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Psychological aspects of peacekeeping missions

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Abstract

Relevance. The article discusses the influence of military personnel participation in peacekeeping missions on the psychological state of their family members. This topic is particularly relevant amid growing global militarization and the need for effective regulation by peacekeepers.

Purpose. The purpose of the empirical study is to identify the relationship between family identification and the ability of military personnel's family members to consciously overcome stress associated with peacekeeping missions.

Methodology. The study involved family members of military personnel undergoing training and those who have already participated in a peacekeeping mission. Three questionnaires were used to collect data, focusing on perceived stress levels, conscious controllability, and family identification features.

Results. Statistical analysis revealed that family identification significantly influences the ability of military family members to manage stress caused by participation in peacekeeping missions. The analysis identified four types of subjects differentiated by their levels of family identification and stress management capabilities. Family members with high family identification exhibited better stress management and adaptability. Conversely, those with low family identification struggled more with stress and showed lower adaptability. The study found a positive correlation between strong family bonds and effective stress management, highlighting the importance of family support in coping with the challenges posed by peacekeeping missions.

Conclusions. The findings indicate that family identification is crucial in helping military families cope with stress from peacekeeping missions. This typology provides a basis for developing socio-psychological support methods, identifying risk groups, and offering targeted psychological assistance to different types of military family members. By understanding the specific needs and stress management capabilities of military families, it becomes possible to design more effective support programs that enhance resilience and well-being among the families of peacekeepers.

Keywords: personnel; self-organization; family identification; perceived stress.

Introduction

Despite the advantages of the profession of military servicemen for him and his family, the scientific researchers also reveal some negative aspects. Thus, a survey conducted in 2019 among the members of military families has shown that 73% of respondents need psychological help [1]. The study of necessary psychological support for the members of families of military personnel (participating in peacekeeping missions) became one of the scientific problems. This

emphasizes the fact that the actual participation in such operations has a different effect on the level of stress of family members of military personnel [2; 3]. According to P. Bartone [4], the above-mentioned stress means a state caused by the influence of the environment, rather than a person.

Some studies, such as those conducted by S.H. Pincus and T. Nam, have identified the causes of stress among family members of military personnel participating in military operations [5]. Among the common concomitant

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factors, are feelings of anger and grief, protest, emotional distancing in the family, emotional instability, and a low level of self-organization. In addition, it indicated the following manifestations: anxiety, sleep problems, and complaints about the physical state. In addition, it has been studied certain problems in relationships in the families of a military servicemen after returning from peacekeeping missions, such as a sense of loss of independence, and the uncertainty of their role in the family structure.

The studies by S. Ribeiro et al. [6] with the participation of spouses of military servicemen showed the negative impact of the conditions associated with military peacekeeping missions on the psychological state of family members. Among the consequences, it is indicated emotional disorders, depression, and sleep disorders. M.S.V.K. Raju [7] considers the negative impact of a military serviceman's participation in peacekeeping missions on the psychological state of their family members as a process with three stages. These stages are anger among family members before the serviceman's deployment, depression and confusion during the mission, and stress after the mission is completed.

Given the number of available empirical results in this area of scientific problems, the question remains regarding a deeper study of the ways of psychological support for family members. A. Gewirtz et al. [8] conducted the studies of stress experienced by family members due to the participation of a soldier in a peacekeeping mission. At the same time, there are three stages of family stress. The first stage occurs in the period before the involvement of a soldier in a peacekeeping mission, and it is characterized by the mood swings and a predisposition to conflict. The second stage is associated with the long-term separation of family and the raising of the children alone during the period of participation in the mission. The last stage (after the return of a soldier) is connected with the restoration of the "balance" of the family hierarchy.

The negative influence of the involvement of a military serviceman in operations is manifested not only in spouses but also in children. Thus, M. Chartrand et al. [9] described the aggressive behaviour, anxiety and depressive symptoms as a result of such influence on children under 5 years of age. Thus, the need to provide psychological support to family members of military personnel participating in peacekeeping missions is emphasized once again. Certainly, the support for families of military servicemen is carried out by the various structures [10-13]. At the same time, special attention should be paid to the study of methods for overcoming stressful reactions of family members due to the participation of a military serviceman in a peacekeeping mission [14-16].

