

**Promotion of mental hygiene practices among educational participants
in the context of environmental and epidemic threats: A gender analysis****Yuliia Hundertailo***

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Abstract. The relevance of the study is conditioned by the growing number of stressful factors in the contemporary educational environment, in particular, environmental, epidemic, and military threats that negatively affect the psychological well-being of participants in the educational process. Under these conditions, the spread of mental hygiene practices as a means of maintaining mental health and developing the ability to self-regulate becomes particularly important. The purpose of the study was to identify gender features of mental hygiene practices (on the example of mindfulness) among participants in the educational process in the context of environmental and epidemic threats and substantiate the areas of gender-sensitive promotion. The methodological basis of the study was the integration of a gender-based and systematic approach and the concept of mindfulness. The theoretical basis was the author's model of mental hygiene practices, which includes basic practices (physical and mental) and derivative practices (communicative, informational, recreational). An empirical study (on the example of mindfulness practices) was conducted using the "Five-Factor Mindfulness Questionnaire". The study involved 502 respondents who are currently enrolled in higher education, the majority of whom are studying for a bachelor's degree, master's students, and postgraduate students. Representatives of both gender groups were dominated by the medium level of development of mindfulness components (in the range of 60-70%). Statistically significant gender differences were found on the "Observation" and "Conscious action" scales: women showed higher levels of sensory and emotional awareness, while men showed higher levels of conscious activity. No significant differences were recorded on other scales. The obtained data indicate the influence of socio-cultural factors on the development of awareness components. The practical significance of the study lies in the possibility of using its results by psychologists, teachers, and the administration of educational institutions to develop gender-sensitive programmes to support mental health, prevent stress, and introduce mindfulness practices in the system of psychological support for participants in the educational process in crisis and emergency situations

Keywords: mental well-being; psychological self-regulation practices; mindfulness; gender differences; educational environment

INTRODUCTION

Education operates in the face of an increasing number of stressful factors, among which environmental, epidemic, and military threats occupy a special place. These factors significantly affect the psychological well-being of participants in the educational process, increasing the level of anxiety and emotional exhaustion. In this regard, there is a problem of developing

a system for maintaining mental health in the educational environment. Psychological readiness of participants in the educational process to counteract environmental and epidemiological threats to human health includes specific skills of the individual to worry about their psychological health and skills of activity in crisis situations. An individual's ability to cope with

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environmental and epidemic threats lies in the realm of personal resilience, which is underpinned by a clear structure to one's daily routine – a phenomenon discussed by V. Frankl (2020). Due to constructive habits, a person remains in a stable emotional state, which significantly enhances their effectiveness in challenging situations. One of these effective routine actions is mental hygiene practices, in particular mindfulness. These practices are widely used in educational institutions around the world, but they are not widely used in Ukraine, so their study is just beginning. The issue of gender characteristics of mental hygiene practices in the context of the educational environment also remains insufficiently investigated.

According to the World Health Organisation, mental health in the educational environment is a key component of overall well-being, and its support requires the creation of preventive strategies (World Health Organisation, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has become a powerful stressful factor that has significantly affected the psychological well-being of the population, including participants in the educational process. Under these conditions, interest in mental hygiene approaches as a system for preventing mental disorders and maintaining mental health has significantly increased. Y. Fu *et al.* (2024) in a systematic review and meta-analysis examined the effects of mindfulness meditation on depressive symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers concluded that mindfulness practices contribute to a statistically significant reduction in depression and psychological distress, especially in conditions of social isolation and uncertainty. R.L. Miller-Chagnon *et al.* (2024) conducted a randomised controlled trial among adolescents exposed to chronic stressors. The results showed that mindfulness training increases the level of instant awareness and improves emotional regulation, reducing the intensity of impulsive emotional reactions. C. Daniel *et al.* (2024) examined the relationship between mindfulness, spiritual well-being, and environmental responsibility behaviour. Researchers have found that a higher level of awareness is associated with a more responsible attitude to consumption and maintaining sustainable behavioural practices. T. Larina (2024) analysed the role of mindfulness in overcoming war-related experiences.

