

## **ATTENTIVE PRESENCE AS ANTIDOT TO EXISTENTIAL ANXIETY OF TODAY'S TURBULENT CHALLENGES**

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**Summary:** The report presents a scientific and theoretical analysis of the phenomenon of Existential anxiety, considers its nature and features in the modern research in the field of existentialism and neurobiology, as well as an existential-analytical approach to existential anxiety.

Different types of existential anxiety (fear of death, loneliness, blurred identification, and meaning of life), preconditions, and features of their manifestations, have been empirically studied and the relationship between their manifestations in the modern world (Existential Concerns Questionnaire, V. Van Bruggen) and the ability for attentive presence in the present moment (Mindfulness) (FFMQ) is presented.

**Keywords:** Existential anxiety, Existential Analysis, Four fundamental motivations, Mindfulness, Ukrainians.

The fragility and uncertainty of the world and life is obvious, and is a characteristics of our existence as a living being, but nowadays - they've become extremally noticeable. Some years ago and we couldn't even imagine that we would have an outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, so many technical disaster, dramatic political and economic changes, war conflicts, not to mention the full-scale war started Russia in Ukraine, with all the destruction, misery and death it has already brought. Such absurdity was difficult to imagine; nevertheless, we live in it now. All of this influences us. So, the topic of my report is: "**Attentive presence as antidot to Existential anxiety of today's turbulent challenges**".

In the tumultuous times of current challenges, any society is undergoing rapid changes and transformations that affect the individual not only at the general human level but also at the level of personal experiences. Crisis events shake the foundations of human existence, take away a sense of security and protection, destroy trust in oneself, others, and human relations in general, raise doubts about oneself and one's own identity, and sometimes deprive one of faith in justice, meaning, and a better future.

**Existential crises (or anxieties)** are periods of intense reflection by a person on his own life, its meaning, evaluation, evaluation of his own place in the context of life and summing up of what he managed to do. Being natural stages of development, sometimes they fall on a period of special vulnerability (age crisis) or can be caused by external factors. According to the American psychologist I. Yalom, the fundamental facts of human existence - loneliness, hopelessness, a sense of the meaninglessness of life, isolation, freedom, or death can cause internal conflicts, affecting different spheres of an individual's life, become factors of Existential anxiety when contradictions arise between them, which are not understood and integrated (Yalom, 2020).

There are several basic theoretical models for classifying Existential Anxiety by species, but sometimes they have no consensus. The most famous of them is the concept of Paul Tillich and Irwin Yalom. The concept of Paul Tillich which was introduced in 1952 and included: Death and Fate,

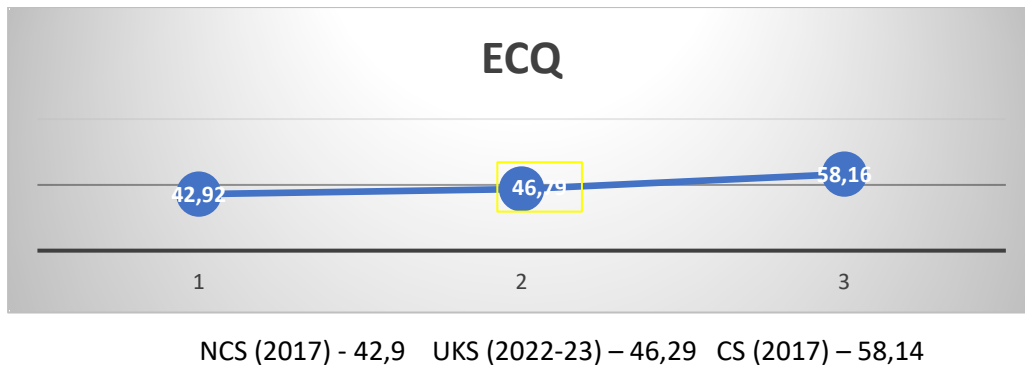
Emptiness and Meaninglessness, Guilt and Condemnation (Tillich 1952). Another one is the well-known concept of Irvin Yalom, which includes: Death, Lack of Meaning, Freedom, and Loneliness (Yalom 2020).