Among the available ways to overcome stress (compliance with the daily routine, proper nutrition and physical activity), the influence of social identification stands out [17-20]. That is, overcoming stress by a person is possible due to the feeling of support from significant people [21-22]. As a result of studies conducted by S. Pflanz and S. Sonner [23], a negative impact of stress on emotional health was revealed ($p < 0.001$). According to J. Todrank and E. Somer [24], as a result of stress, it is weakened the ability to control the living conditions that cause stress, and the ability to critically evaluate information ($p < 0.001$). At the same time, A. Issimova [25]

names the family identification as a factor contributing to overcoming professional stress ($p < 0.05$).

Thus, the family identification can be an effective method of reducing the stress level of family members due to the participation of a military servicemen in peacekeeping operations. Accordingly, the purpose of this article is to explore the relationship of group identification of family members of military personnel and their ability to overcome the consequences of stress associated with a peacekeeping mission.

Materials and Methods

For the experimental confirmation of the existence of a link between family relationships and the ability to overcome stress, was conducted a study among the family members of military personnel who took part in peacekeeping missions. The sample included family members of military personnel who joined The United Nations Mission in October 2018 ($N=106$), as well as the family members of military personnel who were in training for this mission in May 2019 ($N=94$). In the study, the parents of servicemen, their spouses and other family members at least 18 years old took part. Thus, the average age of the subjects was 39 years. Since the level of perceived stress, as well as the family identification of a person, is largely a subjective concept, the empirical research at this stage involves methods based on the subject's self-assessment. On this basis, the questionnaires were chosen as data collection tools.

Among the methods used for self-assessment of stressful states of a person, the projective tests are often used (the Lüscher colour test [26], Collection of projective techniques [27]) and some other methods (for example, the Holmes and Rahe stress scale [28], the PSM-25 scale [29], DASS-21 scale [30]). In this study, it was necessary to determine the subjective perception of the stress level by the family members of military personnel participating in the peacekeeping mission. It is also necessary to consider that in this case, the respondents experience stress from the moment of announcement of the forthcoming participation of a military serviceman in a peacekeeping mission. Having this in mind, a questionnaire for assessing perceived stress has been chosen, which involves the determination of their own feelings and thoughts during the last month (PSS-10) [31]. Among the widely used methods for assessing the ability to manage stress, the SACS Coping Strategies Assessment Questionnaire [32] and the WSQ Coping Strategies Assessment Questionnaire are used [33]. The purpose of this study was to study not so much the behavioural responses to stress as the ability to recognize and manage it. Therefore, a questionnaire was chosen aimed at self-assessment of the ability to consciously overcome stressful situations [34].

The assessment of respondents' family identification became another key factor in the study. In the studies, it is often used the methods that allow assessing to a greater extent family resilience (FRAS), family cohesion and adaptation (FACES-3), and ways for spouses to manage conflicts considering their characterological features (WIPPF) [35]. To achieve the goal of this study, the following concepts became the priority: the assessment of correlation of individual with the family, and the assumption of specific social roles that determine the

interaction within the family. On these grounds, T. Cruwys et al. [36] used a three-dimensional scale of group identification strength. The obtained data of respondents were processed using the mathematical and statistical package SPSS version 26. The correlation analysis of data was used to statistically evaluate the relationships between variables. Thus, it has been found a significant statistical relationship between the assessment of family identification and self-assessment of the ability to manage stress ($r=0.31$, $p<0.01$). To determine the nature of a statistically significant relationship between the indicators of assessment of perceived stress PSS-10 and self-assessment of the ability to consciously overcome stressful situations, a method of regression analysis was used.

As a result, it has turned out that the stress in subjects associated with the fulfilment of a peacekeeping mission significantly affects their ability to consciously manage stress ($\beta=-0.36$, $t(104)=-0.394$, $p<0.001$). When the regression analysis included data on assessing the level of family identification, it turned out that at a high level of the latter one, the negative effect of stress on the ability to consciously manage stress did not have a significant statistical significance ($\beta=-0.26$, $t(104)=-0.37$, $p<0.05$). Thus, because of statistical data processing, it can be claimed that family identification has a positive effect on the ability of subjects to overcome stress.