The researcher found that mindfulness practices help to reduce the level of anxiety, emotional stress, and help the individual to better adapt to the conditions of military stress. L. Karamushka *et al.* (2024) investigated technologies for ensuring the mental health and well-being of educational personnel in the context of war and post-war recovery. The researchers found that prolonged exposure to stress negatively affects the psychological state of teachers, and the introduction of psychological support programmes and mental hygiene practices contributes to increasing adaptability and professional effectiveness. The issue

of gender-based features of mental hygiene practices (in particular, mindfulness) among participants in the educational process remains insufficiently studied, especially in the context of contemporary environmental and epidemic threats. Promotion strategies can only be effective if gender-sensitive programmes can be created based on such intelligence. The purpose of the study was to identify gender features of mental hygiene practices (mindfulness) among participants in the educational process in the context of environmental and epidemic threats and to substantiate the areas of gender-sensitive promotion.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The theoretical basis of the study was the model of mental hygiene practices by Yu.D. Hundertaylo (2025), which considered mental hygiene practices as routine forms of self-care and nervous system training aimed at maintaining psychoemotional stability and forming healthy cognitive models of personal well-being. Stabilisation of the psychoemotional state was defined as one of the key conditions for maintaining psychological well-being in situations of excessive stress and traumatic influences. Basic mental health practices include physical activities such as healthy sleep, a balanced diet, hydrotherapy and physical exercise, and mental practices such as meditation, breathing techniques, visualisation, narrative methods, and other forms of self-regulation. The systematic application of basic practices creates the basis for the effective use of derived mental hygiene practices, in particular, informational, communicative, and recreational. Information practices are associated with a conscious choice of content and interaction with information sources, communication practices – with a conscious organisation of interaction in an online and offline environment, and recreational practices – with creative activities, gaming activities, humour, and leisure. Regular use of such practices contributes to the development of self-regulation skills, critical attitude to information, and constructive behaviour in crisis conditions, which forms the psychological readiness of participants in the educational process to counteract environmental and epidemic threats to human health. For empirical research, the department staff developed a special diagnostic complex aimed at investigating the structural components of the psychological readiness of participants in the educational process to counteract environmental and epidemic threats. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Institute of Social and Political Psychology of the National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine (Minutes No. 07/25 of 28 April 2025) and was conducted between April and September 2025 as part of the research project "Social and psychological techniques for promoting the readiness of participants in the educational process to counter environmental and

epidemic threats to human health" (2025-2026) under the supervision of Prof. O. Kredentser.

The sample was generated by distributing an online survey through the Google Forms platform. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous; all respondents gave informed consent to use the results for scientific purposes. The total sample consisted of 502 people, including 403 women (80.3%), 91 men (18.1%), and 8 non-binary individuals (1.6%). The participants' ages ranged from 17 to 44; 406 respondents (80.9%) were under 22, whilst 96 (19.1%) were aged 22 or over. In terms of educational status, 419 people (83.5%) were studying for a bachelor's degree, 78 people (15.5%) for a master's degree, and 5 people (1%) for a postgraduate degree. The study was carried out in compliance with international ethical standards for conducting scientific research with human participation. The respondents' participation was voluntary, and prior to the start of empirical data collection, all participants provided informed consent. Confidentiality and anonymity of the information received were guaranteed at all stages of the study. The organisation of the study was also based on the principles of respect for human dignity, charity, and ensuring the rights and well-being of participants (World Medical Association, 2013). To investigate mental hygiene practices using mindfulness as an example, the "Five-Factor Mindfulness Questionnaire" (FMQ-15), adapted by Ya.Yu. Kaplunenko & V.V. Kuchyna (2023) based on the approach of J. Kabat-Zinn (1991) was used. Mindfulness in this approach is defined as a special form of invaluable conscious focus on the current moment. The questionnaire contained 15 statements and was aimed at self-assessment of the level of awareness of thoughts, emotions, and behavioural responses in everyday activities. The tool covers five subscales: observation, description, conscious action, non-judgement of internal experience, and non-reactivity. According to the results of self-assessment, the low, medium, or high level of severity of each subscale was determined.

