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## Impact of Increased Risk Conditions on Emotional Component of Psychological Aspect of Safe Educational Environment: Case Study

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**Abstract.** The article deals with studying the influence of terms, national and international students of higher educational establishment live in, on their emotional state. The tasks for the research of the importance of emotional aspect affecting a safe educational environment in different circumstances, conceptualize the fundamental category "safety" and shift the emphasis from its static to dynamic understanding, are revealed. The leading scientific approaches for the creation of psychological safety of an individual, particularly the emotional component, are noted. The main objective of this paper, including the essence of emotional and psychological safety and security of the educational environment, factors that negatively affect its subjects and the conditions for the formation of a psychologically safe educational environment, is determined. The external and internal influences, that can cause both positive results and destructive threats, dangers and risks, are outlined. The traumatic situations, that directly or indirectly can influence the emotional state of an individual, are stated. The organization of the experiment and getting the outcomes, using the theoretical, empirical and heuristic methods, is described. The theoretical background of the study, in particular, psychological and pedagogical literature, and the elaboration of the material essential to develop some interviews and questionnaires, used to elicit the results of the research, is presented. Some e-learning modes and digital platforms, implemented to collect, process and analyze data, are mentioned. The achievements of the experiment, aforesaid in the study, are calculated and analyzed. A case study, conducted on the basis of some faculties of Sumy National Agrarian University, Ukraine, is evaluated. The focus of the study, based on two experimental groups of first and second - year national (NS), including refugees, and international (IS) students, who study at the University, is highlighted. The influence of the psychological aspect on the mental, emotional, social or behavioral and spiritual dimensions of health and educational environment as a part of the living environment, is pointed out. Psychological safety in educational establishments, affected by the circumstances the participants have to deal with, is stressed. The peculiarities of positive educational environment, such: a safe, welcoming atmosphere, a sense of belonging among students, trust between students and teachers, are characterized. Psychologically safe educational environment, that provides students with the opportunity to feel safe to make mistakes, take risks to further their learning and thinking and ask for help and support when needed, is distinguished. The opportunity to support diversity and emotional well-being of students across educational fields by means of creating a psychologically safe environment is provided.

**Key words:** living environment, negative phenomena, personalized experience, psychological violence, emotional aspect.

## Вплив умов підвищеного ризику на емоційний компонент психологічної складової безпечного освітнього середовища: тематичне дослідження

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**Анотація.** У статті розглядається вплив умов проживання вітчизняних та іноземних студентів вищого навчального закладу на їхній емоційний стан. Окреслено завдання дослідження важливості емоційного аспекту, що впливає на безпечне освітнє середовище за різних обставин, концептуалізації фундаментальної категорії «безпека» та зміщення акценту з її статичного розуміння на динамічне. Висвітлено провідні наукові підходи до створення психологічної безпеки особистості, зокрема емоційної складової. Визначено основну мету даної роботи, яка включає сутність емоційної складової психологічної безпеки та захищеності освітнього середовища, чинники негативного впливу на його суб'єкти та умови формування психологічно безпечного освітнього середовища. Згадано зовнішні та внутрішні впливи, які можуть викликати як позитивні результати, так і

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деструктивні загрози, небезпеки та ризики. Виділено травматичні ситуації, які прямо чи опосередковано можуть впливати на емоційний стан особистості. Описано організацію експерименту та отримання результатів з використанням теоретичних, емпіричних та евристичних методів. Представлено теоретичні основи дослідження, зокрема психолого-педагогічну літературу, а також опрацювання матеріалу, необхідного для розробки співбесід та анкетування, що використовуються для отримання результатів дослідження. Згадуються деякі режими електронного навчання та цифрові платформи, реалізовані для збору, обробки та аналізу даних. Розраховано та проаналізовано досягнення експерименту, зазначеного в дослідженні. Оцінено тематичне дослідження, проведене на базі факультетів Сумського національного аграрного університету, Україна. Виділено фокус дослідження, проведеного на базі двох експериментальних груп вітчизняних (ВС), включаючи біженців, та іноземних (ІС) студентів першого та другого курсу, які навчаються в університеті. Підкреслено вплив психологічного аспекту на психічний, емоційний, соціальний або поведінковий і духовний виміри безпечного освітнього середовища як частини життєвого середовища. Наголошується на психологічній безпеці в навчальних закладах, що залежить від обставин, з якими доводиться стикатися учасникам. Охарактеризовано особливості позитивного освітнього середовища, такі як: безпечна, доброзичлива атмосфера, відчуття спорідненості, довіра між студентами та викладачами. Описано психологічно безпечне освітнє середовище, яке дає учням можливість відчувати себе в безпеці робити помилки, йти на ризик для подальшого навчання та мислення та звертатися за допомогою та підтримкою, коли це необхідно. Надано засади формування підтримки різноманіття та емоційного благополуччя студентів освітніх закладів шляхом створення психологічно безпечного середовища.

