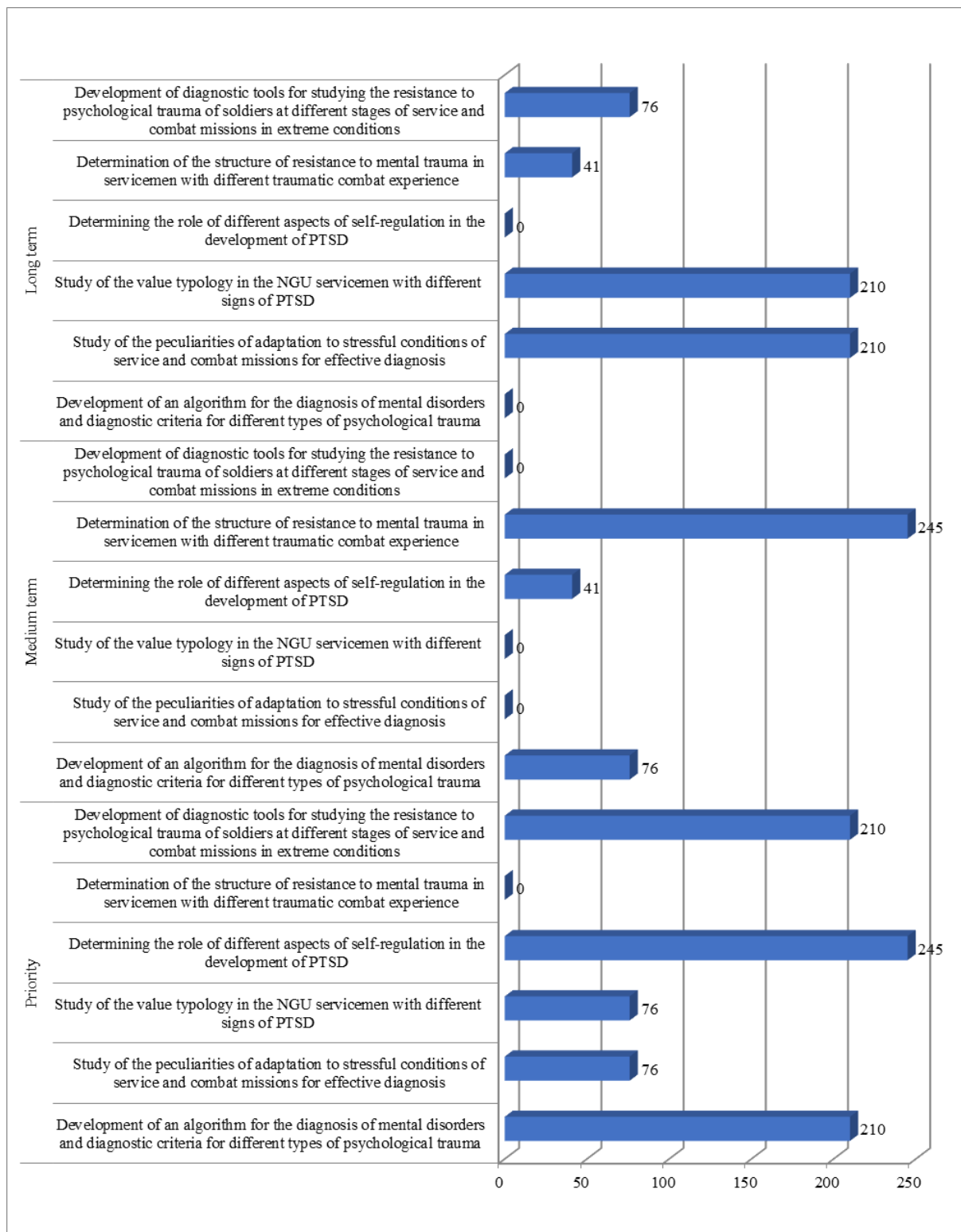


Figure 2. Issues that need to be addressed to optimize the diagnosis of mental disorders among AFU military personnel, %. Source: compiled by the authors based on Annex 2.

