

Psycho-Semantic Reconstruction of Psychological Risk Readiness Perceptions by the National Guard of Ukraine Servicemen

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Abstract: *The article presents the results of a study of the views of military servicemen of the National Guard of Ukraine on psychological readiness to take risks. To achieve the goal of the study, the authors used the psycho-semantic method. The methods of the specialized semantic differential are chosen by the psychological tool of the psycho-semantic method. The semantic differential has been made it possible to evaluate the subjective aspects of the meaning of the concept of "psychological readiness for risk" associated with the meaning, stereotypes, social attitudes.*

Officers represent a soldier who is psychologically prepared for the risk, as follows. This person is trying to achieve a successful result under any circumstances, independent from management or subordinates, relying only on his own strength, showing determination and self-confidence, professionally trained, observant and emotionally stable. Contract servicemen believe that a psychologically prepared for the risk of a soldier can make quick and deliberate decisions, has lots of stamina and strong-willed person, honest and patriotic. This soldier acts deliberately and carefully, not allowing his actions to harm others. Servicemen of military conscription think that a soldier who is psychologically prepared for risk is resistant to extreme factors. He has a principle, he is reliable, outgoing person, always ready to offer the help of his comrades and people around him. This soldier is satisfied with his profession and proud that serves just in the National Guard of Ukraine.

Keywords: *psycho-semantic method; semantic differential; psychological readiness for risk; military personnel; National Guard of Ukraine.*

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1. Introduction

Nowadays psychological science is characterized by the increase in the number of researches that address various peculiarities and manifestations of risk in human life and activities, its understanding, attitude towards it, its admission or avoidance. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to say that there is the lack of psycholinguistic elaboration of the issue of psychological risk readiness in the professional activities of extreme activity profile specialists. There is still no commonly accepted interpretation that would give a holistic view of this phenomenon, its nature and content. The semantics of the concept of “psychological risk readiness” form a whole spectrum in which the most probable, then affective peculiarities are put forward. These interpretations are quite numerous and significantly different.

Analysis of researches and publications on the issue and problem statement. Studying the scientific sources on the selected problem testifies to the high interest of scientists in examining the peculiarities of psychological risk readiness of specialists of risky professions. In particular, attention was paid to the semantics of the notion of “risk” (Berezhnaya et al., 2005; Luhmann, 1993, and others), risk attitude peculiarities and risk readiness, including decision-making under risk conditions (Absaliamova, 2009; Habibulin, 2008, and others), the meaning of “risk” and “psychological risk readiness” in terms of the professional activities of risky professions specialists (Dolhyi et al. 2002; Khlon, 2011, and others).

The enhanced studying of the nature and content of the notion of “psychological risk readiness” resulted in confusion with such categories as “risk appetite”, “risk perception”, “risk assessment”, “riskiness”, “orientation”, “risk acceptance”, “risk awareness” (Zubkov, 2005; Furedi, 1997). The above-mentioned notions are closely related and sometimes not sufficiently differentiated from one another in the contemporary scientific literature. What is common to these risk categories is that the content of each of them entails a person’s own understanding of the possibility of some particular threat to himself/herself.

Therefore, it is important for us to distinguish a separate and unified conceptual and operational content of the notion “psychological risk readiness” when exploring uniformed personnel professional activities characterized by their almost constant presence in risky, dangerous to health and life conditions during which it is necessary to successfully perform service and combat tasks. For example, risk readiness is understood as a

tendency to seek out strong feelings generated by a situation, or as a positive characterological component of “courage”, or such personal qualities as, for example, anxiety, aggressiveness, etc. (Ilin, 2012). T. Kornilova views risk readiness as a property of personal self-regulation, which is manifested by a person when making decisions and choosing strategies for action under uncertainty (Kornilova, 2003). Readiness of an individual for personal risk is interpreted as a dynamic formation, which is determined by the activity of the individual (Petrovskiy, 1992).