**Ключові слова:** життєве середовище, негативні явища, персоналізований досвід, психологічне насильство, емоційний аспект..

## *I Introduction*

The events of recent years vividly testified that more and more often a person is left alone with dangerous, risky and unforeseen events that make him or her psychologically more vulnerable and weaker. Established algorithms of everyday actions undergo a psychological collapse due to situations that were considered to be unpredictable, incomprehensible or turned out to be completely new for adaptive systems of human activities [19]. Due to the war in Ukraine, the importance of universities as integrators of scientific, educational, business and production areas is growing [18]. Our usual everyday life has been complicated not only by the war, the problems of human trafficking, the increase in cases of domestic violence caused by social isolation, but also low understanding, awareness of personal responsibility for one's own safety. Such a situation cannot help but worsen not only the physical, but also the psychological well-being of a person and society as a whole.

A certain vagueness and resulting conceptual complexity of the modern "safety discourse" as a discussion on the "problem field" of safety as "circles of topics and problems related to the discussed issue" explained by several circumstances. The socio-political concept of safety has recently spread from the military-political (mainly international) sphere to related social-humanitarian fields and spheres – first of all, to sociology and psychology, ethno-political science and cultural studies, linguistics, education etc. as a result of such "interdisciplinary transit", the political philosophical category "safety" (and, accordingly, its derivatives) are gradually "blurred", and the term itself loses its clarity of meaning and can be considered not only in the social-political or military-political, but also in linguistic, cultural, sociological, pedagogical and psychological aspects.

The methodological and theoretical foundations of the concept "safety" are described in scientific research of foreign scholars, namely: Maslow A., Smith B., Johnson M., Langacker R., Lakoff G., Peacocke K., Brandom R., Dennett, Williams, Allen and others. The notion of a concept is analyzed from the point of view of various approaches and spectra. Researchers consider structure and content of various aspects, analyze linguistic, cultural, educational and psychological aspects of the concept, considering its cognitive point of view.

There are several main scientific approaches as for the formation of psychological safety of an individual, including its emotional component. Representatives of the psychoanalytic approach suggest forming the psychological and emotional safety of the individual by dealing with psychological defenses and overcoming the inferiority complex by adjusting or improving patterns of safe behavior that have been already established [1,4]. The behavioral approach involves considering the subjective nature of the person's experience of a state of danger-safety. This approach is aimed at creating behavioral patterns that promote psychological and emotional safety by means of a series of psychological trainings, positive reinforcement of constructive behavior, using a system of social learning [12,20,6].

A significant contribution to the theory of the formation of psychological safety was made by representatives of Gestalt psychology. Lewin's concept of life space, which is a constituent of the "field theory", played a special role for the development of the theory of psychological safety. From the point of view of security psychology, the attempt to study the field of possible events and the field of forces, started by Lewin, can be perceived as an attempt to determine the level of "security-danger" of certain systems [3]. A special place among the approaches to the formation of psychological safety of the individual is occupied by the existential-humanistic direction [14].

Society expects not only the status of an educational resource from an educational institution, but also a space for development and cooperation both internally and outside of the establishment. The modern educational environment creates a unique individualized and personalized experience, where everyone has the opportunity to find themselves. In order to understand a safe educational environment, it is necessary to define what is an educational environment in general.

An educational environment is a place where students, teachers, public and business representatives, politicians and ordinary citizens meet and interact. Classes, interesting meetings, holidays and concerts, lectures, seminars, trainings and open laboratories and workshops in various fields of science, art and technology are held. Both national and international researchers along with practitioners define the educational environment as: a part of the living, social environment of a person, which is a collection of all educational factors that directly or indirectly affect the personality in the process of learning, upbringing and development, the educational space that forms the personality.