The participants indicated that the foremost priorities revolve around specific tasks. One of the tasks is to formulate an algorithm for diagnosing mental disorders. Another task is to establish diagnostic criteria that are specific to various types of psychological trauma. The participants also emphasized the importance of delineating the role played by distinct facets of self-regulation in the progression of post-traumatic stress disorder. Lastly, there is a need to create diagnostic instruments

capable of examining the resilience of soldiers to psychological trauma at different stages of engaging in combat missions within extreme environments.

Certain social and individual characteristics of patients are of great diagnostic importance as factors in assessing the mental disorder of the study participants (Figure 3).

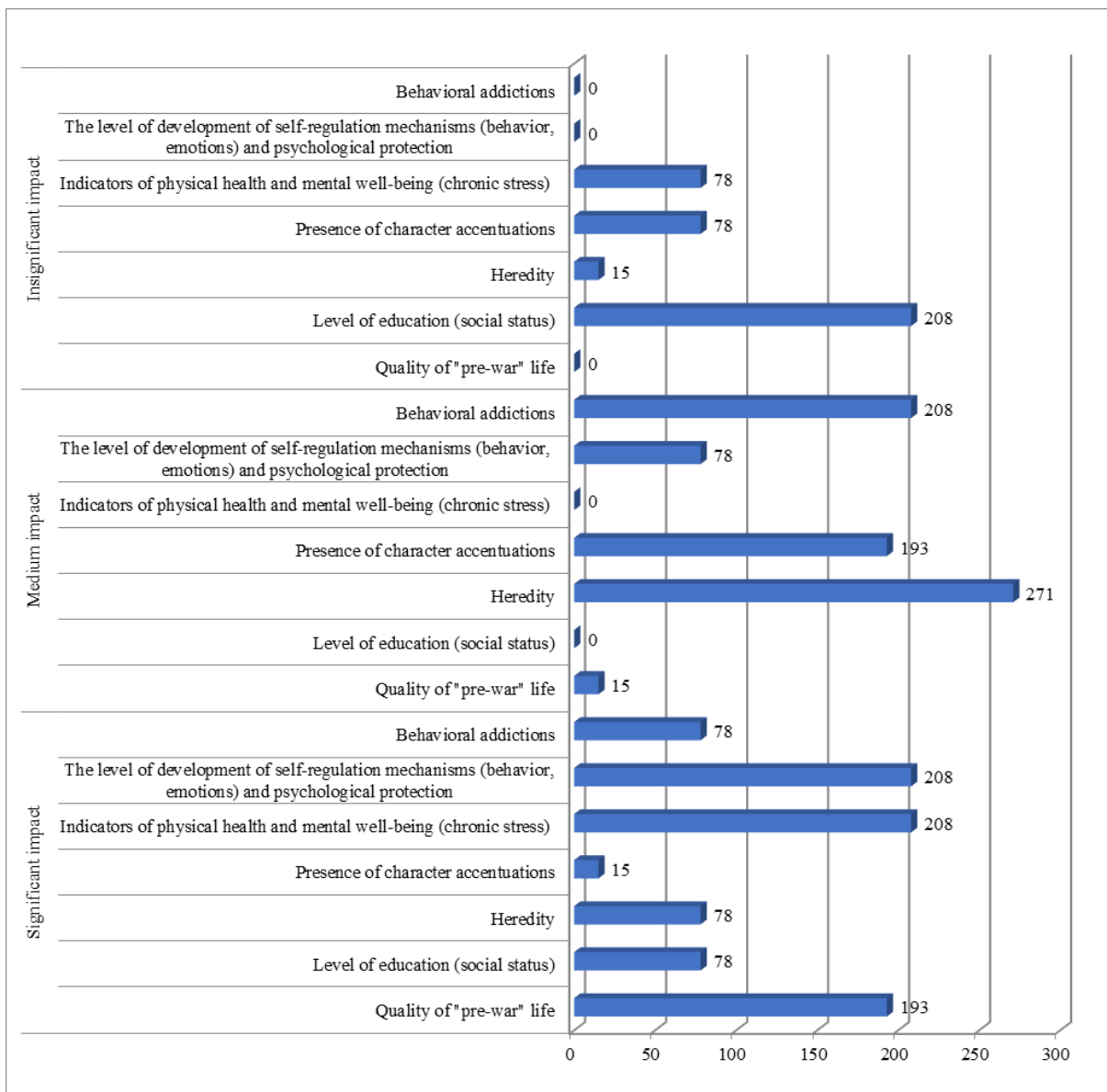


Figure 3. Social and individual characteristics of patients that are diagnostically relevant as factors in the assessment of mental disorder, %. Source: compiled by the authors based on Annex 2.