The enhanced studying of the semantics of the notion of “psychological risk readiness” by modern scientists allowed making attempts to determine the personal qualities and environmental factors that can influence the formation and maintenance of a normal level of risk psychological readiness in terms of uncertainty activities. Thus, a high level of psychological risk readiness (as a multilevel personality trait) is characterized by a desire for high results, rationality, ability to act in incomplete certainty, responsibility; and a low level is characterized by situational motivation associated with the needs for thrills, impulsiveness, irrationality, irresponsibility (Absaliyeva, 2009). The author points out that the study of risk readiness as a systemic formation made it possible to distinguish structural components characterized by certain personality traits: motivational and personal component (self-confidence, risk acceptance, need for thrills); cognitive component (reflexivity, structural and communicative recognition, field independence); emotional component (general emotionality, uncertainty tolerance, general anxiety); regulatory component (general adaptability, general self-regulation, control).

In turn, O. Vdovichenko states the following: “... personality traits, such as originality of thinking, flexibility of mind, level of anxiety, independent behaviour, determination, extraversion/ introversion, selfishness/ altruism, etc. are important.” (Vdovichenko, 2003).

So, having analyzed the semantics and meaningful content of the notion of “risk readiness”, it became known that it is quite variative one. It is impossible to distinguish individually accepted or agreed interpretation, its psychological conceptual and operational content.

The *goal* of the article is to study the perceptions of the National Guard of Ukraine uniformed personnel about a psychologically risk-ready serviceman, which will allow distinguishing the meaningful content of this notion and distinguishing the component elements of psychological risk readiness.

2. Methods of the Research

A psychosemantic method was used to achieve this goal, which is based on the modelling of meaning systems as structures of representation of experience in consciousness (Artemieva, 1999; Stoklasa et al., 2018).

The technique of specialized denotative semantic differential, which is a modified procedure of subjective multidimensional scaling was selected as the psychological instrument of psychosemantic method using (Zasiekina & Zasiakin, 2008). It was used to assess the subjective aspect of the meanings of the notion of “psychological risk readiness”, which are associated with the content, stereotypes, social attitudes and other structured and not well realised forms of generalization (Petrenko, 2005; Serkin, 2008).

Methodology of Research

The procedure of the research, actually the development of specialized semantic differential, was conducted in six stages:

1. Review, theoretical description and definition of relevant notions for the development of differentiation instrumentarium.

2. Specification of the first set of notions with the help of an expert group.

3. Definition of the second set of notions and refinement of already compiled one in the previous stage.

4. Processing of selected lists of signs and construction of a working variant of semantic differential.

5. Specification of key qualities through expert assessment.

6. Formation of the final version of the specialized semantic differential and summarizing the obtained results of perceptions by different categories of servicemen of the National Guard of Ukraine (NGU) - the specification of peculiarities in a serviceman personality understanding who is ready to take risks in the line of duty.

The research was conducted with the participation of servicemen of different military units of the NGU. All respondents had experience of being in stressful, health- and life-threatening conditions (participation in public order maintenance during the 2004 presidential election, cessation of mass riots in Kyiv and Kharkiv in November 2013 - February 2014, anti-terrorist operation in the east of the country, etc.). Such tasks are characterized by specific features: extremity and transience; the presence of armed resistance; work with people who are in an unbalanced mental state; constant real threat to health and life, lack or insufficiency of adequate logistical support, etc. (Dubiaha, 2014; Prykhodko, 2008). These realities have in some way

influenced the contemporary understanding of high-risk situations and the NGU servicemen's readiness to act in the face of uncertainty.

The analysis was based on the distribution of respondents into equal groups by the servicemen categories: commissioned officers, contract servicemen and conscripts. Thus, the second stage of the research involved the NGU servicemen in the age from 20 to 44 years old according to different categories (commissioned officers and contract servicemen with different length of service, as well as senior classmen of the National Academy of the NGU). The total number of respondents made 91 persons, all male respondents.

At the third stage, experts' ideas about the concept of "psychological risk preparedness" were clarified. At the fourth stage, the selected features were processed and a working version of the semantic differential of the studied concept was constructed.

The fifth stage of the research envisaged the processing of the list of qualities by 79 experts (16 psychologists from the NGU, 13 scientists and higher-education teaching personnel of the National Academy of NGU and other higher educational institutions of Ukraine, 11 classmen of the graduate military course, 12 masters and 27 graduate class cadets of the National Academy of NGU). The selection of experts was conducted taking into account the following criteria: success of professional activities in combination with authority in the environment of teammates; availability of psychological (legal, military) education; professional experience in the profession; availability of a scientific degree and academic title; experience in different extreme situations.