Results

Since the sample included both the test subjects whose relatives were already involved in the peacekeeping mission and those who were at the training stage; data from both test samples were analysed separately. This made it possible to compare the psychological state of respondents who were just about to face changes in the family structure, and the subjects who had already adapted to the circumstances associated with participation of their relatives in the peacekeeping mission. Thus, the statistical analysis data of survey results of the family members of military servicemen who took part in the peacekeeping mission made it possible to establish the following. The stress caused by the soldier's participation in a peacekeeping mission certainly affects the ability to consciously manage. At the same time, the ability to consciously manage stress is higher in those subjects who have shown a high level of family identification. In addition, the level of family identification helps to reduce the negative impact of mission-related stress on the ability to consciously manage this stress.

As for the study of family members of military personnel who are being trained for a peacekeeping mission, the statistical analysis of data has shown the following results. A significant correlation was found between the results of the method of self-assessment of the ability to manage stress and the data of the method of assessing the level of family identification ($r=0.31$, $p<0.01$). As it has been indicated above, an analysis of data from the study of family members of military personnel (who are already participating in a peacekeeping mission) has revealed the same significant relationship between

these indicators. Because of data analysis using regression analysis, the influence of indicators according to the PSS-10 method on the results of questionnaire for assessing conscious controllability was revealed ($p<0.01$). By including indicators of family identification in the analysed variables, it was revealed the conditionality of reducing the negative impact of stress on the ability to consciously manage it ($\beta=0.59$, $t(93)=p<0.005$). This suggests that perceived stress affects the conscious controllability of an individual. However, with an increase in the level of family identification of test subjects, the effect of stress on conscious controllability decreases. The same results have been presented when analysing data from a sample of family members of military personnel who are already participating in a peacekeeping mission.

From the above, it is possible to make several conclusions. First, whether a soldier participates in a peacekeeping mission or is at the stage of preparation for it, the family members are often stressed about it. Secondly, the perceived stress negatively affects the ability of family members of military personnel (who are participating or preparing to take part in a peacekeeping mission) to consciously manage stress. Thirdly, the level of family identification is associated with the ability to consciously manage stress. Finally, a high level of family identification can reduce the negative impact of stress on the ability to consciously manage stress in the family members of military personnel who are participating or preparing to take part in a peacekeeping mission. The higher the level of family identification of respondent, the better his ability to consciously manage stressful situations.

Descriptive statistics, in particular, the calculation of the average number for each method for both groups, made it possible to establish several categories of data. The first category of responses included a high level on the "Tension" scale of the PSS-10 method ($\mu=16.7$), a low level of self-assessment of consciousness overcoming stressful situations ($\mu=18.3$), and low indicators of intragroup connections according to the method of T. Cruwys et al. [30] ($\mu=7.3$). The second category consisted of lower indicators of "Tension" PSS-10 ($\mu=13.8$), average evaluation of the ability to consciously manage stress ($\mu=24.1$) and a high level of intragroup connections ($\mu=18.4$). Therefore, there is a need for a statistically valid categorization. For this purpose, the data were processed using the cluster analysis method.

Data clustering in statistical studies can be carried out using two methods: hierarchical cluster analysis, which allows determining the optimal number of clusters, and the *k*-means method to redistribute objects between a given numbers of clusters. In this study, four clusters were pre-specified based on the fact that the sample consisted of two groups of test subjects, and the calculation of an average number showed two categories of data. That is, the data clusterisation was carried out using the *k*-means method. Table 1 shows some of the results.

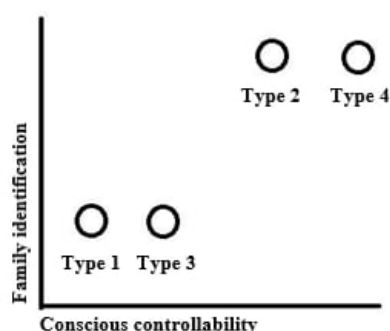
Table 1. Results of clusterisation through the k-means method

	Cluster			
	1	2	3	4
	Number of observations in the cluster			
	63	43	39	55
Scale	Indicator			
Sample	1	2	1	2
“Tension”	17.36	15.51	18.17	14.8
Conscious coping with stress	16.84	25.15	15.2	22.19
Intra-group connections	5.211	17.12	6.31	18.05

Note: for convenience of calculations, the sample of family members of military personnel (who started the peacekeeping mission in October 2018 (N=106)) is depicted as 1, and the sample of family members of military personnel (who underwent training in October 2019 (N=94)) is depicted as 2.