The present study revealed that individual characteristics of patients play a significant role in the assessment of mental disorders. Specifically, the quality of life before the outbreak of hostilities, the level of self-regulation, and physical health were found to have a considerable impact on the diagnosis of mental disorders. However, the level of education and social status were identified as having a minor effect on the success of diagnosis.

Furthermore, the survey identified the strategic directions that are of utmost importance for the development of the diagnostic sphere, as perceived by the respondents. These directions were deemed essential to optimize the diagnosis of mental disorders among military personnel (Figure 4).

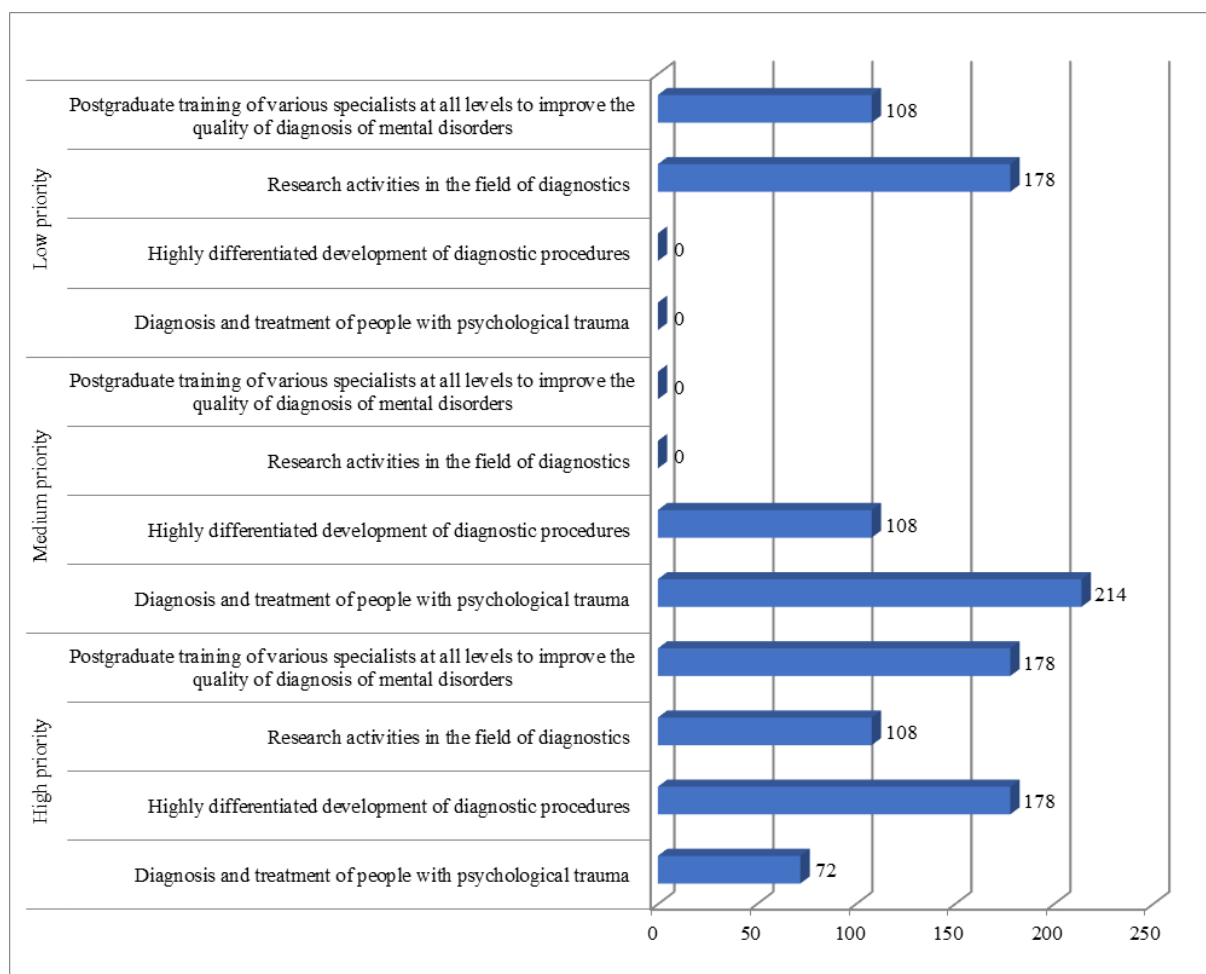


Figure 4. Prioritization of strategic directions for the development of the diagnostic sphere, which would optimize the diagnosis of mental disorders of military personnel, %.

Source: compiled by the authors based on Annex 2.

Upon examination of Figure 4, it is evident that the respondents placed a high degree of importance on two primary strategic directions for the development of the diagnostic sphere: postgraduate training of various specialists at all levels to enhance the quality of diagnosis of mental disorders, and the highly differentiated development of diagnostic procedures.

6 Discussion

Predicting and diagnosing mental disorders in military personnel is a challenging task for military psychologists. To preserve the mental health of military personnel, it is crucial to develop and implement modern preventive, corrective, developmental, rehabilitative, and educational measures, and to integrate them into psychological practice. This requires a systematic and comprehensive approach to psychological support for military personnel, which includes special methods, tools, and actions aimed at strengthening the psychological stability of military specialists and developing their readiness to cope with stressors in the context of military service. Psychological support is provided through group and individual forms of work by specialists designated for this purpose and is closely linked to the medical care system. It complements the medical care system by supporting the maintenance and restoration of mental functions, social activity, and physical resilience that are affected by stress (Leightley et al., 2020), (Stevellink et al., 2018).

Medical and psychological rehabilitation of military personnel is crucial for preserving their mental health. One of the essential measures of rehabilitation is the psychophysiological and psychological diagnosis, which allows for the assessment of various factors such as motivation to work in combat