In the context of Western culture, individual cognitive and emotional processes associated with mindfulness practices remain insufficiently integrated into the daily experience of socialisation. In particular, the

ability to become aware of bodily sensations, sensory stimuli, and internal experiences is often not supported by educational practices focused primarily on external productivity and purposeful activity. As a result, focusing on inner experiences is often interpreted as absent-mindedness or a tendency to daydream. In addition, the problem of mindfulness is limited in popular culture, which makes it difficult to form an adequate understanding of mindfulness practices in society. The results were processed using descriptive statistical methods, in particular, the analysis of mean values (M), standard deviations (SD), and frequency distributions of indicators in gender groups. To assess the statistical significance of relationships between variables, contingency table analysis was performed using Pearson's χ^2 test. All statistical calculations were performed in the Jamovi software suite version 2.3.28.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the group of women on all scales, the medium level of manifestation of awareness components prevails (Table 1). On the scale "Observation", the majority of respondents showed a medium level (66.7%, $n = 269$), while a high level was typical for 21.6% ($n = 87$), and a low level was typical for 11.7% ($n = 47$). A similar distribution is observed on the scale "Description", where the medium level was 68.7% ($n = 277$), high – 16.6% ($n = 67$), low – 14.6% ($n = 59$). On the scale "Conscious action", the medium level dominated (65%, $n = 262$), but compared to other scales and groups, there was a relatively higher percentage of the low level (22.6%, $n = 91$), while the high level was 12.4% ($n = 50$). Notably, even during the student years women have a great many routine tasks to perform. For example, face care 30 years ago consisted of two actions – washing and applying cream, and now cosmetologists offer five-step routine. Therefore, such actions often become automatic. On the scale "Non-judgement of internal experience", the medium level was also leading (60.5%, $n = 244$), with a low level of 20.8% ($n = 84$) and a high level of 18.6% ($n = 75$). On the scale "Non-reactivity", the medium level prevailed (70.5%, $n = 284$), while the low level was 13.2% ($n = 53$), and the high level was 16.4% ($n = 66$).

Table 1. Distribution of indicators of mindfulness components in the female group

	Low		Medium		High	
	amount	percentage	amount	percentage	amount	percentage
Level of observation	47	11.7	269	66.7	87	21.6
Level of description	59	14.6	277	68.7	67	16.6
Level of conscious action	91	22.6	262	65	50	12.4
Level of non-judgement of internal experience	84	20.8	244	60.5	75	18.6
Non-reactivity	53	13.2	284	70.5	66	16.4

Source: compiled by the author

In the group of men (Table 2) on the scale “Observation”, the majority of respondents show the medium level (66.7%, $n = 60$), while a low level was typical for 21.1% ($n = 19$), and a high level was typical for 12.2% ($n = 11$). A similar distribution is observed on the scale “Description”, where the medium level was 70.3% ($n = 64$), low -15.4% ($n = 14$), high -14.3% ($n = 13$). On the scale “Conscious action”, the medium level also prevailed (68.1%, $n = 62$), while the high level was

found in 19.8% ($n = 18$) and the low level was found in 12.1% ($n = 11$). A similar trend persisted for the scale “Non-judgement of internal experience”, where the majority of respondents had an average level (70.3%, $n = 64$), and low and high levels were represented to a lesser extent – 16.5% ($n = 15$) and 13.2% ($n = 12$), respectively. On the scale “Non-reactivity”, the medium level also dominated (70.3%, $n = 64$), while the low level was 9.9% ($n = 9$), and the high level was 19.8% ($n = 18$).

