



Gender-specific characteristics of intrapersonal conflict in adolescents under conditions of chronic war-related stress

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◆ **Abstract.** This article presents the results of a theoretical and empirical study of the gender-specific characteristics of intrapersonal conflict in adolescents under conditions of chronic war-related stress. The relevance of the study is determined by the increasing psycho-emotional burden placed on adolescents during martial law, accompanied by heightened levels of anxiety, emotional tension, internal disorganisation, and disturbances in the processes of personal self-determination. The issue is of particular significance during adolescence, which is a sensitive period for the development of self-esteem, identity, and systems of interpersonal relationships. The aim of the study was to identify the gender-specific characteristics of adolescents' experience of intrapersonal conflict under conditions of prolonged war-related stress and to determine the specific characteristics of their emotional responses and methods of psychological adaptation. The theoretical analysis was based on contemporary scientific approaches to understanding intrapersonal conflict, the psychological characteristics of adolescence, and the impact of chronic stress on individual mental development. The empirical study was conducted among adolescents aged 13-16 years living under conditions of systematic exposure to war-related events. A set of psychodiagnostic methods was used to investigate the characteristics of intrapersonal conflict, focusing on the assessment of anxiety levels, self-esteem characteristics, frustration responses, coping strategies, and psychological defence mechanisms. Quantitative analysis methods and Student's t-test were employed for the statistical processing of the results. The empirical findings revealed gender-specific characteristics of intrapersonal conflict among adolescents under conditions of chronic war-related stress. It was established that girls demonstrated higher levels of trait anxiety (49 points) and state anxiety (50 points), a predominance of intropunitive reactions (62%), and greater use of the coping strategy of seeking social support (67%), whereas boys more frequently exhibited extrapunitive reactions (58%) and avoidance coping strategies (61%). The practical value of the study lies in the possibility of applying the findings to the development of gender-oriented programmes of psychological support and psycho-emotional assistance for adolescents under martial law. The results may be used by psychologists, social educators, and mental health professionals to prevent maladaptive manifestations, enhance resilience to stress, and promote the development of effective psychological adaptation strategies among adolescents

◆ **Keywords:** adolescence; psychological defence mechanisms; resilience to stress; self-esteem; anxiety; coping strategies; psychological adaptation

◆ Introduction

Since the onset of full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022, anxiety has been the most prevalent psychological state across Ukrainian society as a whole. At the same time, anxiety

caused by the hostilities is compounded by age-related factors and individual personality traits. Young people, who are at a stage of active personal development, professional

Suggested Citation:

Stanishevskia, V. (2026). Gender-specific characteristics of intrapersonal conflict in adolescents under conditions of chronic war-related stress. *Bulletin of National Defence University of Ukraine*, 21(4), 62-68. doi: 10.33099/2617-6858-26-21-4-62-68.

Article's History: Received: 17.03.2026; Revised: 30.07.2026; Accepted: 25.08.2026; Published: 31.08.2026



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self-discovery and the formation of life values, are particularly vulnerable to the effects of prolonged stress. Prolonged exposure to uncertainty, threats to safety and forced changes to their usual way of life can exacerbate symptoms of anxiety and negatively impact the emotional well-being, adaptive capacities and mental health of young people. The conditions of war have a significant impact on the psycho-emotional state of adolescents, requiring a thorough and balanced analysis of their mental health, as noted by A. Kurapov *et al.* (2023). Research into this topic will help to reveal important aspects of the impact of armed conflict on the mental health of adolescents. The research by L. Zasiukina *et al.* (2025) indicates that the effects of wartime on vulnerable individuals manifest in the development of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression and other psychological problems. Adolescents require special support from specialists, as they experience such difficult times in particular ways (Peltonen, 2024; Solonenko, 2025). Intrapersonal conflict during adolescence can manifest itself in contradictions between an individual's needs, values, aspirations and actual capabilities. In studies by E. Pfeiffer *et al.* (2024) and Y. Kharchenko & L. Onufrieva (2025), the authors emphasise that, in conditions of wartime stress, these contradictions are exacerbated, which negatively affects adolescents' psycho-emotional state, their behaviour, social adaptation and interpersonal relationships.