Additionally, educational environment is: a characteristic of life inside an educational institution, a system of influences and conditions of personality formation, a system of opportunities for personality development in the social and spatial-subject environment [21]. Factually, modern educational environment solves not only educational problems and tasks of socialization, as well as carries out psychological development of the individual, contributes to the preservation of the child's health, maximum realization of his or her abilities and creative potential.

Hence, in today's rapidly changing conditions, the educational environment does not exist in isolation from external and internal influences that can cause both positive results and destructive threats, dangers and risks. Such negative phenomena among young people as violence, bullying and cyberbullying, sexting, etc. cannot help but worry the public and educators. It is logical that there is a need to create a safe educational space in an educational institution in order to protect, secure, and prevent the effects of adverse factors on the individual.

A safe educational environment is a set of conditions in an educational institution that make it impossible to cause physical, property and/or moral harm to the participants of the educational process. A safe educational environment is a state of an educational environment where: there are safe learning and working conditions, comfortable interaction that contributes to the emotional well-being of students, teachers and parents, there are no manifestations of violence and there are sufficient resources for their prevention, and also rights and norms of physical, psychological, informational and social security of each participant in the educational process.

The purpose of the article is to study the influence of terms, the national and international students of higher educational establishment live in, on their emotional state and determine the essence of psychological safety and security of the educational environment, factors that negatively affect its subjects and the conditions for the formation of a psychologically safe educational environment.

The task of the research is to reveal the importance of emotional component of the psychological aspect affecting a safe educational environment in different circumstances.

## ***II Materials and Methods***

The theoretical background of the study included psychological and pedagogical literature and the elaboration of the material essential to develop some interviews and questionnaires, used to elicit the results of the research. Scientists implement various teaching methods to reveal the results of the students' involvement into educational process. These efficient learning methods include: role playing, dialogic learning, inquiry-based learning, trip or expedition learning, problem-based learning and others. We have chosen a case study to evaluate the impact of increased risk conditions on emotional component of safe educational environment. According to Holubnycha, a case study (case-based learning) is a kind of problem-based learning, when to

overcome the challenge student bases on his or her personal experience, creativity, increasing his cognitive activity, and makes his own choice [9].

Currently, the emotional component of the psychological safety of the educational environment is one of the most important problems both for psychological and pedagogical science and practice, and for society in general. Researchers, studying a psychologically safe educational environment, believe that traumatic situations directly or indirectly affect the physical and mental health of an individual. Psycho-traumatic situations in the educational process include: problems of adaptation in the educational environment; conflicts between students and teachers; excessive demandingness of teachers; competitiveness; terms the students live in.

In modern psychological science the concept of “psychological safety” belongs to the category of integrative and insufficiently developed ones. The intangibility of this concept presumes the fact that psychological safety, like any other psychological phenomenon, can be considered in a system of adjacent planes, namely: as a process (created in a new way each time), as a state (ensures the basic need for security) and as a property of the individual (it acts as an internal resource of resistance and counteraction to destructive influences).

Nowadays, the educational environment can provide both additional and some restrictions to the personal manifestations of its participants, because it sets certain requirements. It is affected by the tension of social life and the complication of interpersonal relations, which in turn prevents the maintenance of the necessary level of work capacity and the preservation of the health of the participants of the educational process

The main features of a safe educational environment are presented by some positive factors, namely: trust, benevolence, approval, tolerance, and absence of negative factors, such as: aggressiveness, conflict, hostility, manipulation.

The main threat in the interaction of participants in the educational environment is psychological trauma, the source of which is psychological violence [8].

The threat of psychological violence will be the non-recognition of the referential significance of the educational environment by its participants and, as a result, the realization of the intention to leave it or the denial of its values and norms. Therefore, another criterion of psychological safety of the educational environment will be its referential significance, which is recorded as an attitude towards it – positive, neutral or negative.

The next criterion of psychological safety of the educational environment is the level of satisfaction with the main characteristics of the interaction process [25]. Empirical manifestations are emotional comfort, the opportunity to express one's opinion, respect for oneself, preservation of one's dignity, the opportunity to seek help, consideration of personal problems and difficulties, help in choosing one's own decision [16].