The experts were asked to identify the qualities that are important to the notion of "psychological risk readiness". To do this, each of the 89 characteristics had to be assessed on a ten-point scale.

The sixth stage envisaged the involvement of 34 commissioned officers, 35 contract servicemen, and 37 conscripts. The total sample is 106 respondents. The selected categories are slightly different in terms of length of service: the length of service of a greater percentage of commissioned officers (41.2%) is from 6 to 10 years, the length of service of 48.6% of contract servicemen is up to 5 years, the length of service conscripts is absent as they have been in the service for 18 months, but due to the difficult situation in the east, their demobilization has been delayed.

The respondents were to determine the most inherent NGU serviceman risk-ready characteristics during the sixth stage of the research. To do this, they were required to give one rating to each of the 35 presented characteristics and their opposite features using seven-point-scale. As a

result, the higher the rating was given, the less, according to the investigators, the quality is expressed by the risk-ready serviceman.

3. Results of Research/Findings.

A review, theoretical description and definition of relevant notions for the development of differentiation instrumentarium were conducted during the first stage of the research. With this in mind, and in order to obtain the most complete set of characteristics of the notion under study and its content, we have resorted to the available forms of description of different levels of generalization: from general definitions of risk in its various types (financial, entrepreneurial, psychological, military, social, legal, political, professional, etc.) to the description of its specific manifestations, as well as the definition of synonymous notions, such as “threat”, “danger”, “extreme situations”, “state of emergency”, “uncertainty”, “accident” and others. Scientific literature on theoretical analysis of readiness for risk, riskiness, risk perception, risk inclination, decision making under high-risk conditions, etc. was also included in the terminological descriptions.

In the second stage in order to clarify and formulate the content of the notion of the NGU servicemen “psychological risk readiness” we selected and used the projective method of unfinished sentences of the corresponding content filling i.e. the experts had to finish 16 sentences concerning different aspects of “psychological risk readiness” constituting this category in its entirety. It was suggested to provide one’s own definition of the notion of “risk”, readiness to act under health- or life-threatening situations, to identify the resources needed to form a psychological risk readiness and the factors that may lead to unwillingness to act under high-risk conditions, and to point out the basic personal and professional qualities of a serviceman ready to act under high-risk conditions, etc. Here are some incomplete sentences: “Risk for me is...”, “My readiness to risk depends on...”, “My confidence under the high-risk situation disappears when...”, “Performing tasks under high-risk conditions requires me...”, “For me, the risk is justified if ...” and others.

It is determined that the readiness to risk increases with the emergence of a real threat to life or health and depends on personal qualities such as prudence, determination, courage, confidence and self-control. Factors affecting the servicemen readiness to act under high-risk conditions include physical and mental health; causes of high-risk situation; justification of risk; possible negative consequences, etc. Thus, based on the experts’ answers, we were able to determine a set of adjectives, which were more

often used to characterize the notion under study. They formed a significant part of the ultimately compiled semantic differential technique.

The third stage of the research envisaged the determination of the second set of notions and elaboration of already compiled one at the previous stage based on the analysis of scientific papers and publications on the subject of the research, questionnaires of similar content, psychological dictionaries, etc.

The fourth stage is the processing of selected lists of traits (selection of acceptably best synonyms and their antonyms; structuring according to basic spheres of personality) and construction of a working variant of the semantic differential. All lists of descriptors, complementary to each other, made a significant contribution to creating an integral image of the notion under study. Therefore, in order to establish the scope and content of the notion, we selected 89 word-terms that made up a working version of the author's methodology.

The goal of the research during the fifth stage was to reduce the number of notions, to exclude synonyms and "insignificant" units, as well as to design the final version of the specialized semantic differential. The frequency of use of a particular trait (quality) in the expert group was calculated based on the obtained data. The high frequency testified to the importance (not coincidence) of perceptions of this trait in the minds of experts. This made it possible to select the qualities most suitable to describing the personality of a serviceman psychologically ready for risk, and to determine the most important characteristics for such readiness.

