

Psychological Features Of Uncertainty In War Conditions

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the relevant contemporary topic of uncertainty. The psychological characteristics of the category of uncertainty in wartime and life in general are identified. These include novelty, contradiction, complexity; variability of possibilities, choices, and decisions; unpredictability—the inability to forecast developments, unknowns, probabilities of events, and the absence of cause-and-effect relationships; uncontrollability—the subjective impossibility of managing the development of events, resisting surprises, predicting them, or controlling other people or circumstances. The situation of uncertainty is examined both as a threat and danger, and as an opportunity for further development and realization of one's potential. The concept of tolerance for uncertainty is revealed as a personality trait that helps individuals adapt and accept it. The characteristics of a tolerance-for-uncertainty personality are discussed, including the ability to see new opportunities in a constantly changing world, viewing challenges as tests of one's strength, enduring and accepting the nervous tension accompanying uncertain situations, and the ability to accept the unknown, new, and unusual as a stimulus for seeking new strategies, methods, and approaches in altered circumstances. Recommendations are developed for individuals in uncertain situations during wartime, aimed at planning their lives amid uncertainty and accepting and living through it. Priority tasks for individuals in uncertain conditions are identified as the rejection of the illusion of stability, belief in their strengths and capabilities, a positive attitude toward uncertainty, and readiness for change in unpredictable, volatile situations.

Keywords: Uncertainty, Tolerance for uncertainty, Intolerance for uncertainty, Readiness for change, Life planning in uncertain conditions.

INTRODUCTION

Uncertainty permeates all aspects of our lives and is an inherent part of it, whether we experience it in peacetime or wartime. It is difficult to imagine and predict what will happen to us in five minutes, tomorrow, in a year, or in the future during peacetime. However, war has introduced its corrections to how individuals perceive uncertainty, as there are many global situations that provoke it—loss of home, loved ones, jobs, health, disabilities, and a constant sense of threat and danger. These have a cumulative effect, making it increasingly difficult to cope. By nature, humans tend to resist uncertainty, surrounding themselves with comfort and security. Yet, even in safety, no one can accurately predict what will happen in the future. This is why individuals may constantly feel anxiety and unease about their future; however, uncertainty also carries many opportunities that would not otherwise arise.

The aim of this article is to conduct a theoretical analysis, empirical research on the problem, and develop practical recommendations for mastering the situation of uncertainty in the face of contemporary challenges (war).

To achieve this aim, the following tasks were defined: to reveal the psychological essence of the concept of uncertainty and its main characteristics; to explore the psychological features of tolerance for uncertainty; to empirically investigate attitudes toward uncertainty, tolerance for uncertainty, and determine the interrelationship between these indicators; and to propose recommendations for mastering the situation of uncertainty in wartime.

Among Ukrainian researchers, the problem of uncertainty has been addressed by scholars such as S. Maksymenko, who views uncertainty as a state (process) arising from the combination of variability in the characteristics of two or more psychological phenomena; Lushyn (2016), who considers uncertainty as transitional states that prompt individuals to experience positive emotions in new unstructured, ambiguous situations, perceiving them not as threats but as challenges; Husiev (2015), who sees uncertainty as a reserve of various pathways for personal development and the formation of a new identity, with the development of tolerance for uncertainty as one of the ways to cope with it; Khilko (2014), who categorizes situations of uncertainty and defines tolerance for uncertainty as one of the important professional qualities for future psychologists; and Perehonchuk (2016), who examines uncertainty in the context of organizing educational spaces and the professional training of future psychologists.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Before analyzing the psychological features of uncertainty in wartime, it is essential to consider the concept of uncertainty in psychological studies. According to the informational approach, uncertainty is the insufficiency of information about the conditions under which activities will occur, unpredictability of circumstances due to a lack or deficit of information. Uncertainty is associated with risk—planning, decision-making, and actions at all levels. It is a situation with unknown variables, relative ignorance of what will happen, and an inability to control external circumstances and other people.