To organize the experiment and get the outcomes, we implemented the theoretical, empirical and heuristic methods. From the group of empirical methods, we used psycho-diagnostic method [22,15]. Some e-learning modes and digital platforms were implemented to collect, process and analyze data. The achievements of the experiment were calculated and analyzed.

### **III Results**

Based on the described methods of collecting material and its interpretation, as well as the above-mentioned combination of them, let us turn to the study of the impact of increased risk conditions on the emotional component of safe educational environment.

A case study was conducted on the basis of some faculties of Sumy National Agrarian University, Ukraine, from March till May 2023 and from September till October 2023. Fifty first and second – year national (NS), including refugees, and international (IS) students, aged 18-20, participated in the experiment. The students agreed to take part in the study on the voluntary base. The participants of the study provided oral responses.

The research was done from March till May 2023 and from September till October 2023 among national (NS) and international (IS) students of Sumy National Agrarian University. We conducted several studies to identify the main challenges the students face in current circumstances that make them feel unsafe during the process of education. The study questionnaire was provided both in the Ukrainian and English languages.

Figure 1 shows problems the IS paid special attention to:

- finding hard to make decisions;
- family problems;

- unequal opportunities.

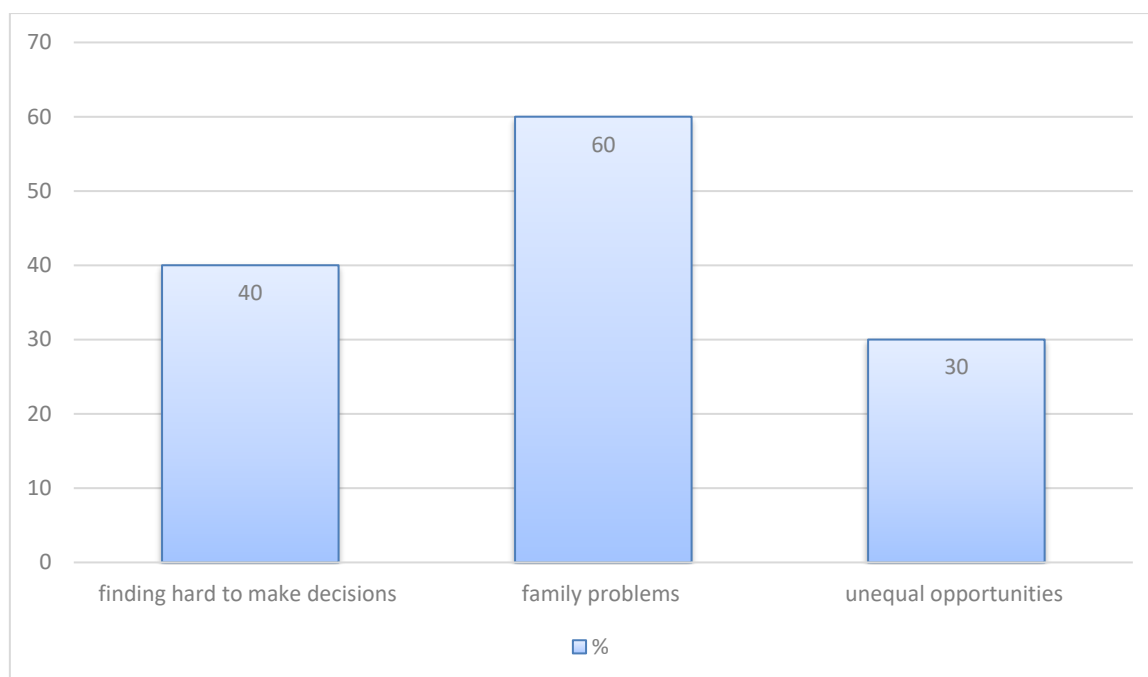


Fig. 1. Problems the IS

Figure 2 presents issues this experimental group also enlisted:

- lack of communicative skills;
- difficulties in combining work and study;
- aggressiveness;
- bullying;
- sexting;
- excessive homework to be done.