The sixth stage made it possible to develop a final version, which identified 35 scales (qualities and their antonyms), which were equally distributed in the following areas of personality: need-motivational, emotional-volitional, cognitive-educational, moral, existential-living, activity-practical and interpersonal-social (Shevandrin, 2010).

Thus, a number of differences between different categories of the NGU servicemen regarding the meaningful content of the studied notion were identified by analysing the results of the research, taking into account average norms, standard deviations and statistical significance. The results obtained are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Assessment of the personal characteristics of a risk-ready serviceman of the National Guard of Ukraine (in points)

No	Scale	Officers, n=34 (group 1)	Contract servicemen, n=35 (group 2)	Conscript, n=37 (group 3)	Significance of differences		
					t 1,2	t 1,3	t 2,3
1	Proud of one's profession	2.79±1.12	2.77±0.88	2.78±1.29	0.09	0.04	0.05
2	Presence of leadership skills	2.65±0.92	3.09±1.20	3.08±1.26	1.71*	1.67*	0.02
3	Motivation	2.38±0.85	2.60±1.01	3.08±0.86	0.97	3.43***	2.17**
4	Adherence to principles	2.29±1.38	2.66±1.03	2.70±1.31	1.24	1.28	0.17
5	Material dependence	2.71±1.36	2.60±0.88	3.43±1.71	0.38	1.99**	2.62**
6	Endurance	2.18±0.97	2.57±0.95	2.76±0.98	1.71*	2.50**	0.81
7	Resoluteness	2.29±1.03	2.80±1.05	3.05±1.22	2.02**	2.84***	0.95
8	Emotional resilience	2.24±0.82	2.83±1.18	3.27±1.37	2.44**	3.91***	1.47
9	Courage	2.35±0.92	2.77±1.09	2.95±1.25	1.73*	2.29**	0.63
10	Strong-will	2.38±0.95	2.51±1.10	2.68±1.03	0.53	1.25	0.64
11	Quick in decisions	2.50±0.93	2.57±1.15	3.16±1.34	0.29	2.43**	2.01**
12	Power of observation	2.27±0.99	3.17±1.04	2.89±1.39	3.69***	2.20**	0.97
13	Quick-wit- tedness	2.12±0.95	2.49±0.98	2.89±1.17	1.59	3.07***	1.59
14	Reasonableness	2.77±1.21	2.69±0.96	2.97±1.30	0.30	0.69	1.07
15	Professional competence	2.71±0.94	2.60±1.17	3.11±1.31	0.42	1.49	1.74*
16	Reliability	2.12±0.98	2.82±1.20	2.57±1.07	2.70***	1.85**	0.97
17	Public spirit	2.88±1.34	2.51±1.25	3.43±1.74	1.18	1.49	2.58**
18	Honesty	2.24±0.99	2.49±0.95	3.11±1.33	1.07	3.16***	2.29**
19	Law abidance	2.50±1.05	2.83±1.10	3.11±1.45	1.27	2.04	0.93
20	Social responsiveness	2.41±0.78	2.86±1.09	3.16±1.37	1.96*	2.87***	1.05
21	Self confidence	2.29±1.06	2.74±0.98	3.16±1.21	1.82*	3.22***	1.66*
22	Purposefulness	2.29±0.97	2.80±1.02	2.92±1.38	2.11**	2.22**	0.42
23	Wide-awakeness	2.94±1.72	2.51±0.82	3.38±1.52	1.31	1.13	3.03***
24	Independent behaviour	2.53±1.16	3.09±1.12	3.08±1.40	2.02**	1.81*	0.02
25	Altruism	3.12±0.98	2.89±1.26	3.73±1.56	0.86	2.00**	2.54**

26	Orderliness	2.79±1.25	3.29±1.43	3.49±1.64	1.52	2.01**	0.55
27	Discipline state	2.68±0.95	3.23±1.48	3.14±1.42	1.86*	1.62	0.27
28	Responsibility	2.29±1.03	3.03±1.22	3.08±1.01	2.69***	3.24***	0.19
29	Initiativity	2.32±0.81	2.91±0.92	3.32±1.38	2.84***	3.78***	1.49
30	Farsightedness	2.38±0.99	2.71±0.96	3.32±1.51	1.42	3.14***	2.06**
31	Confidence	3.06±1.69	3.03±1.29	3.51±1.66	0.08	1.14	1.39
32	Companionship	2.56±1.26	2.62±1.22	2.62±1.48	0.23	0.19	0.02
33	Resect of other's interests	2.88±1.47	2.57±0.88	3.11±1.49	1.06	0.64	1.87*
34	Credibility	2.50±0.96	2.97±0.99	3.22±1.29	2.01	2.66***	0.91
35	Outwardness	2.74±1.31	2.60±0.98	3.49±1.48	0.49	2.27**	3.01***

