

UDC 159.923:316.6:159.944



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## **THEORETICAL MODEL OF PROFESSIONAL DEFORMATION AMONG MILITARY PSYCHOLOGIST OF THE NATIONAL GUARD OF UKRAINE UNDER MARTIAL LAW**

*The paper examines the differentiation between the concepts of professional deformation and professional burnout and substantiates the causes of terminological discrepancies between Ukrainian and foreign scholarly traditions. An authorial model of the professional deformation of military psychologists is proposed.*

**Keywords:** professional deformation, professional burnout, positive professional development, military psychologist, theoretical model of professional deformation.

**Statement of the problem.** Professional activity constitutes an integral part of human life and a key factor shaping individual development. It determines not only the mode of self-realization but also affects psychological well-being, social interaction, and personal life strategies [3]. In the case of military psychologists, this influence is intensified by the strict demands of military service, the specifics of working with service members in combat zones, secondary traumatization, and compassion fatigue, all of which deepen the interrelation between the professional environment and transformations in the specialist's personality.

The professional activity of military psychologists of the National Guard of Ukraine under wartime conditions combines intense emotional load, moral dilemmas, and prolonged work under resource constraints. Such circumstances increase the likelihood of forming stable negative changes in the professional personality, which in the Ukrainian scholarly tradition are conceptualized as professional deformation, whereas international approaches predominantly describe them through validated constructs of professional burnout, compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, and vicarious trauma.

Comprehensive studies on the professional deformation of military psychologists in Ukrainian academic discourse remain absent. At the same time, global scientific evidence indicates that personal difficulties experienced by mental health

professionals inevitably affect their professional functioning and the quality of psychological assistance delivered, which underscores the relevance of addressing this issue.

### **Analysis of recent research and publications.**

The most comprehensive studies of professional deformation in Ukrainian scholarship were conducted by Professor V. S. Medvediev, who examined this phenomenon among employees of internal affairs agencies [9], and by Academician Z. R. Kisil, who investigated professional deformation among personnel of the National Police of Ukraine [5]. In Ukraine, professional deformation has predominantly been conceptualized as a negative phenomenon accompanying the careers of law enforcement officers. Its manifestations were addressed by such scholars as S. O. Larionov, P. V. Makarenko, and L. M. Zakharenko, as well as by D. V. Shvets and co-authors [8, 9, 12]. Ukrainian researchers generally concur that professional deformation is more characteristic of specialists in the so-called "helping professions", including medical workers, whose psychological aspects of deformational changes were described by L. F. Verbytska and I. M. Ovdiyenko [3], and psychologists, as reflected in the works of Yu. M. Chemodurova [11].

Significantly more attention in Ukrainian science has been devoted to the phenomenon of professional burnout among specialists working in the "human-to-human" domain. O. M. Borysiuk and M. V. Fostiak, for instance, studied the development of professional burnout syndrome

among employees of the National Police of Ukraine [1]. Researcher V. I. Bosko conducted a theoretical and empirical analysis of emotional burnout among psychologists in the security and defense sector [2]. L. Konyayeva and O. Hurovych examined emotional burnout among counseling psychologists [6], while A. E. Meloyan and Ye. V. Likarchuk focused on the role of vicarious (secondary) trauma and depression among psychologists working in the context of armed conflicts [10]. International studies also frequently address burnout among physicians and healthcare workers, as reflected in the works of E. A. Apaydin, D. Deriglazov, V. Olapeju, and others [13, 15, 17]. The scholar N. A. Sayer and co-authors demonstrated that therapist burnout has a negative effect on the effectiveness of psychotherapeutic care (only 28.3 % of patients treated by therapists experiencing burnout showed significant improvement, compared to 36.8 % among those treated by therapists without burnout) [19]. K. Zivin and colleagues found that high levels of burnout among psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers adversely affect their subjective perception of the quality of care provided to veterans [20].

Despite the extensive focus on burnout, both in Ukraine and internationally, there remains a lack of research addressing stable negative personality changes – such as the deformation of military psychologists resulting from the performance of professional duties during wartime. This gap represents a notable omission in current scientific knowledge.