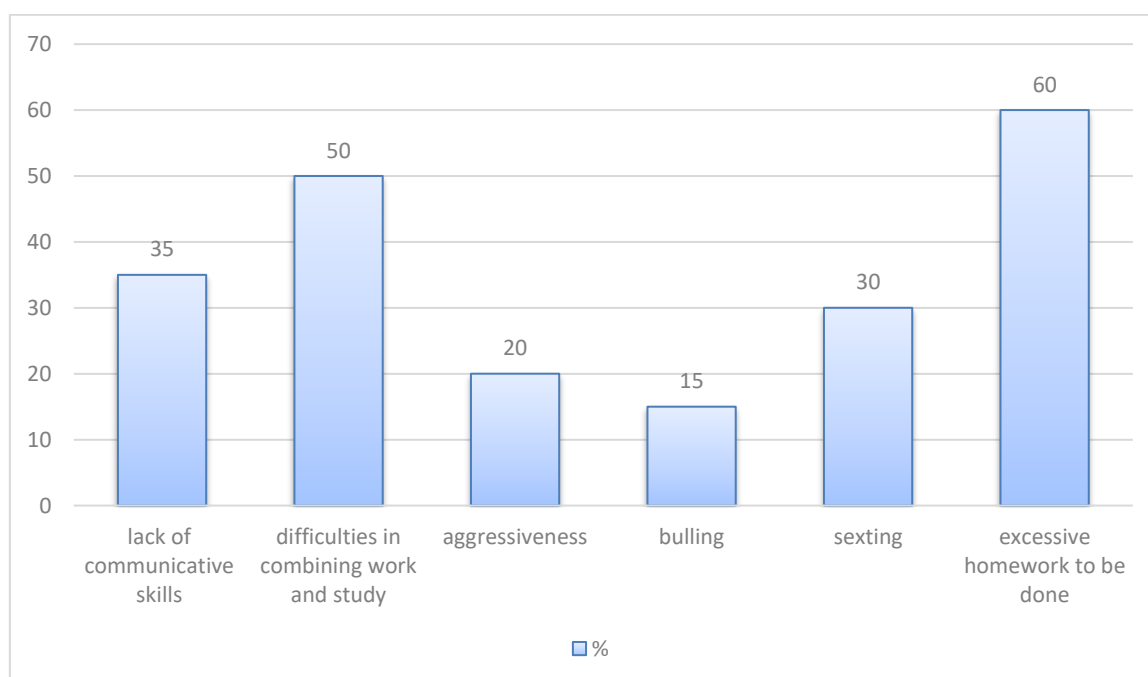


Fig. 2. Issues of the experimental group

The results suggest that IS, living in safe psychological and physical environment, pay more attention to the issues, peculiar to people feelings and behavior in terms of peace.

Figure 3 identifies quite different characteristics of the terms most NS have to live in:

- finding hard to relax and concentrate;
- having troubles with thinking clearly;
- being irritable and easily annoyed;
- feeling overwhelmed, helpless and hopeless;
- forgetting things (even important ones).