The study of gender-specific aspects of experiencing intrapersonal conflict is of particular importance, as boys and girls react differently to stressful situations and employ different psychological defence mechanisms and coping strategies. The issue of intrapersonal conflict is the subject of research by many Ukrainian and international scholars. Researchers view intrapersonal conflict as a clash of conflicting motives, needs, values and aspirations within the individual. Contemporary psychological research indicates that the impact of armed conflicts on adolescents' mental health is long-lasting and protracted (Osokina *et al.*, 2023). For instance, K. Zhurba (2022) emphasises that significant psychotraumatic factors for adolescents in wartime include air-raid sirens, shelling and bombing, the emotional distress of adults, terrorist threats, wartime restrictions, the destruction of homes, prolonged stays in shelters, as well as the psychological impact of media reports on violence, loss of life, captivity and torture. For adolescents in temporarily occupied territories, additional stressors include the constant threat to life, the grief of losing loved ones, the difficulties of evacuation and traumatic memories of wartime events. The findings of an empirical study by T. Palko & K. Travina (2024) also confirm the significant negative impact of the war on the psychological and emotional well-being of Ukrainian adolescents. The authors reported high levels of state anxiety in almost half of the participants, together with clinically significant depressive symptoms in a considerable proportion of the respondents.

S. Kuzikova *et al.* (2024) examine the issues of providing psychological support to individuals under wartime conditions, the impact of chronic stress on mental health,

and the characteristics of the psychological adaptation of children and adolescents to crisis situations. O. Minenko (2024) empirically demonstrated that the majority of Ukrainian adolescents exhibit significantly elevated levels of state anxiety, whereas the level of trait anxiety generally remains relatively low. The gender differences identified in the study are also consistent with the findings of I. Zhdanova & I. Reva (2020), who report that girls are more prone to internal experiences, emotional reflection, and intrapersonal contradictions, whereas boys more frequently demonstrate external behavioural responses and conflict-oriented patterns of behaviour. During adolescence, intrapersonal conflict may manifest itself in contradictions between an individual's needs, values, aspirations, and actual opportunities. Under conditions of war-related stress, these contradictions become more pronounced, adversely affecting adolescents' psycho-emotional well-being, behaviour, social adaptation, and interpersonal relationships.

It was found that both boys and girls considered the achievement of inner balance, emotional self-control, and the search for a compromise between their own needs, experiences, and social expectations to be the most effective means of overcoming intrapersonal conflict. The respondents identified experiences of injustice, emotional hurt, difficulties in mutual understanding with others, lack of self-confidence, and contradictions between their own desires and the demands of the social environment as the principal factors contributing to the emergence of intrapersonal conflicts. The study of responses to intrapersonal conflict demonstrated that boys more frequently employed behavioural and activity-oriented methods of coping with internal tension, whereas girls were more inclined towards the emotional processing of their experiences, reflection, and seeking psychological support. The aim of this article was to conduct a theoretical and empirical analysis of the gender-specific characteristics of intrapersonal conflict among adolescents under conditions of chronic war-related stress.

◆ Materials and Methods

The empirical study was designed to identify the gender-specific characteristics of intrapersonal conflict among adolescents under conditions of chronic war-related stress. The study involved 60 adolescents aged 13-16 years, including 30 boys and 30 girls. The sample was formed using purposive sampling in accordance with the objectives of the study. The main inclusion criteria were adolescence, residence under martial law, and voluntary consent to participate. At the time of the study, all participants were experiencing systematic exposure to war-related events, including air raid alerts, information overload, and socio-psychological risks associated with the war.

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of psychological research involving minors. Before the collection of empirical data, participants and their parents or legal guardians were provided with information regarding the aims, objectives, and procedures of the study. Participation was voluntary, anonymous, and confidential.