**The purpose of the article** is to propose a theoretical model of professional deformation of a military psychologist of the National Guard of Ukraine under wartime conditions.

Research objectives:

- 1) to theoretically differentiate the concepts of professional deformation and professional burnout;
- 2) to outline the causes of terminological discrepancies between Ukrainian and international scholarly traditions.

**Summary of the main material.** In foreign scientific literature, the concept of *professional deformation* is virtually absent. International research on professional risks among psychologists focuses on the categories of *burnout* (emotional or occupational), *compassion fatigue*, *secondary traumatic stress*, and *vicarious trauma* [10, 16]. These phenomena have clearly defined operational content, are studied within the evidence-based

paradigm, and are characterized by the extensive use of standardized measurement tools (e.g., Maslach Burnout Inventory, ProQOL). Consequently, English-language studies emphasize processes and states that arise as a result of chronic stress in helping professions [14, 15, 18].

It is important to note that the majority of foreign studies on occupational exhaustion and related phenomena among mental health professionals concern civilian occupations, while systematized research specifically addressing military psychologists remains significantly limited. Publications that examine the military context most often describe specialists providing assistance to veterans or working within the military medical system, primarily in the United States. Authors of review and analytical works emphasize the necessity of long-term and mixed research designs that adequately account for the extremity of combat conditions, the multilayered hierarchy of military subordination, and the multi-role nature of military psychologists' work [13, 17, 19, 20].

In contrast, Ukrainian scholarship continues to employ the concept of *professional deformation*. This term emerged during the Soviet period and became established within occupational psychology, pedagogy, jurisprudence, and military psychology. It carries a normative and preventive meaning, emphasizing undesirable personality changes that occur under the influence of the specific demands of professional activity, such as formalism, authoritarianism, emotional insensitivity, and reduced empathy [4, 11]. Unlike burnout, which is primarily understood as a functional and potentially reversible state, deformation describes stable personal transformations that gradually become embedded within professional identity.

One of the reasons for the terminological divergence is the isolation of Ukrainian scholarship from the global scientific community during the Soviet period. In the post-Soviet – and later Ukrainian – academic tradition, a normative approach has been preserved, in which the profession is understood as a system of values and norms, and deviations from these are interpreted as a threat to the effectiveness of professional activity. In contrast, Western science focuses on clinically verified phenomena that are subject to empirical diagnosis; therefore, no universal analogue of the concept of *professional deformation* exists in that

context. *Burnout* has a narrower yet clearly validated definition, whereas *deformation* encompasses a broader spectrum of personality shifts [2, 12].

Contemporary Ukrainian studies confirm that burnout is a dynamic process (with the phases of tension, resistance, and exhaustion according to V. Boiko) [1], whereas deformation is the result of the cumulative impact of professional factors, leading to long-term personality changes [4, 12]. Thus, these two phenomena can be regarded as related but not identical: burnout represents a process and a state, whereas deformation reflects an outcome and a transformation of personality.

The absence of the concept of *professional deformation* in Western literature is explained by its orientation toward empirically validated clinical constructs. At the same time, the preservation of this concept in Ukrainian psychological science reflects a desire to account for not only temporary states of exhaustion but also deep-seated personality changes that create risks of professional and moral distortion. Such a duality of approaches enables the integration of validated international models of burnout with the Ukrainian tradition of analyzing professional deformation – a task of particular relevance for psychologists operating under wartime conditions.

In Ukrainian scholarship, professional deformation is described as a set of specific, predominantly negative, personality changes that arise under the influence of the conditions and content of professional activity. It represents an undesirable outcome of professional development, manifesting itself in the transformation of traits, attitudes, communication styles, and behavioral patterns [8]. Methodological guidelines of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine emphasize precisely this complex, cumulative nature of deformation [9].

Emotional or occupational burnout is a phenomenon closer in its dynamics yet narrower in scope, associated with chronic professional stress. In contemporary Ukrainian publications, it is most commonly assessed using the MBI questionnaire (C. Maslach) and the methodology developed by V. Boiko [6].