By considering the EA concept of anxiety, which is connected with 4 Fundamental existential dimensions (Leangle 2002), we can identify the following factors that are associated with the growth of anxiety on all four fundamental levels: **1FM** - Fear of losing one's life, being in danger; or a threat to capabilities and existence. **2FM** - Fear of losing values: health, loved ones, the joy of life; Fear of losing a relationship; Fear of the ugly side of life, Fear of suffering. **3FM** - Fear of oneself in many forms: of being oneself, of loneliness, fear of passing oneself; alienation from oneself; fear or inability to draw boundaries; fear of others - to lose respect, to be ridiculed, to be foolish. **4FM** - Fear of uncertainty, new and unfamiliar people; Fear of living meaninglessly - choosing the wrong partner, the wrong job, not feeling fulfilled. It is quite obvious that against the background of the full-scale invasion of Russian troops into Ukraine, Ukrainians are experiencing almost all manifestations of different types of anxiety.

#### **Research method and results**

In 2022 and 2023, we conducted 2 studies on Existential Anxiety (2022-23) among students of the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. The questionnaire "Types of existential anxiety" is the Ukrainian version of the English-language questionnaire by V. van Bruggen (Netherlands) used in the study and was adapted in Ukraine by Valeria V. (Kuchyna 2020). Van Bruggen's Questionnaire, which was used in our study of Existential anxiety, includes 22 questions corresponding to one of 5 scales the following 5 scales: Existential death anxiety, Existential anxiety of loss of meaning, Existential anxiety of identification, Existential anxiety of loneliness, Existential guilt (van Bruggen, etc. 2017).

The aim of the research is to identify the structure of existential anxiety in Ukrainians from 2022-2023. A qualitative analysis of respondents' answers separately revealed an average level of existential anxiety as such. However, the calculation of the results revealed a fairly high level of general concern about the fear of death, the fear of loss of one's own personality, as well as the loss of the meaning of life. In this figure below, we can see a comparison of Existential anxiety in the Ukrainian sample - 2022-23 and Van Bruggen's statistics in 2017 (on the non-clinical and clinical samples) (Fig.1). The level of Existential anxiety of Ukrainians, which is on average 46, 29 points, is higher overall, compared to Van Bruggen's non-clinical sample, but not critically. It does not reach the border of pathology.



NCS (2017) - 42,9 UKS (2022-23) – 46,29 CS (2017) – 58,14

*Fig.1 EA indicators in the Ukrainian sample - 2022-23 and van Bruggen's statistics (2017 - non-clinical and clinical sample)*

Research on Existential Anxiety (2022) conducted by us in 2022 on a sample of 22 respondents shows the following structure of existential anxiety. The greatest number of points falls on the scale of fear of death - 41% of respondents' answers. That is quite understandable against the backdrop of the constant threat to life that Ukrainians are experiencing. But the other indicators are quite high also: especially - the scale of identity – 20% and the scale of loss of the meaning of life – 20%. The scale of guilt – occupies only 4% of the indicators from the total number of points. A study on Existential Anxiety carried out in 2023 for a sample of 44 respondents shows almost the same results but with a decrease in the percentage of fear of death. Here it is already 39%. Which is, probably, related to the reduction of the feeling of immediate danger, the strengthening of Ukrainian positions in the fields, and adaptation to current events.

Briefly, it can be noted that among the factors of existential anxiety in Ukrainians, internal and external factors can be distinguished. They include subjectively disturbing and traumatic life events; war factors (presence or witnessing of hostilities, stories about capture and torture, losses and grief ) and other closing to these situations; all external factors that people cannot control, that create situations that harm human life, and the physical or psychological integrity of people; internal factors: fear of death, loss of meaning in life, and loss of identity; all external factors that people cannot control, which create situations that are harmful to human life, physical or psychological integrity of people; internal factors: fear of death, loss of the sense of life and loss of identity. Everything that concerns the integrity of life, both physical and moral, is taken into account acutely, directly, by factors such as war, and by other situations and conditions, such as fires, injuries, accidents, heavy suffering, and bad illnesses. The fear of death scale is 41%, which indicates that this experience has captured this existential given at once. This sample of respondents, in the past, revealed high values of existential anxiety, according to the assessments of the majority of respondents, the highest average, which can indicate that their nutrition may not be satisfactory, but be present as a background. The factors of fear of loss of identity and the sense of life also play a significant role in the experienced existential anxiety. Previously

experienced traumatic events can be re-experienced in fears and superimposed on the stage of war, which engulfs the existential state of specialness.