Table 2. Distribution of indicators of mindfulness components in the male group

	Low		Medium		High	
	amount	percentage	amount	percentage	amount	percentage
Level of observation	19	21.1	60	66.7	11	12.2
Level of description	14	15.4	64	70.3	13	14.3
Level of conscious action	11	12.1	62	68.1	18	19.8
Level of non-judgement of internal experience	15	16.5	64	70.3	12	13.2
Non-reactivity	9	9.9	64	70.3	18	19.8

Source: compiled by the author

In general, both groups are dominated by the medium level on all scales (mainly in the range of 60-70%). Mathematical analysis revealed statistically significant gender differences on two scales: “Observation” and “Conscious action” (Table 3). In the male sample, pronounced indicators of a high level were recorded in the “Conscious actions” scale (19.8%). In general, men’s daily experiences are often saturated with dynamic changes or unpredictable circumstances that require higher concentration of attention. For example, driving is an unpredictable situation where successful control requires a clear understanding of the current situation on the road. Women had higher scores on the “Observation” scale (21.6 %). This scale described the focus on their own feelings and experiences, which may be conditioned by socio-cultural factors: in the process of raising girls, such behaviour was more often allowed and interpreted as traditionally “feminine”. For males, on the contrary, culture is more likely to offer detachment

from their own experiences in order to maintain a masculine stereotype. Based on the obtained empirical data, the areas of gender-sensitive promotion of mental hygiene practices among participants in the educational process were substantiated. In the relevant programmes, it is advisable to integrate components that emphasise the value of new life experiences in the plane of thinking and experiencing as a way to increase own resilience in the face of constant threats. For men, this will open up new facets of observation as opposed to exclusively external activity supported by Western culture. For women, it is necessary to provide elements of programmes that will help to turn routine activities into a source of diverse impressions, reducing the impact of the monotony effect (the so-called “Groundhog Day”), since most of the care work is usually performed by women. Thus, it becomes possible to significantly expand the range of daily experiences, deepen and enrich it with new shades.

Table 3. The need for digital applications for psychological assistance

Scales	χ^2	p
Observation	8.15	0.017
Conscious actions	7	0.03

Source: compiled by the author

A more detailed analysis of the frequency distributions revealed the presence of a specific inversion at the poles of the minimum and maximum values on those scales where statistically significant gender differences were found. In particular, on the “Observation” scale, the proportion of men with a low level of severity of this component was 21.1%, which was almost twice as high as the corresponding indicator among women (11.7%). But a high level of ability to fix sensory and internal stimuli was recorded in 21.6%

of women and only in 12.2% of men. The results of Pearson’s χ^2 test ($\chi^2 = 8.15$; $p = 0.017$) indicate that the differences found are not random and reflect a stable gender specificity, in which women show higher sensitivity to internal and external sensory experience. The opposite trend was observed on the scale “Conscious action” ($\chi^2 = 7.00$; $p = 0.030$). A low level of conscious action, which characterises a tendency to automatized and insufficiently controlled behaviour, was more often recorded among women – 22.6% compared to

12.1% in men. High indicators of conscious concentration on the activity performed were more typical for men: 19.8% of men and 12.4% of women showed the corresponding level. However, no statistically significant gender differences were found for a number of components of mindfulness.

Indicators on the scales “Description”, “Non-judgement of internal experience” and “Non-reactivity” were characterised by a high degree of similarity between men and women. On the “Description” scale, the medium level dominated both groups and was 68.7% for women and 70.3% for men. The proportion of respondents with a low level was almost the same – 14.6% among women and 15.4% among men, while a high level was recorded in 16.6% of women and 14.3% of men. The results obtained suggest that the ability to verbalise own emotional and bodily experiences is formed mainly under the influence of universal socialisation mechanisms, and not gender factors. Similar uniformity was observed on the “Non-reactivity” scale. The medium level of this component was almost identical in the two groups and was 70.5% in women and 70.3% in men. This indicates a relatively uniform development of the ability to allow internal experiences to arise and disappear without excessive emotional reactivity. On the scale of “Non-judgement of internal experience”, both groups had a relatively high level of internal self-criticism. A low level of this indicator, which reflects a tendency to strictly assess their own emotions and experiences, was observed in 20.8% of women and 16.5% of men, which is quite a significant indicator for students.