Military and professional activity within the National Guard of Ukraine under martial law involves strictly regulated duties, the necessity of maintaining a high level of discipline, and the readiness to withstand extreme workloads [7]. Legislative regulations – particularly the Law "On

the National Guard of Ukraine" and relevant normative documents of the Armed Forces of Ukraine – define the key requirements for military service, conditions of social protection, and directions of psychological support. However, under the conditions of exhausting combat operations, a range of socio-psychological factors becomes salient, potentially provoking negative personality transformations. An analysis of contemporary scientific sources demonstrates that the combination of external factors (social interactions within the unit, challenging service conditions, extreme situations) and internal factors (psychological defense mechanisms, adaptation strategies) contributes to the formation of stable personality changes among service members, including military psychologists.

According to the research of V. Medvediev, the phenomenon of professional deformation is a multidimensional construct that integrates internal (individual-psychological) and organizational-social determinants. The scholar argues that the most characteristic signs of deformation include biased attitudes toward the objects of professional activity, subjective interpretation of normative requirements, "coarsening" of personality, the transfer of formalized communication styles into private life, and profound changes in self-esteem [9].

Zoriana Kisil, in her studies, emphasizes the multifactorial nature of professional deformation, indicating that insufficient resources, high levels of conflict or isolation within the professional environment, and certain personality traits of the specialist may gradually increase vulnerability to destructive shifts [5]. In combat units of the National Guard of Ukraine, such manifestations may intensify due to prolonged deployment in areas of active hostilities and limited opportunities for psychological recovery.

The signs of deformation identified by Z. Kisil (cynicism, decreased empathy, formalism, legal nihilism, and conflict proneness) are largely universal for representatives of "human-to-human" professions. Such manifestations often remain latent at first but gradually become noticeable in specialists' communication styles, emotional states, and moral orientations.

According to scientific approaches that examine negative personality shifts under stressogenic conditions (based on research involving law enforcement officers, the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and the State Emergency Service of

Ukraine), deformation primarily manifests in emotional exhaustion, cynicism, bias, diminished empathy, and the intensification of aggressive or formal behavioral patterns. The systematic impact of combat-related factors (constant threat to life, traumatic events, lack of rest) amplifies these destructive processes, which may eventually become consolidated and evolve into stable personality transformations.

The effectiveness of a military psychologist's professional performance is largely determined by the availability of physical, social, and psychological resources. Such resources include social interaction within the unit, support from leadership, and adequate material provision. Positive socio-psychological factors reduce the likelihood of emotional burnout and mitigate manifestations of professional deformation. Conversely, shortcomings in service organization, inadequate distribution of workload, and persistent threats to life intensify stress reactions and increase the risks of destructive personality changes.

The proposed theoretical model of the professional deformation of a military psychologist describes how initial socio-psychological conditions set the trajectory of subsequent personality development toward either positive professional genesis or deformational changes. The socio-psychological conditions of deformation consist of three interconnected blocks: individual-psychological characteristics, parameters of the professional environment, and socio-psychological factors of interaction.

Psychological characteristics encompass early dysfunctional schemas, value systems, self-concept, and motivational structure. These elements determine the initial configuration of personal sensitivities and vulnerability zones, readiness for self-reflection, and the ability to maintain professional meaning under pressure.

Conditions of professional activity include both everyday practices (routine work with personnel, documentation, scheduled consultations) and extreme episodes associated with combat operations, consequences of losses, crisis interventions in unpredictable circumstances, and other high-risk situations. The ratio of these sub-environments determines the type and density of stressors.

Socio-psychological factors set the boundaries of role expectations and the quality of the social environment: in the communicative-role dimension, this refers to interactions with

command, subordinates, and colleagues, as well as the overlap of professional and social roles; in the dimension of social surroundings, it concerns the supportive resources available within the unit, the professional community, and the family.

These input blocks activate the "stress – resources" interaction mechanism, within which external and internal demands are counterbalanced by systems of recovery and self-regulation. The balance between these two poles is not static: resources buffer the impact of stress, whereas the accumulation of stressors depletes resources, narrows the range of adaptive responses, and increases vulnerability to deformational patterns.