Written informed consent for the participation of the children was obtained from their parents, and the adolescents provided their own voluntary consent to participate in the psychodiagnostic procedures. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage. The research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the American Sociological Association's Code of Ethics (2018). To comprehensively investigate the gender-specific characteristics of intrapersonal conflict, the following psychodiagnostic instruments were employed:

- ♦ State-Trait Anxiety Scale by E. Gaudry & C. Spielberger (1970);
- ♦ Assessment of self-esteem using the Dembo-Rubinstein method (n.d.);
- ♦ Coping Strategies Questionnaire by R. Lazarus & S. Folkman (1984);
- ♦ S. Rosenzweig Frustration Study Method (1945);
- ♦ Life Style Index (LSI) for the assessment of psychological defence mechanisms by R. Plutchik *et al.* (1979).

The selected battery of instruments enabled a comprehensive assessment of psychological characteristics directly associated with manifestations of intrapersonal conflict during adolescence and those that may be influenced by chronic war-related stress. Descriptive statistical methods (calculation of means, standard deviations, and percentages) and Student's independent-samples t-test were used for statistical data analysis. The use of this statistical test was justified by the need to compare the mean scores of two independent groups, namely boys and girls. As the sample consisted of two equal independent groups ($n = 30$ in each group) and the variables were measured on quantitative scales, Student's independent-samples t-test was applied to determine the statistical significance of gender differences. Differences were considered statistically significant at $p \leq 0.05$. The study was conducted in 2025 at the Uman Gymnasium of the Cherkasy City Council.

♦ Results and Discussion

To analyse the gender-specific characteristics of intrapersonal conflict among adolescents under conditions of chronic war-related stress, the "State-Trait Anxiety Scale" developed by E. Gaudry & C. Spielberger (1970) was employed. The instrument made it possible to identify statistically significant gender differences in adolescents' experience of intrapersonal conflict under conditions of chronic war-related stress. The results of the assessment of trait and state anxiety are presented in Figure 1.

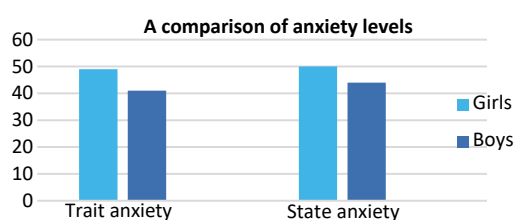


Figure 1. Level of state anxiety according to the methodology
Source: created by the author based on E. Gaudry & C. Spielberger (1970)

The findings of the study revealed statistically significant gender differences in adolescents' experience of intrapersonal conflict under conditions of chronic war-related stress. It was experimentally confirmed that girls demonstrated higher levels of both trait and state anxiety compared with boys. The mean trait anxiety score among girls was 49 points, whereas among boys it was 41 points. Similarly, state anxiety scores were higher among girls, averaging 50 points compared with 44 points among boys. The next stage of the study involved analysing the level of frustration responses using S. Rosenzweig's (1945) Frustration Study Method, which made it possible to identify statistically significant gender differences in adolescents' experience of intrapersonal conflict under conditions of chronic war-related stress. The results of the analysis of gender differences in frustration responses are presented in Figure 2.

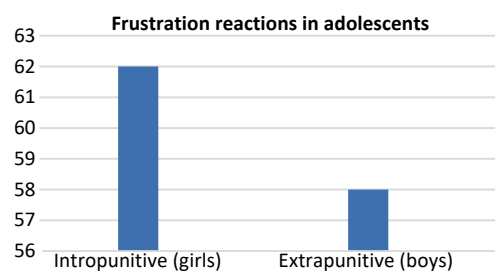


Figure 2. Gender differences in frustration responses according to the Frustration Study Method
Source: created by the author based on S. Rosenzweig (1945)

The analysis of frustration responses revealed that boys more frequently demonstrated an extrapunitive response pattern, characterised by a tendency towards aggressive or blaming reactions. Girls, by contrast, were more likely to exhibit intropunitive responses, characterised by self-blame, internalised emotional experiences, and emotional tension. The mean proportion of intropunitive responses among girls was 62%, compared with 38% among boys. Conversely, extrapunitive responses predominated among boys (58%) compared with girls (34%). These findings indicate distinct patterns of emotional responses to psychologically traumatic circumstances.