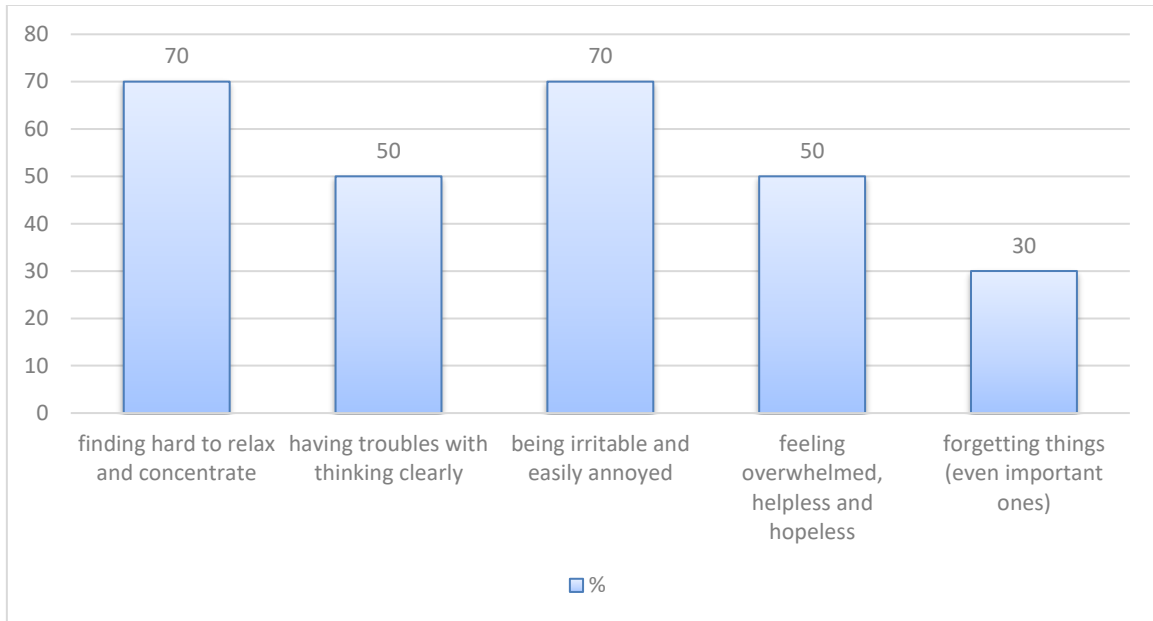


Fig. 3. Characteristics of the NS's terms

Figure 4 demonstrates nervous habits and physical disorders also mentioned by the students:

- biting nails, grinding teeth, fidgeting, pacing, mood-swings, stomach upsets, heart beating and breathing rapidly;
- sleeping problems (troubles with falling asleep, staying asleep, waking up, nightmares).

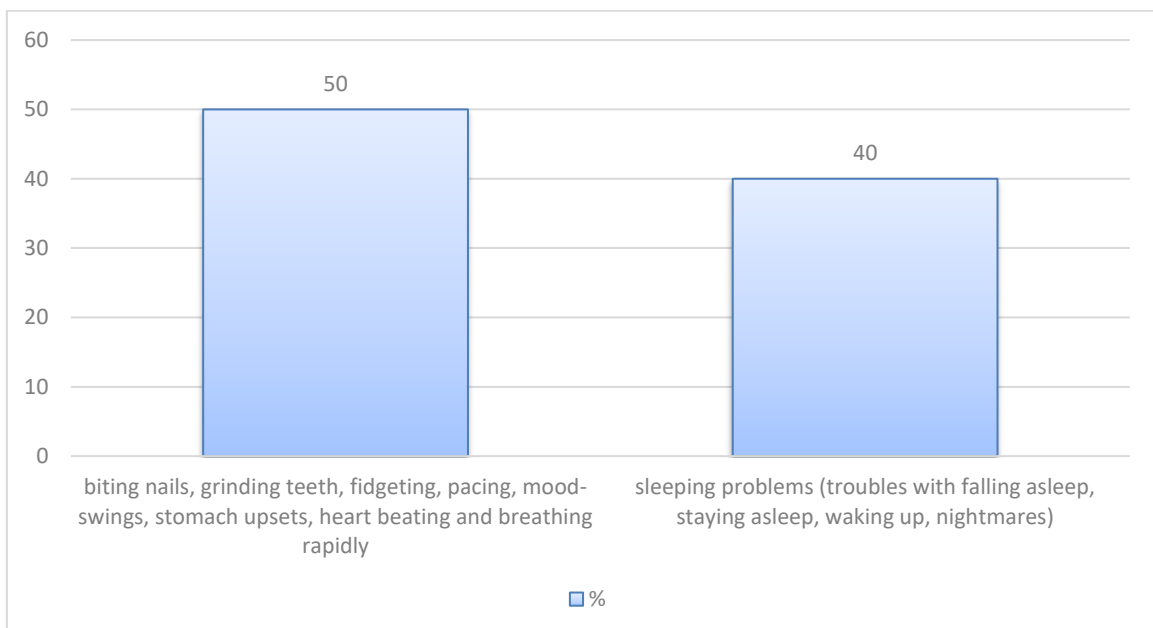


Fig. 4. Nervous habits and physical disorders

We can observe the quantitative index of the NS reaction to the outer manifestation that influenced their choice. Thus, according to the results we can conclude that international students come across the difficulties connected mostly with social problems, while national students reveal the challenges which reflect the consequences they have to deal with.