According to the results of cluster analysis, four clusters were identified by k-means, combined according to the indicators of “tension” of the PSS-10 methodology, the scale of conscious coping with stress and the indicators of intragroup relationships of the methodology of T. Cruwys et al. [36]. The first cluster (63 observations) includes relatively high indicators of “tension”, a reduced level of conscious coping with stress, and low indicators of intragroup connections. Similar levels of indicators are observed in the third cluster (39 observations). The first and third clusters include the data of the test subjects from the first sample (N=106). The second (43 observations) and the fourth (55 observations) clusters are characterized by an average level of “tension”, and higher indicators on the scale of “conscious stress management” and the scale of “intragroup connections”. These two clusters describe the second sample of subjects (N=94).

Based on this, the family members of military servicemen (who are participating or preparing to take part in a peacekeeping mission) can be conditionally divided into several types by the indicators of clustering results. It is worth noting it is necessary to involve a larger number of test subjects in the study for scientific typification in the future, considering a greater number of personal characteristics, living conditions and characteristics of family relationships. For a more accurate determination of the number of types of test subjects, it is necessary to analyse data, including the use of the hierarchical method of cluster analysis. This may constitute the next goal in the study of psychological aspects of peacekeeping missions. Figure 1 schematically depicts the characteristics of conventionally identified types of test subjects.

**Figure 1.** Types of family members of military servicemen involved in the mission

It is worth paying attention to the similarity of characteristics of type 1 with type 3 and type 2 with type 4. The difference lies in the fact that the types 1 and 3 include the families of military personnel who are already participating in a peacekeeping mission, while the types 2 and 4 – the families of military personnel who are at the stage of preparation for participation in a peacekeeping mission. The division is also due to the presence of a revealed direct relationship between perceived stress and conscious controllability in test subjects belonging to the types 3 and 4. Let us consider each type in more detail.

Type 1 includes the family members of military personnel participating in a peacekeeping mission who are under the peacekeeping mission stress. Test subjects of this type are characterized by unstable identification of their personality with the family structure, as well as the uncertainty of social roles within their own family. They are characterized by the manifestation of anxiety due to unforeseen situations; they may feel inability to control their own lives, nervous tension, irritability. At the same time, they may experience a low ability for self-regulation, control of their own emotions, relative control over the events happening to them.

Type 2 includes the family members of military personnel participating in a peacekeeping mission who are under stress related to the peacekeeping mission. They tend to promptly regulate their emotional state, determine the ways out, confidence in the imminent improvement of situation, an optimistic view of the mission. This type of test subjects is characterized by a higher degree of identification with the family, acceptance of their own role in the family, and probably, the general satisfaction with the family structure. The test subjects of this type are easier to tolerate stress associated with a peacekeeping mission.

Type 3 describes the family members of military personnel who are at the stage of preparation for participation in a peacekeeping mission. These test subjects experience apprehension and anxiety caused by the future participation of a soldier in the mission. The upcoming mission can cause a feeling of uncertainty, nervousness, and denial. The usual methods of self-regulation of the emotional state and management of stressful situations may be ineffective in the new conditions. Experienced stress exacerbates the weak ability to self-regulate. Amid the low level of self-identification with the family, and the instability of family

roles, the test subjects of this type may have trouble in finding more effective ways to consciously manage stress.

Type 4 includes the family members of military personnel undergoing the process of training for participation in a peacekeeping mission. They may also experience feelings of anxiety and uncertainty about the upcoming mission. The stress associated with the mission certainly hurts the ability to manage it. However, due to the relative stability of the family structure, identification with the family and the adoption of family roles, the test subjects of this type relatively quickly find ways to regulate stressful conditions and manage a stressful situation. They may show more optimistic views about the future, and feel confident in the favourable outcome of stressful situations.

Thus, the conducted empirical research has shown that the ability to consciously manage stress in the family members of military personnel participating or being trained to participate in a peacekeeping mission depends largely on their identification with the family. The stability of family identification helps to reduce the level of perceived stress and optimize the functions of self-regulation. These findings open the prospects for further research related to the possible typification of the family members of military personnel participating in a peacekeeping mission to identify the primary signs of stress and prevent further development of its consequences. The problem of finding ways and methods of psychological support for military personnel participating in a peacekeeping mission and their families is also important.