The findings obtained using the Coping Strategies Questionnaire developed by R. Lazarus & S. Folkman (1984) indicated that girls were more likely to engage in emotional processing of their experiences through interpersonal interaction, verbalisation of their emotional state, and seeking support from significant others. In contrast, boys more commonly relied on avoidance, distraction, or behavioural methods of coping with stress. The results of the analysis of coping strategies are presented in Figure 3. The average rate of use of the "seeking social support" strategy among girls was 67%, whilst among boys it was 42%. At the same time, the "avoidance" strategy was observed more frequently among boys (61%) than among girls (39%). The application of the Life Style Index (LSI) developed by R. Plutchik *et al.* (1979) confirmed the

existence of gender differences in psychological responses to stress. Among girls, the predominant defence mechanisms were rationalisation, regression, and the somatisation of emotional experiences. They were more likely to engage in internal analysis of problems and to experience conflict on an emotional level. Boys, by contrast, more commonly employed defence mechanisms aimed at minimising awareness of emotional discomfort and maintaining internal control over their psychological state.

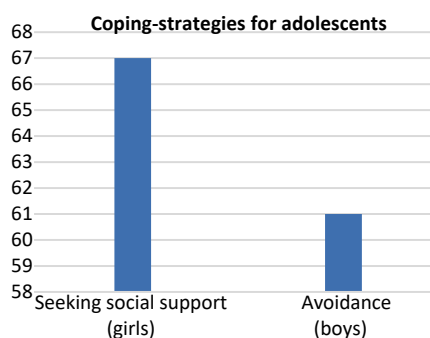


Figure 3. Gender differences in coping strategies according to the Coping Strategies Questionnaire

Source: created by the author based on R. Lazarus & S. Folkman (1984)

Using the Assessment of Self-Esteem using the Dembo-Rubinstein method (n.d.), the assumption was confirmed that a significant proportion of adolescents exhibit instability in their self-concept and internal inconsistencies in self-esteem. Specifically, the sample of girls more frequently exhibited low self-esteem, emotional insecurity and dependence on social approval. Meanwhile, the sample of boys showed a tendency to display inflated or compensatory self-esteem. Amid chronic war-related stress, adolescents in both groups experienced difficulties with personal self-definition, uncertainty about their life prospects and heightened internal conflict. The analysis carried out made it possible to trace the specific nature of adolescents' psychological responses depending on gender, which manifested itself in differences in emotional experience, behavioural reactions and ways of coping with stressful situations.

The results of the empirical study confirm that chronic war-related stress has a negative impact on adolescents' psycho-emotional state and exacerbates intrapersonal conflicts, which is consistent with the findings of contemporary psychological research. Analysis of the empirical data revealed differences in the nature of intrapersonal conflict experiences depending on gender. For girls, inwardly directed emotional reactions, elevated levels of anxiety and a tendency to experience emotional tension deeply were found to be more typical. In contrast, boys' psychological responses were more frequently manifested through external behavioural forms, in particular aggression, emotional distancing and avoidance of openly experiencing their own emotional states. The findings highlight the need to develop gender-specific psychological support

programmes for adolescents, adapted to the conditions of prolonged wartime stress.

The findings of this study are consistent with the conclusions of contemporary Ukrainian and international researchers regarding the impact of chronic stress on the psycho-emotional state of adolescents and the gender-specific nature of experiencing intrapersonal conflicts. The study confirmed the existence of gender-specific patterns in adolescents' intrapersonal conflicts under conditions of chronic wartime stress. The findings showed that girls are characterised by higher levels of state and trait anxiety, a greater tendency towards intrapunitive reactions and a search for social support, whilst boys more frequently demonstrate extrapunitive forms of response and avoidance strategies. These findings are consistent with those of T. Palko & K. Travina (2024), who established that wartime events significantly affect adolescents' psycho-emotional state, leading to increased anxiety, emotional tension and a sense of uncertainty. The authors also concluded that girls are more likely to experience stressful events emotionally, which is supported by the findings of the present study.