Note: *p ≤ 0.01; ** p ≤ 0.05; *** p ≤ 0.1

Based on the above data, commissioned officers perceive a risk-ready serviceman as such who is characterized by the following basic personal characteristics: “adherence to principles” related to the need-motivational sphere; “endurance”, “resoluteness” and “emotional resilience” (emotional-volitional sphere); “power of observation” and “quick-wittedness” (cognitive-educational sphere); “reliability” and “honesty” (moral sphere); “self-confidence” and “purposefulness” (existentially-living), as well as such trait of activity-practical sphere as “responsibility”. Only the qualities characterizing the interpersonal-social sphere were not given a high rating by this category of servicemen.

It should be noted, and this applies to all categories of respondents, that commissioned officers did not rate any quality with close rating to the opposite one according to the meaning of the personality trait content. Such results may indicate high demands to the personality of the NGU serviceman, that is, in their opinion, such person should be comprehensively developed, professionally trained, emotionally stable, socially active in risky conditions, etc.

Commissioned officers' perceptions of a risk-ready serviceman do not over-express such qualities as “wide-awakeness”, “altruism”, “public spirit”, “confidence” and “resect of other's interests”.

In turn, risk-ready contract servicemen being a representative of the NGU has such qualities as the ability to “strong-willed” effort and “endurance” (emotional-volitional sphere); “quick-wit-tedness” and “quick in decisions” (cognitive-educational), “honesty” and “public spirit” (moral), “resect of other's interests” (interpersonal-social), “wide-awakeness” (existential-living). It should be noted that the lowest estimates of the contract servicemen's qualities are given to the qualities that characterize the need-motivational and activity-practical spheres of personality.

Conscripts perceive a risk-ready serviceman, above all, as a serviceman with the following characteristics as “adherence to principles” and “satisfied with his profession” (need-motivational sphere), “reliability” (moral), “endurance” and “strong-willed” (emotional-volitional) and “companionship” (interpersonal-social). Respondents in this category rated the qualities that characterize the activity-practical and cognitive-educational spheres somewhat lower. Such results are due to the fact that because of their small military experience and possibly unwillingness to associate their professional careers with the NGU, the conscripts cannot objectively and differentially assess the qualities inherent in a risk-ready serviceman.

According to Table 1, the descriptions of the NGU risk-ready representative differ somewhat concerning the commissioned officers and contract servicemen. The respondents of these groups revealed statistical differences in the positions of “leadership skills”, “discipline state” ($p \leq 0.01$ in both cases), “independent behaviour” ($p \leq 0.05$), “responsibility”, “initiative”, “reliability” ($p \leq 0.1$ in all specified positions). Unlike the contractors, the commissioned officers believe that these qualities are more inherent in a risk-ready serviceman. The results obtained reflect, to a certain extent, the experience of contract servicemen in situations of uncertainty, who are more inherent in acting on orders and according to an early-drafted action plan, if any. In addition, under threatening critical circumstances, they try not to take responsibility for what is happening, and avoid responsibility for their subordinates.

Statistically significant differences between the estimates of contract servicemen and commissioned officers were found in the following qualities: “self-confidence”, “endurance” ($p \leq 0.01$ in all cases), “purposefulness”, “emotional resilience”, “resoluteness” (at the level of $p \leq 0.05$), as well as “power of observation” and “courage” (differences at the level of $p \leq 0.1$ on the specified scales). The identified personal qualities of a risk-ready serviceman are significantly higher ranked by the commissioned officers than by the contract servicemen.