In contemporary research, mindfulness is increasingly considered as an effective tool for supporting the mental health of students in conditions of chronic stress, high academic workload, and social crises. Simultaneously, the results of various studies show both general trends and certain differences in the interpretation of the mechanisms of influence of mindfulness practices on psychological well-being and stress tolerance. G. Gallo *et al.* (2023) in a randomised controlled trial found that mindfulness practices help to reduce psychological distress and improve the emotional state of university students. The researchers emphasise the positive effects of regular mindfulness practice on anxiety and symptoms of emotional exhaustion. The results obtained are consistent with the results of the study, in which mindfulness is also considered as a resource for stabilising the psychoemotional state in the context of environmental, epidemic, and military threats. However, unlike the researchers, the current study focused not only on the overall psychological effect of mindfulness, but also on the gender characteristics of individual components of mindfulness.

E. Sperling *et al.* (2023) in a systematic review and meta-analysis concluded that mindfulness interventions statistically significantly reduce stress levels in

medical students. The researchers noted that the most effective programmes are those that are systematic and long-term in nature. Similarly, the results of the study indicate the importance of regular mental hygiene practices for the development of self-regulation skills. Simultaneously, this study further emphasised the role of socio-cultural factors in the development of awareness models. S. Fagioli *et al.* (2023) investigated the effectiveness of a short-term online mindfulness programme for university students. Improved emotional well-being and reduced stress symptoms were found even after a short intervention. In contrast to this approach, the study did not evaluate the effectiveness of a particular programme, but analysed the already formed components of mindfulness as individual characteristics of participants in the educational process. T. Fazia *et al.* (2023) also confirmed the effectiveness of online mindfulness interventions for medical students, showing positive effects on anxiety, stress, and overall psychological well-being. In comparison with these results, the study shows that even in the absence of special training programs, individual components of awareness can be formed at the medium level in the majority of respondents. This may indicate the influence of everyday experience and socialisation on the development of mindfulness competencies.

A.M. González-Martín *et al.* (2023), in a systematic review and meta-analysis, concluded that mindfulness has a positive effect not only on stress levels, but also on depressive symptoms, emotional exhaustion, and student academic well-being. Similarly, the results of the study confirmed the importance of mindfulness as a resource of psychological stability. However, the study also found gender differences on the “Observation” and “Conscious action” scales, which was not a central aspect of the research. P.L. Gerbarg *et al.* (2023) focused on body-breathing techniques as a means of reducing stress in medical students. The researchers considered breathing practices as a mechanism for regulating the nervous system and emotional state. Such conclusions relate to the concept of mental hygiene practices, in which mental and physical techniques are considered as components of a system for maintaining psychological well-being. A. Siripongpan *et al.* (2023) found that mindfulness interventions increase students' stress tolerance and improve adaptation to an intense learning environment. The results obtained are consistent with the conclusions of the study on the role of awareness in the development of the ability to respond constructively in crisis situations. Simultaneously, the study considered resiliency more broadly – in the context of environmental, epidemic, and military threats.

A distinct theoretical framework was provided by M. Bonnett (2019), who emphasised the need to make education more environmentally conscious and to foster a more mindful attitude towards the natural environment. Unlike research focused primarily on

students' mental health, the researcher considered mindfulness as a prerequisite for environmentally responsible behaviour. In the conducted research, this idea is further developed through the consideration of mental hygiene practices as a factor in the development of individual readiness to respond to environmental threats. Thus, the results of contemporary research confirmed the effectiveness of mindfulness practices in maintaining mental health and developing stress tolerance among students. Simultaneously, the study expanded the existing scientific approaches by analysing the gender characteristics of awareness components, and considering mental hygiene practices in the context of environmental, epidemic, and military challenges of the contemporary educational environment.