The study of gender-specific aspects of experiencing intrapersonal conflict is of particular importance, as boys and girls react differently to stressful situations and employ different psychological defence mechanisms and coping strategies (Bezlyudna & Korchakova, 2021; Karnaukh & Butenko, 2023). Researchers emphasise that adolescence is characterised by emotional instability, an acute preoccupation with one's own self-worth, a desire for self-affirmation and the formation of personal identity. The results of the questionnaire developed by O. Fedorinova & Y. Hapochka (2022) revealed gender differences in how adolescents experience intrapersonal conflict. In particular, boys are more likely to openly express internal tension through external behavioural reactions, impulsivity and the verbal expression of negative emotions. In contrast, girls tend to experience internal conflicts more on an emotional level, demonstrating a tendency towards self-reflection, anxiety and avoidance of openly expressing their inner feelings.

The identified characteristics of anxiety are also consistent with the findings of a study by O. Minenko (2024), which highlights high levels of anxiety among adolescents living in conditions of armed conflict. In the author's view, the constant threat to safety, uncertainty about the future and prolonged exposure to a stressful environment contribute to the development of persistent emotional tension. The data obtained expand on these findings, demonstrating that the intensity of such experiences has gender-specific characteristics and is reflected differently in the ways boys and girls respond. The study's findings are also consistent with the findings of S. Kuzikova *et al.* (2024) regarding the impact of war on the psychological well-being of children and adolescents. The researchers emphasise that the prolonged exposure to wartime stressors activates the individual's defence and adaptation mechanisms and prompts a search for effective ways to psychologically cope with difficult life circumstances. In the present study, this was reflected in

differences in adolescents' coping behaviours: girls more frequently turn to social support as a resource for overcoming difficulties, whilst boys more often resort to avoidance, which may indicate different mechanisms of psychological adaptation to conditions of chronic wartime stress.

The findings partly echo the conclusions of K. Zhurba (2022), who emphasises that war significantly affects the sphere of meaning in the lives of modern adolescents, altering their value systems, life orientations and perceptions of the future. It is precisely this transformation of the individual's sphere of meaning that may act as one of the factors in the emergence and intensification of intrapersonal conflicts during adolescence. The differences identified between boys and girls suggest that the experience of such conflicts is mediated not only by age-related characteristics but also by gender-specific ways of making sense of stressful events. At the same time, the study's findings are consistent with the views of O. Fedorinova & Y. Hapochka (2022) regarding the role of emotional and personality factors in the development of internal personality conflicts. The authors emphasise that intrapersonal conflict arises from a clash of conflicting needs, values and aspirations, and that its course depends to a large extent on individual characteristics of emotional response. The findings confirm this position and demonstrate that, under conditions of chronic war-related stress, such conflicts may intensify, taking on different forms of manifestation depending on the adolescents' gender.

It should also be noted that recent European studies on the psychological consequences of war for adolescents, in particular the work by A. Maftai *et al.* (2022), confirm that even indirect exposure to wartime events leads to increased anxiety, emotional instability and identity crises among young people. Thus, the findings of this study corroborate current scientific evidence that chronic war-related stress acts as a powerful factor in exacerbating adolescents' intrapersonal conflicts and determines the specific nature of their experiences depending on gender characteristics.

◆ Conclusions

The theoretical and empirical study made it possible to establish that chronic war-related stress constitutes a significant psychological traumatic factor that substantially intensifies adolescents' intrapersonal conflicts and complicates the processes of their emotional adaptation, self-determination, and personal identity formation. It was found that under conditions of prolonged exposure to war-related

events, intrapersonal conflict acquires the characteristics of persistent emotional tension, accompanied by increased anxiety, internal inconsistency of self-esteem, and a diminished sense of psychological security. The empirical findings revealed gender-specific characteristics of intrapersonal conflict among adolescents under conditions of chronic war-related stress. It was demonstrated that girls exhibited higher levels of trait anxiety (49 points) and state anxiety (50 points), a predominance of intropunitive responses (62%), and greater use of the coping strategy of seeking social support (67%), whereas boys more frequently demonstrated extrapunitive responses (58%) and the avoidance coping strategy (61%). At the same time, adolescents of both genders exhibited unstable self-esteem, difficulties in personal self-determination, and elevated levels of internal conflict.