Mutually directed connections generate feedback loops: the positive dynamics of professional genesis – which strengthens identity, self-control, and social support – expands the resource base; in contrast, the progression of deformation leads to the reduction of resources, rigidity of responses, and weakening of professional agency.

At the level of personality, this dynamic unfolds into two alternative trajectories: positive professional genesis or professional deformation.

Drawing on extensive research in occupational psychology, ***positive professional genesis*** can be appropriately examined through the following components: professional motivation, social tolerance, adaptive flexibility, and professional self-regulation.

1. *Professional motivation* encompasses the internalization of the core purpose of the profession in daily decisions and a sustained motivation for professional improvement.

2. *Social tolerance* is expressed through empathy and unconditional acceptance of individuals, which supports the quality of psychological assistance and prevents the development of cynical attitudes.

3. *Adaptive flexibility* is manifested in the ability to combine adherence to service discipline with non-standard thinking, which is essential for functioning in variable and unpredictable circumstances.

4. *Professional self-regulation* relies on an internal locus of control, proactivity, positive professional identity, stable and adequate self-esteem, and the consistent unfolding of a constructive professional role. Together, these elements ensure impulse control, preservation of core professional meaning, and the ability to

maintain role boundaries even under peak workloads.

The opposite trajectory – professional deformation – emerges when a chronic imbalance in the "stress – resources" system consolidates problematic professional motivations, social intolerance, maladaptive rigidity, and **professional deregulation**.

1. *Problems of professional motivation* manifest in distorted understandings of the professional mission and give rise to indifference toward professional development, stagnation, and decreased engagement.

2. *Within the domain of social intolerance*, emotional insensitivity and social cynicism accumulate, replacing professional distance with

indifference and undermining trust in interpersonal interactions.

3. *Maladaptive rigidity* appears through professional stereotyping, reduced readiness to adjust decisions, and difficulties in adapting to changes in the operational environment.

4. *Professional deregulation* intensifies due to an external locus of control, inertia, role expansionism, problems of professional identity, and inadequate self-esteem. Collectively, these factors increase the risk of errors, ethical dilemmas, and reduced quality of psychological assistance.

Figure 1 presents the scheme of the proposed theoretical model of professional deformation of a military psychologist.