contingents, professionally important characteristics, and individual adaptation reserves. The diagnosis helps to determine the fitness of the military personnel to perform assigned tasks or the need for rehabilitation, treatment, and psycho-prophylaxis at different stages of their service. This process is crucial in ensuring that military personnel receives the appropriate care and support to maintain their mental well-being (Leightley et al., 2018), (Mark et al., 2019).

The diagnostic process for potential mental disorders enables the identification of military personnel with reduced adaptive potential and a high probability of developing early and severe symptoms of psychological trauma and its long-term consequences. This early identification allows for the development of personalized tactics and methods for prevention and recovery for each individual, taking into account their psychophysiological characteristics. It is widely known that the severity of combat psychological trauma is largely influenced by individual psychophysiological characteristics (Therault et al., 2020), (Heyman et al., 2021).

Scientists have emphasized that due to the complex mechanism of psychological trauma in a combat situation, three distinct phases of extreme stress need to be considered. The first phase is the phase preceding the impact, which involves a sense of threat and fear. The second phase is the exposure phase, during which fear is the dominant emotion. The third phase is the aftereffect phase, which is characterized by the emergence of a range of mental health disorders. The duration of each stage can vary significantly depending on the specific conditions of its occurrence. Only by considering all three stages of psychological trauma development can a specialist make a correct diagnosis

and choose appropriate psycho-correctional tactics (Zuromski et al., 2019), (Boulos & Fikretoglu, 2019).

7 Conclusions

Thus, based on the analysis of the scientific literature and the results of the questionnaire, it is evident that psycho-diagnostic assessment of military personnel is becoming increasingly important for providing timely psychological assistance to soldiers with combat mental injuries, as well as for effective psychological rehabilitation and management of post-traumatic stress disorder. This approach results in a significant improvement in the pace and quality of personal and professional growth, optimization of the mental state, and an increased likelihood of successful professional activity for the military personnel in the future.

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Primary Paper Section: A

Secondary Paper Section: AN