The contract servicemen and commissioned officers differ significantly in the following assessments of personality traits related to the need-motivational sphere: “material dependence” (at the level of $p \leq 0.05$) and “motivation” ($p \leq 0.1$). The commissioned officers gave greater importance to personal traits, as in the case of differences in qualities that characterize the emotional-volitional sphere: “endurance” (at the level of $p \leq 0.05$), “emotional resilience”, “resoluteness”, “courage” ($p \leq 0.1$ in all identified cases).

Since the commissioned officers have much more responsibility and they need to make decisions that the lives of all subordinates sometimes depend on, they rated such qualities as “independent behaviour” ($p \leq 0.01$), “altruism”, “purposefulness”, “power of observation”, the ability of “quick decisions” ($p \leq 0.05$ in all specified cases), “quick-wittedness”, “self-confidence” ($p \leq 0.1$ in both cases) significantly higher than the conscripts.

There were also statistically significant differences between perceptions of the commissioned officers and the conscripts on such scales as “reliability” ($p \leq 0.05$), “social responsiveness”, “honesty” ($p \leq 0.1$ in both specified cases). These qualities of the moral sphere are the defining characteristics of the NGU risk-ready serviceman for the commissioned officers, in comparison to the conscripts.

The certain rating of the qualities of the activity-practical sphere is a reflection of the servicemen’s attitude towards their own service as a professional activity, demonstration of their abilities, skills and habits in the conditions of performing their professional tasks in threatening, risky and dangerous situations. Thus, the conscripts rated such positions as “orderliness” ($p \leq 0.05$), “farsightedness”, “initiative”, “responsibility” ($p \leq 0.1$ in all specified cases) slightly lower than the commissioned officers. Such results may indicate that, according to the conscripts, psychological risk readiness is defined as some situational characteristic of a person that does not require any particular in-depth training, so the characteristics of these spheres of personality are less significant for a risk-ready serviceman.

Let us now turn to the differences between the assessments provided by the contract servicemen and the conscripts. Indeed, the contract servicemen, somewhat more than the conscripts, perceive a risk-ready serviceman as financially secure individual ($p \leq 0.05$). It turns out that it will be easier for the contract servicemen to be at risk, knowing that their efforts will be worthy of a material reward. In addition, the results of the “altruism” scale (2.89 ± 1.26 - not too high indicator compared to other assessments in this group) indicate that, according to the contract servicemen’s perception, a risk-ready serviceman will not risk his own life disinterestedly. Among other things the contract servicemen, compared to the conscripts, more believe that the NGU representative should be motivated to act under high-risk circumstances in order not to be frustrated (at the level of $p \leq 0.05$).

In addition, the contract servicemen, unlike the conscripts, perceive a risk-ready serviceman as a person with such traits as ‘public spirit’, “honesty”, “altruism”, “farsightedness” (at the level of $p \leq 0.05$), more of “wide-awakeness” than riskiness ($p \leq 0.1$), “outwardness” ($p \leq 0.1$).

4. Conclusions.

Through the psychosemantic method, it became possible to research and reconstruct (identify, describe and model) the structures of subjective experience (systems of meaning and content) in relation to the notion of a serviceman “psychological risk readiness”.

Certain features in relation to the different categories of servicemen concerning understanding the identity of a serviceman who is ready to take risks in the line of their duties have been specified. In the officers’ perceptions, such person tries to achieve a positive and successful outcome under all circumstances, is commander or subordinates independent, counts solely upon his forces, is determined and confident, many-sided personality, professionally trained, observant and emotionally resilient.

The contract servicemen highly assess the ability of a risk-ready serviceman to make quick and deliberate decisions without paying attention to the high hazard of risky situations. Under extreme circumstances, such a serviceman will act more deliberately and cautiously, trying not to harm others.

The conscripts perceive a risk-ready NGU representative as resilient to emotional factors, while being able to control and restrain emotions, cautious but ready to take risks when necessary, to come to the rescue of comrades and other people. The conscripts also consider that pride in belonging to the NGU ranks is important.

The respondents’ perceptions of a risk-ready serviceman are influenced by their professional training, length of service and past personal experience under high-risk conditions, as well as their past risky activities, ability to objectively assess high-risk situations, current needs and motivation for risky activities, etc.

Further study of the problem of servicemen psychological readiness for risk will allow to increase efficiency of professional activities of the NGU personnel under health- and life-threatening conditions.

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