Discussion

Even though the conducted research was more of an applied nature, it opened up several directions that could be introduced into psychological and sociological practice, as well as the prospects for further theoretical and applied research. Moreover, these areas can be used not only in socio-psychological work with military personnel and members of their families, but also in other areas of psychology, after additional empirical research.

Considering the results of the study, it seems possible to determine the ways of psychological support for family members of military personnel participating in a peacekeeping mission. In the world practice, such support is provided in various forms. For example, in Canada, the relevant structures focus on the psychological and educational work with the family members of military personnel to develop skills to deal with stress [15; 37]. The HR department of the General Staff of the Serbian Armed Forces conducts psychological work on the prevention of family problems and relationships. In the Australian military system, it is considered the need for adaptation of the military family members to the period before and after the return of a soldier from a peacekeeping mission [14; 38-40].

In addition, the results indicate that identifying with one's family influences the ability to consciously manage stressful situations. This suggests the possibility of providing socio-psychological support to family members of military personnel participating in peacekeeping missions by optimizing family structure and facilitating the distribution and acceptance of family roles. Thus, the

methods of systemic family psychology are aimed at optimizing the family structure. Defining the family as an autonomous system, following the theory of M. Bowen [41], this method provides psychological counselling not for an individual, but for the whole family. That is, it can be assumed that the use of this approach as a psychological support for the families of military personnel participating in a peacekeeping mission can help optimize the family structure, and as a result, increase the level of family identification.

The approach based on the principles of work by C. Whitaker [42] can become another method that is potentially capable of optimizing the level of family identification of the family members of military personnel participating in a peacekeeping mission. Certainly, to apply this approach, it is required the proper experience of psychologist working with families of military personnel. The main goal of work in this approach is to direct the family structure to self-healing, to optimize its functioning. With the successful implementation of the principles of this approach, the family members get a new experience of interaction, which allows them to open up and harmonize their personalities. This, in turn, contributes to the improvement of family relations, the adoption by each family member of his role in the family, and as a result, an increase in the level of family identification.

The positive approach of N. Peseschkian [43] is another effective approach to family psychological counselling. This method is considered one of the universal ones, aimed at resolving a wide range of psychological issues, including family relationships. In the case of working with the families of military personnel participating in peacekeeping missions, it can also be useful because it combines the practices of different areas and considers differences in education, culture and views. The pursuit of personal maturity is one of the important principles of a positive approach, which also favourably affects the family structure. The application of this method in socio-psychological work with the families of military personnel participating in a peacekeeping mission can also become the subject of applied researches.

Considering the described methods and approaches, it can be stated that there are prerequisites and opportunities for successful work with family members of military personnel (participating in a peacekeeping mission) already at the current stage of development of the socio-psychological practice of family counselling. As for the promising directions for further research on the psychological aspects regarding the participation of military personnel in a peacekeeping mission, it is possible to consider theoretical projects, empirical studies and applied developments. In terms of theoretical descriptions, the testing of personality types of family members of military personnel participating in a peacekeeping mission can become one of the relevant areas.

From an applied point of view, in the case of studying types, several opportunities will open up related to the optimization and correction of the psychological state of the family members of military personnel, as well as the military personnel themselves participating in a peacekeeping mission. If there are detailed descriptions of the types, it will be possible to promptly identify risk groups and conduct timely socio-psychological work with

them. Thus, considering the studies of M.S.V.K. Raju [7], and A. Gewirtz et al. [8], there are opportunities to study the process of influence of the participation of a military serviceman in a peacekeeping mission on the psychological state of his family members belonging to different types.

The following concepts can be attributed to several necessary empirical researches: the study of factors influencing the ability of family members of military personnel participating in a peacekeeping mission to cope with mission-related stress. In this article, the family identification is described as such a factor. Nevertheless, with a high degree of probability, it is possible to assume that there are other factors affecting conscious controllability to a different extent. Perhaps, such factors will include the activity of an individual, lifestyle, the chosen circle of interaction and reference persons, and the nature of the individual's attitude to himself. It is also important to empirically test the likely consequences of stress caused by the participation of a military serviceman in a peacekeeping mission. Moreover, the approbation should cover both the consequences for military servicemen and his family members, including children. It can be assumed, given the available scientific research described above, that consequences can be revealed to a soldier related to military service, motivation, and psychological problems. For the family members of military personnel, it can be described as the consequences related to relationships in the married couple or parent-child relationships, with the success of professional or educational activities, and with relationships with an interaction group.