In addition to the study of Existential anxiety, among the same sample of students, in 2022-2023 we conducted an additional study of the ability for attentive presence (mindfulness) - to identify possible relationships between them. Scientific research in mindfulness began about 30 years ago. Active integration of the mindfulness method into psychological and psychotherapeutic practice required the development of tools for its measurement. One of them is the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ-39), constructed by Ruth Baer et al. and adopted in Ukraine by Kaplunenko Ya., Kuchyna V. (Kaplunenko, Kuchyna, 2021). This is a self-assessment scale consisting of 39 questions, that measures awareness of thoughts, feelings, and behavior in everyday life and contains 5 subscales: 1) "**observation**" of internal or external stimulus, such as sensations, feelings, thoughts, images, sounds, and smells; 2) "**verbal description**" of these stimuli; 3) "**conscious action**" as opposed to automatism and inattention; 4) "**non-judgmental**" regarding inner experiences; 5) "**non-responsiveness**" to internal experiences, which allows thoughts and feelings to "ebb and flow" without completely overwhelming the person (Carmody & Baer, 2008). It was this questionnaire that was used in the study.

The indicators of mindfulness, quite high in this sample, were compared with the date of standardization, provided by us while adapting this test in Ukraine in 2021 and with results of Spanish representatives, published in 2015, among the students of the University of Castellón, Spain (Aguado, etc., 2015). The result was quite comparable almost with the same score of indicators with ones in Ukraine. But what is really interesting is that the general level of mindfulness became higher in the Ukrainian sample of 2022-23 in comparison with a sample of standardization carried out in 2021 (Fig.2). Results can be seen in this table and chart.

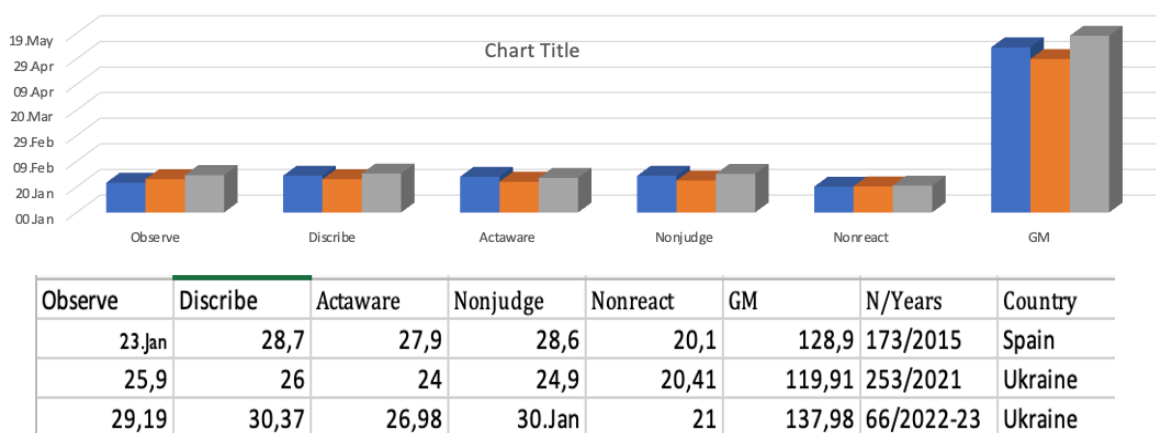


Fig.2 Mindfulness Assessment Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ-39), R. Baer et al. (2006), adaptation by Kaplunenko Ya., Kuchyna V.

Additionally, based on the analysis of the relationship between the General level of Existential anxiety and the General level of mindfulness ability (R. Bayer), we found a fairly significant negative correlation between them (**-.518**). Thus, respondents with higher Mindfulness ability scores experience lower levels of Existential Anxiety. Conversely, an increase in existential anxiety can lead to a decrease in our ability to directly experience life in the here and now.

My report is illustrated by the life history of Mariya Pruymachenko, well well-known Ukrainian painter of the last century, which used to suffered from paleomelite since childhood, and despite all the difficulties, was able to live fruitfully and painted hundreds of works that are admired all over the world. So I wish all of us to attentively and respectfully accept our own challenges and reconstruct this world in a positive way by our personal "living here and now".

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