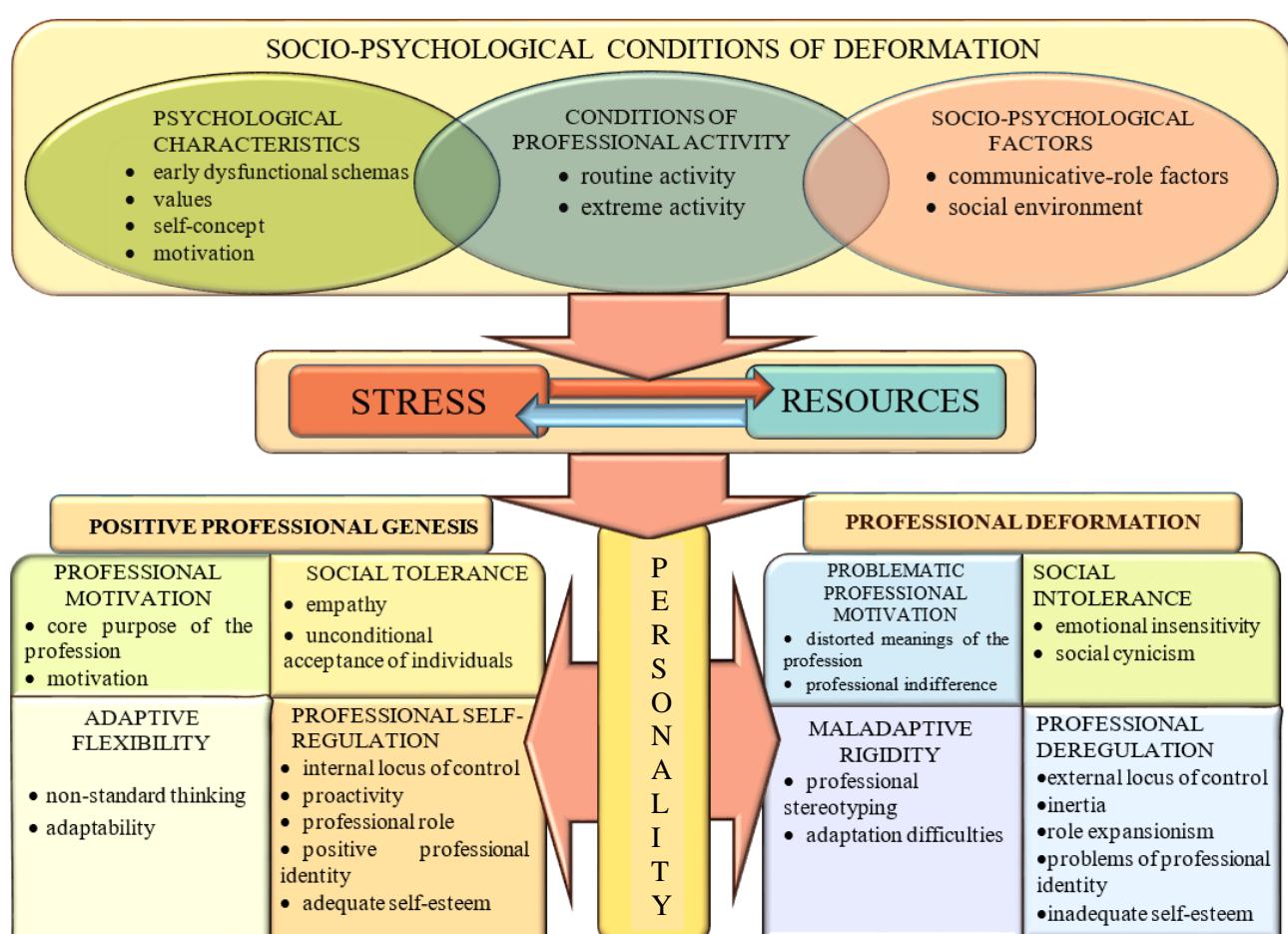


Figure 1 – Theoretical Model of Professional Deformation of a Military Psychologist

The proposed model is not only explanatory but also prognostic: the configuration of initial conditions, combined with the subsequent balance of "stress – resources" makes it possible to anticipate the direction in which the developmental trajectory will shift – toward strengthening

professional agency and resilience, or toward the intensification of rigid and deregulative manifestations. The model also delineates clear points for preventive intervention: correction of dysfunctional schemas and realignment of values with the core purpose of the profession; restoration

of role boundaries within a multilayered hierarchy; development of supervision and intervision formats and mechanisms for recovery after extreme missions; management of workload through rotations, structured access to support, and regulation of bureaucratic demands.

### **Conclusions**

1. Differentiation of the key concepts makes it possible to define professional deformation as a phenomenon characterized by stable negative changes in the specialist's personality caused by the cumulative impact of professional factors. Professional burnout, in contrast, is a dynamic process of emotional exhaustion that may be reversible. Deformation encompasses a broader spectrum of personality transformations – including rigidity, cynicism, and reduced empathy – whereas burnout focuses on the phases of tension and exhaustion.

2. Terminological discrepancies highlight the features of the Ukrainian scholarly tradition, which emphasizes the normative aspect of deformation as a threat to professional effectiveness, whereas Western evidence-based approaches rely on validated constructs such as burnout and compassion fatigue due to their empirical orientation. This divergence can be explained by the prolonged isolation of Ukrainian science from the global academic community during the Soviet period, when one of the primary objectives of psychology was to ensure human performance. In the Ukrainian scientific context, the profession is interpreted as a system of values and norms, and deviations from these are viewed as a threat to effectiveness.