Figure 5 reveals some common problems both IS and NS highlighted during the survey:

- students find hard to make decisions;
- occasionally they find themselves taking unnecessary risks or engaging in behavior hazardous to health or safety;
- students have trouble feeling that life is meaningful;
- they think they are withdrawn and feel distant and cut off from other people;
- students conclude that their educational performance has declined and they have trouble completing things.

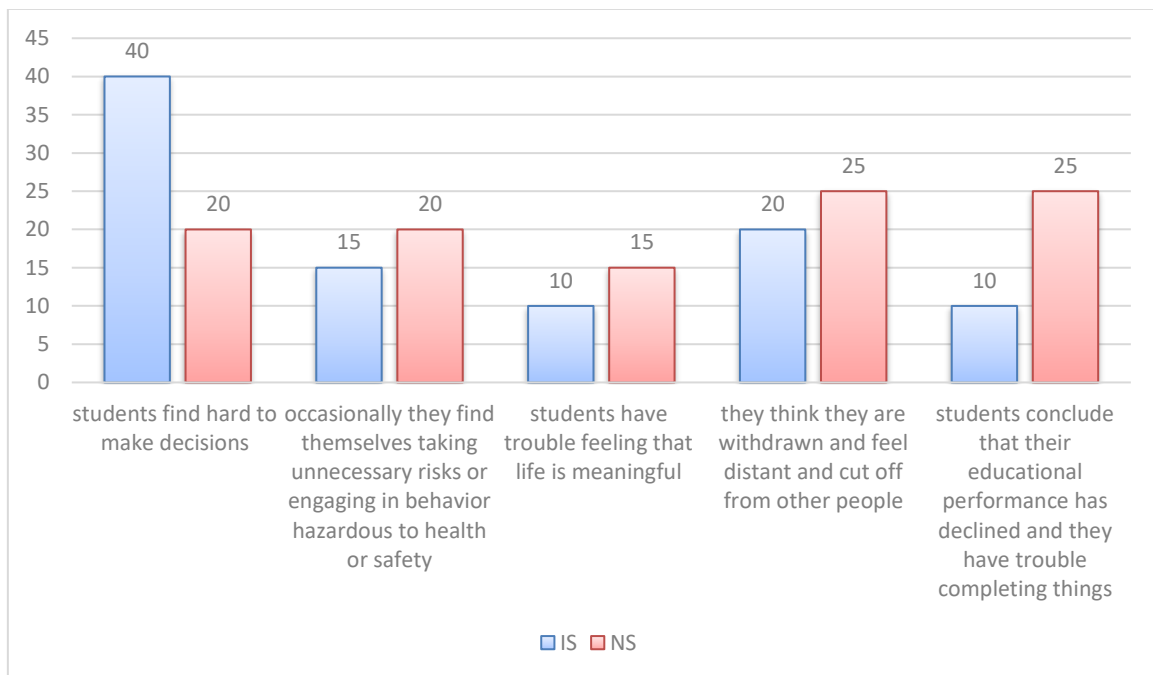


Fig. 5. Common problems

Hence, the results can justify that both groups have some fear of conditions they live in. At the same time, IS demonstrate their dependence on the social circumstances they got into. On the other hand, overcoming the obstacles and terms of the war they have to struggle with, NS reveal quite opposite sphere of problems and feelings. Despite this difference in results, students of both groups showed their wiliness to create safe educational environment, providing substantial background for studying in psychologically safe educational environment. Furthermore, in spite of the results, the observation gave us the opportunity to state that both IS and NS regularly displayed common basic characteristics of psychologically healthy people, namely: they respect others and have compassion; they try to control tension and anxiety; they are ready to meet the demands of life; they value diversity.

#### IV Discussion

Our review confirms the enormous impact of risk conditions on students' emotional state. This article indicates the results of the investigation concerning the effect of the psychological aspect in creating safe educational environment. Psychological aspect influences the mental, emotional, social or behavioral and spiritual dimensions of health and educational environment as a part of the living environment.

The World Health Organization announced that in situations of armed conflict around 10 percent of the people who experience traumatic events will have serious mental health problems, and another 10 percent will develop behavior that will hinder their ability to function effectively [24].

Dr. Amy Edmondson supports the idea that psychological safety, including emotional component, is a climate in which one feels one can be candid, it is a place where interpersonal risks feel doable, interpersonal risks, like speaking up, with questions and concerns and half-baked ideas and even mistakes [7].