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the study, it was found that mental hygiene practices, in particular mindfulness, are an important resource for supporting the psychological well-being of participants in the educational process in the context of environmental, epidemic, and military threats. The theoretical analysis allowed substantiating the importance of mental hygiene practices as a system of routine actions aimed at stabilising the psychoemotional state, developing self-regulation, and increasing the readiness of the individual to respond constructively in crisis situations. It was determined that mindfulness practices contribute to a conscious attitude to own emotional and physical experience, the development of emotional regulation skills, and the development of psychological stability in conditions of prolonged stress. Empirical results showed the dominance of the medium level of development of most components of mindfulness in representatives of all gender groups. Statistically significant gender differences were observed on separate scales. Women showed higher scores on the "Observation" scale, indicating greater sensitivity to internal and sensory

experiences, and higher emotional awareness. Men, in turn, showed a higher level of "Conscious action", which may indicate better concentration on performing current activities and a lower tendency to automatic behaviour. No significant gender differences were found on the "Description", "Non-reactivity", and "Non-judgement of internal experience" scales, suggesting that certain components of mindfulness are relatively universal and less dependent on gender-specific patterns of socialisation. The results obtained also indicate the influence of socio-cultural factors on the development of mindfulness practices and methods of psychoemotional self-regulation. The relatively high level of self-criticism observed among student-aged respondents may indicate that young people are psychologically more vulnerable in the context of current societal crises, and that there is a need to develop the ability to view own experiences without judgement. The prospects for further research are related to the investigation of the impact of mindfulness practices on stress tolerance, adaptation to crisis conditions and academic well-being of different age and professional groups, and to the development and verification of the effectiveness of long-term mental hygiene support programmes in the context of contemporary social challenges. A promising area is also the investigation of the relationship between the level of awareness, psychological readiness for emergencies, and the development of environmentally responsible behaviour of participants in the educational process.

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Промоція психогієнічних практик серед учасників освітнього процесу в умовах екологічних та епідемічних загроз: гендерний аналіз

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Анотація. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена зростанням кількості стресогенних чинників у сучасному освітньому середовищі, зокрема екологічних, епідемічних та військових загроз, які негативно впливають на психологічне благополуччя учасників освітнього процесу. У цих умовах особливої ваги набуває поширення психогієнічних практик як засобу підтримки ментального здоров'я та формування здатності до саморегуляції. Метою дослідження було виявлення гендерних особливостей психогієнічних практик (на прикладі майндфулнес) серед учасників освітнього процесу в умовах екологічних та епідемічних загроз і обґрунтування напрямів гендерночутливої промоції. Методологічну основу дослідження становила інтеграція гендерного й системного підходу та концепції майндфулнес. Теоретичним підґрунтям виступає авторська модель практик психогієни, що включає базові практики (фізична та ментальна) та похідні (комунікативна, інформаційна, рекреаційна). Емпіричне дослідженням (на прикладі майндфулнес-практик) проведено із використанням «П'ятифакторного опитувальника майндфулнес». У дослідженні взяли участь 502 респонденти, які є учасниками навчального процесу, серед яких більшість здобувають освітній рівень бакалавра, а також взяли участь магістри та аспіранти. У представників обох гендерних груп домінує середній рівень розвитку компонентів майндфулнес (у межах 60-70 %). Виявлено статистично значущі гендерні відмінності за шкалами «спостереження» та «усвідомлена дія»: жінки демонструють вищі показники здатності до сенсорного та емоційного усвідомлення, тоді як чоловіки – вищий рівень усвідомленої діяльності. За іншими шкалами суттєвих відмінностей не зафіксовано. Отримані дані свідчать про вплив соціокультурних чинників на формування компонентів усвідомленості. Практична цінність дослідження полягає у можливості використання його результатів психологами, педагогами та адміністрацією закладів освіти для розроблення гендерночутливих програм підтримки ментального здоров'я, профілактики стресу та впровадження майндфулнес-практик у системі психологічного супроводу учасників освітнього процесу в умовах кризових і надзвичайних ситуацій

Ключові слова: психічне благополуччя; практики психологічної саморегуляції; майндфулнес; гендерні відмінності; освітнє середовище