3. The proposed authorial model of the professional deformation of a military psychologist of the National Guard of Ukraine under martial law demonstrates the influence of socio-psychological conditions on the "stress – resources" balance and the dependence of subsequent professional development or deformation on this balance.

4. The socio-psychological conditions of professional deformation include three interconnected blocks: 1) psychological characteristics, which encompass early dysfunctional schemas, values, self-concept, and motivation; 2) conditions of professional activity, which include both routine and extreme components; 3) socio-psychological factors, which

encompass communicative-role factors and the social environment.

5. The balance of "stress – resources" affects the specialist's personality, determining its development depending on the dominance of negative or positive factors, and leading to one of two alternative trajectories: positive professional genesis or professional deformation.

6. Positive professional genesis unfolds through professional motivation, social tolerance, adaptive flexibility, and professional self-regulation. Professional deformation manifests through problematic professional motivation, social intolerance, maladaptive rigidity, and professional deregulation.

7. The theoretical model of military psychologist deformation makes it possible to forecast personality development trajectories and identify intervention points, such as regulation of professional activity, correction of dysfunctional schemas, restoration of role boundaries, and development of supervision formats. This contributes to maintaining a positive professional identity and ensuring the quality of psychological assistance.

Future scientific work will involve studying military psychologists of the National Guard of Ukraine with consideration of gender, age, and professional factors. Planned research includes the empirical examination of the phenomenological structure of professional deformation among military psychologists of the National Guard under wartime conditions.

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*The article was submitted to the editorial office on 25 August 2025*

**УДК 159.923:316.6:159.944**

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### **ТЕОРЕТИЧНА МОДЕЛЬ ПРОФЕСІЙНОЇ ДЕФОРМАЦІЇ ВІЙСЬКОВОГО ПСИХОЛОГА НАЦІОНАЛЬНОЇ ГВАРДІЇ УКРАЇНИ ПІД ЧАС ВОЄННОГО СТАНУ**

Розмежовано поняття «професійна деформація» та «професійне вигорання». Узагальнено поняття професійної деформації як феномена, що охоплює широкий спектр трансформацій особистості, включно з ригідністю, цинізмом та зниженням мотивації. Визначено професійне вигорання як динамічний процес, що фокусується на фазах напруження та виснаження.

Обґрунтовано причини термінологічних розбіжностей між українською та зарубіжною науковими школами. Відмінності пояснюються впливом пострадянської науки, де професія розглядалася як система норм і цінностей, тоді як західний підхід орієнтований на клінічно верифіковані, емпірично діагностовані стани з вужчим, але валідованим визначенням.

Запропоновано авторську модель професійної деформації військового психолога, що враховує соціально-психологічні умови, механізм взаємодії «стрес – ресурси» та дві траєкторії розвитку: позитивний професіогенез або деформаційні зміни.

Визначено соціально-психологічні умови професійної деформації, що містять три взаємопов’язані блоки: психологічні особливості; умови професійної діяльності; соціально-психологічні чинники. Акцентовано увагу на балансі «стрес – ресурси», який впливає на особистість фахівця, визначаючи її розвиток залежно від домінування негативних чи позитивних чинників та призводить до однієї з двох альтернативних траєкторій: позитивного професіогенезу або професійної деформації. Позитивний професіогенез розгортається за напрямами професійної мотивації, соціальної толерантності, адаптаційної гнучкості, професійної саморегуляції. Професійна деформація проявляється за напрямами проблемної професійної мотивації, соціальної інтолерантності, дезадаптивної ригідності та професійної дегрегуляції.

Запропоновано розглядати теоретичну модель деформації військового психолога для прогнозування траєкторії розвитку особистості та ідентифікування точок втручання, а саме: регулювання професійної діяльності, корекції дисфункційних схем, відновлення рольових меж та розбудови супервізійних форматів. Зроблено висновок, що розуміння теоретичної моделі деформації військового психолога сприяє збереженню позитивної професійної ідентичності фахівця та якості надання психологічної допомоги під час воєнного стану.

**Ключові слова:** професійна деформація, професійне вигорання, позитивний професіогенез, військовий психолог, теоретична модель професійної деформації.

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