The various applied developments in socio-psychological work with family members of military personnel participating in a peacekeeping mission are relevant and necessary. Considering the conclusions drawn from the study described in the article, it is necessary to develop methods of operational self-help in overcoming the symptoms of stress caused by participation in the mission. It is also important to form an algorithm for the socio-psychological support of family members of military personnel at different stages of peacekeeping mission, to determine the most effective methods and practices in the course of such work. It seems necessary to describe the

optimal methods of support during different periods of stress experienced by the family members, as well as by the military servicemen themselves. Considering the increasing relevance of the topic, the psychological aspects of peacekeeping missions are just beginning to unfold, opening up various perspectives for further research.

Conclusions

Thus, the study presented in the article has shown that the ability of family members of military personnel to overcome stress caused by participation in a peacekeeping mission depends on the level of family identification. Regardless of the fact whether a soldier participates in a peacekeeping mission or he is in the training stage, the members of his family experience the mission-related stress. The ability of family members of military personnel to consciously overcome stress is associated with family identification. A high level of family identification contributes to the conscious management of mission-related stress. On the other hand, the ability to cope with stress is reduced with an unstable definition of family roles.

Based on the indicators of a sample of the test subjects, it has been made a conditional typification of family members of military personnel participating in a peacekeeping mission or training for it, by the level of family identification and the ability to overcome stress. Theoretical, empirical and applied developments are designated as prospects for further research in this area. To determine the ways and methods of socio-psychological work with family members of military personnel participating in a peacekeeping mission, it becomes necessary to conceptualize their personality types with a description of features, specifics and likely directions of development, as well as to identify the risk groups. Due to the need for theoretical, empirical and applied coverage, the study of psychological aspects of the peacekeeping mission becomes an urgent scientific problem.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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Психологічні аспекти миротворчих місій

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Анотація

Актуальність. У статті розглядається вплив участі військовослужбовців у миротворчих місіях на психологічний стан членів їхніх сімей. Ця тема є особливо актуальною в умовах зростаючої глобальної мілітаризації та необхідності ефективного регулювання діяльності миротворців.

Мета. Метою емпіричного дослідження є виявлення взаємозв'язку між сімейною ідентифікацією та здатністю членів сімей військовослужбовців до свідомого подолання стресу, пов'язаного з миротворчими місіями.

Методологія. У дослідженні взяли участь члени сімей військовослужбовців, які проходять підготовку, а також ті, хто вже брав участь у миротворчій місії. Для збору даних було використано три опитувальники, які фокусувалися на сприйнятті рівня стресу, свідомому контролі та особливостях сімейної ідентифікації.

Результати. Статистичний аналіз показав, що сімейна ідентифікація суттєво впливає на здатність членів сімей військовослужбовців справлятися зі стресом, спричиненим участю в миротворчих місіях. В результаті аналізу було виділено чотири типи досліджуваних, які відрізняються за рівнем сімейної ідентифікації та здатністю до подолання стресу. Члени сімей з високим рівнем сімейної ідентифікації продемонстрували кращу здатність до подолання стресу та адаптації. І навпаки, ті, хто мав низький рівень сімейної ідентифікації, більше боролися зі стресом і демонстрували нижчу адаптивність. Дослідження виявило позитивну кореляцію між міцними сімейними зв'язками та ефективним управлінням стресом, що підкреслює важливість сімейної підтримки у подоланні викликів, пов'язаних з миротворчими місіями.

Висновки. Отримані дані свідчать про те, що сімейна ідентифікація має вирішальне значення у допомозі сім'ям військовослужбовців впоратися зі стресом, спричиненим миротворчими місіями. Ця типологія є основою для розробки методів соціально-психологічної підтримки, виявлення груп ризику та надання адресної психологічної допомоги різним категоріям членів сімей військовослужбовців. Розуміння специфічних потреб і можливостей сімей військовослужбовців щодо подолання стресу дає змогу розробляти більш ефективні програми підтримки, які сприяють підвищенню життєстійкості та благополуччя сімей миротворців.

Ключові слова: особовий склад; самоорганізація; сімейна ідентифікація; сприйнятий стрес.