The synthesis of the findings makes it possible to conceptualise adolescents' intrapersonal conflict under conditions of chronic war-related stress as a complex, multi-level psychological phenomenon determined by the interaction of stress-inducing conditions of the war environment, age-related characteristics of psychological development, and gender-specific patterns of emotional responses. The identified differences in the experience of intrapersonal conflict and mechanisms of psychological adaptation indicate the need for a differentiated approach to organising psychological support for adolescents. The limitations of the study are associated with the relatively small sample size, the localised nature of the sample, and the predominant use of self-report psychodiagnostic methods, which may affect the generalisability of the findings. Future research should focus on expanding the sample of participants, conducting longitudinal studies of adolescents' psycho-emotional well-being, analysing the influence of family and socio-cultural factors on the course of intrapersonal conflict, and developing and evaluating effective psychological intervention programmes for adolescents experiencing prolonged war-related stress.

◆ Acknowledgements

None.

◆ Funding

None.

◆ Conflict of Interest

None.

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Гендерні особливості внутрішньоособистісного конфлікту підлітків в умовах хронічного воєнного стресу

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♦ **Анотація.** У статті представлено результати теоретичного та емпіричного дослідження гендерних особливостей внутрішньоособистісного конфлікту підлітків в умовах хронічного воєнного стресу. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена зростанням психоемоційного навантаження на підлітків в умовах воєнного стану, що супроводжується підвищенням рівня тривожності, емоційної напруги, внутрішньої дезорганізації та порушенням процесів особистісного самовизначення. Особливої значущості проблема набуває у підлітковому віці, який є сенситивним періодом формування самооцінки, ідентичності та системи міжособистісних взаємин. Метою дослідження було визначення гендерних особливостей переживання внутрішньоособистісного конфлікту підлітками в умовах пролонгованого воєнного стресу та виявлення специфіки їх емоційного реагування і способів психологічної адаптації. Теоретичний аналіз ґрунтувався на сучасних наукових підходах до розуміння внутрішньоособистісного конфлікту, психологічних особливостей підліткового віку та впливу хронічного стресу на психічний розвиток особистості. Емпіричне дослідження проведено серед підлітків віком 13-16 років, які проживають в умовах систематичного впливу воєнних подій. Для вивчення особливостей внутрішньоособистісного конфлікту використано комплекс психодіагностичних методик, спрямованих на визначення рівня тривожності, особливостей самооцінки, фрустраційних реакцій, копінг-стратегій та механізмів психологічного захисту. Для статистичної обробки результатів застосовано методи кількісного аналізу та критерій Стюдента. У результаті емпіричного дослідження було виявлено гендерну специфіку внутрішньоособистісного конфлікту підлітків в умовах хронічного воєнного стресу. Доведено, що дівчатам притаманні вищі показники особистісної (49 балів) та ситуативної тривожності (50 балів), переважання інтрапунітивних реакцій (62 %) і копінг-стратегії пошуку соціальної підтримки (67 %), тоді як хлопці частіше виявляли екстрапунітивні реакції (58 %) та стратегію уникання (61 %). Практична цінність дослідження полягає у можливості використання отриманих результатів для розробки гендерно орієнтованих програм психологічного супроводу та психоемоційної підтримки підлітків в умовах воєнного стану. Результати дослідження можуть бути використані психологами, соціальними педагогами та фахівцями у сфері психічного здоров'я для профілактики дезадаптивних проявів, розвитку стресостійкості та формування ефективних стратегій психологічної адаптації підлітків

♦ **Ключові слова:** підлітковий вік; механізми психологічного захисту; стресостійкість; самооцінка; тривожність; стратегії подолання; психологічна адаптація