Furthermore, a systematic review of articles found that lower scores in the quality of life correlate with traumatic and stressful events experienced and can directly impact psychological health. Dangman found that potentially traumatic events from war reduce the quality of life and that this was mediated by post-migration stressors alone or in sequence with mental distress [5].

Levis and Sun point out the implementation of a self-assessment questionnaire as the best tool for taking final results of the findings. They offer to include items evaluating life satisfaction, satisfaction with own health, abilities to get things done, emotional state of the respondents and satisfaction with self and personal relationships. The exploration of the psychological component as predictor of quality of life justifies that both emotional swings, anxiety and symptoms of depression have negative affect on the quality of life. Besides, there exists strong association between depression and perceived mental health that, in its turn, is considered to be a crucial predictor of quality of life [13].

Seager draws special attention to the emotional consciousness in stressful situations. He points out that emotional consciousness is a highly distinctive feature of our conscious lives, perhaps the central feature of which phenomenal consciousness and conscious thought themselves are best seen as mere [23].

In terms of war people can suffer from emotional and psychological swings caused by various traumatic events. That enhances the risk of developing mental health problems—like post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression.

Mofatteh investigates risk factors associated with stress, anxiety, and depression (SAD) among university students. He stresses that SAD are multifactorial, complex psychological issues which can have underlying biopsychosocial reasons. Multiple risk factors which affect the formation of SAD among university students can be categorized into multiple themes including psychological, academic, biological, lifestyle, social and financial. Among them we can distinguish the following ones, namely:

- lack of support from university;
- low self-esteem and self-confidence;
- loneliness;
- inadequate sleep;
- academic-related stress [17].

Kotsur and Tovkun emphasize that emotional component of the psychological safety in educational establishments is affected by the circumstances the participants have to deal with. Due to this fact, national students, including refugees, who got into wartime terms, are more subjected to both physical and psychological manifestations. At the same time, international students, being in safe life conditions, pay more attention to social issues that can affect the safety of educational process and distract them from educational activity [10].

Kovalchuk and Piletska support the idea that personalized approach is required to assess psychological health in the educational environment. In addition, a majority of mental health risk factors can be related to the academic environment. Furthermore, more training should be provided for teaching and university staff to help students identify risk factors, and provide appropriate treatment [11].

## **V Conclusion**

Humans need a minimum number of their needs met in order to survive, contribute to a community, and achieve self-actualization. Social scientists now believe that psychological safety is one of these basic needs, a prerequisite for people to be at their best in all aspects of life, including home, education and work.

The concept of psychologically safe educational environment has been the first of three basic constituents (psychologically safe educational environment, ecologically safe educational environment and information safety of educational environment) that make the framework of the safe educational environment.

Psychological safety means feeling safe to take interpersonal risks, to speak up, to disagree openly, to surface concerns without fear of negative repercussions or pressure to sugarcoat bad news. Emotional component of the psychological safety nurtures an environment where people feel encouraged to share creative ideas without fear of personal judgment or stepping on toes. In this kind of environment, a person feels safe to

share feedback with others, including negative upward feedback to leaders about where improvements or changes are needed.

Psychologically safe educational environment provides students with the opportunity to feel safe to make mistakes, take risks to further their learning and thinking and ask for help and support when needed. A positive educational environment will have the following characteristics: a safe, welcoming atmosphere, a sense of belonging among students, trust between students and teachers.

Creating a psychologically safe educational environment, teachers can help students feel confident to share their ideas, values and attitudes without fear of negative feedback from their peers. A safe educational environment with clear boundaries also helps teachers to manage discussions on sensitive issues with greater confidence.

According to the findings, we can conclude that in the educational environment a person may be put off his or her stride or totally lose the ability to perform efficiently. It should be recognized that psychologists, teachers, students, engaged in educational process, are currently not equipped or ready enough for the task of making the lives and activities of educational environment participants psychologically safe.

Building a psychologically safe environment has been shown to be foundational to supporting diversity, inclusion, and emotional well-being of students across general educational fields. If we fail to identify behaviors that promote emotional component of the psychological safety in education, we risk these domains for our learners to identify behaviors that promote safety in education.

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