In psychology, as noted by Briukhovetska (2015), uncertainty is often understood as an open task in which the decision-maker does not know all the factors at play and must formulate several hypotheses before evaluating their effectiveness. However, the options for resolving this situation may be equivalent, as it is challenging to predict and clearly determine which option will be more effective at the moment of choice.

In the scientific works of Khilko (2014), we find signs of uncertainty: the presence of incomplete information regarding what is happening here and now in the context of the need to make a decision, its deficit, opacity, incomprehensibility, and superficiality without clear definitions and boundaries; subjective awareness that makes it impossible to clearly determine ways to resolve it; the unknown and novelty of the future; double interpretation or contradictory nature of the information received; and the impossibility of complete control over the situation with a high degree of risk—unpredictability and unforeseen circumstances.

According to Kurova (2021), the informational approach to interpreting uncertainty somewhat simplifies the understanding of its essence and characteristics. On one hand, it is a deficit, contradiction, or vagueness of information, which in decision-making research reduces it solely to external conditions (real deficit, lack, or even excess of information). On the other hand, it is not only information that influences the emergence of uncertainty but also how a person perceives it, relates to it, and what characteristics they attribute to the situation.

An equally important characteristic of uncertainty is the unknown, novelty, and contradiction. These features, according to Kurova (2021), can combine external (informational) and internal (individual-personal—primarily motivational-needs states and characteristics of the cognitive sphere of the subject).

Based on the works of Lushyn (2016), Husiev (2015), Khilko (2014), and Perehonchuk (2016), we can identify the main characteristic features of the state of uncertainty: 1) dependence on events that cannot be predicted (the inability to analyze and forecast the situation in detail); 2) ignorance of all aspects of the situation, variability of choice, and the presence of alternatives; 3) a sense of danger and threat (attitude toward the situation of uncertainty).

Most researchers define the situation of uncertainty in the context of describing its parameters, such as:

- 1) Multiplicity, variability, multivectority—subjective presence of numerous possibilities, variability, alternative options for choices, decisions, and their interpretations (Yatsenko, 2020);
- 2) Unpredictability—subjective impossibility to forecast its development, absence, lack of information, or its excess, which does not allow tracking all features, parameters, and characteristics, establishing cause-and-effect relationships and patterns (Ilan, 2024);
- 3) Uncontrollability—subjective impossibility to control the development of events, resist surprises, and accept them (a person cannot control external circumstances or other people) (Susen, 2024);
- 4) Contradiction and ambiguity—on one hand, it causes nervous tension and a full spectrum of negative emotions, while on the other hand, it can evoke positive emotions (a sense of joy for completing a task, success, correctness of a decision) (McConnell, 2024);
- 5) The unknown and novelty—the situation of uncertainty is associated with the introduction of something new, and everything new evokes resistance and fear (Picione & Lozzi, 2021). In this context, it is worth noting

another characteristic of the situation: fear of change (unreadiness for change), as everything unknown and unpredictable is always associated with the inability to account for all circumstances and features of the situation, as the individual accepts facts that do not correspond to or contradict their previous experience. Sometimes it unexpectedly arises in critical conditions when there is simply no other way out, and one must react extremely quickly, radically changing their life intentions. The situation of uncertainty requires a new approach to organizing one's life activities, where familiar models of communication and behavior no longer work, and the individual does not know how to act anew, leading to anxiety and fear. The rejection of old behavioral strategies, communication forms, and work methods will inevitably be associated with changes—how ready the individual is to accept them, to risk in order to resolve the situation they find themselves in, and not to resist rapidly changing life conditions. Here, it is essential to focus on the personality trait of readiness for change, where the individual has sufficient internal resources to master themselves in the situation of uncertainty and is willing to accept the new and unknown. In these conditions, one way to maintain internal balance is to create and sustain certainty within oneself, believing in one's capabilities.

Given the characteristics of the situation of uncertainty in the context of modern challenges, it can be stated that uncertainty permeates all spheres of personality, and war exacerbates it (Haldén, 2023). People in wartime experience uncertainty even in the short-term perspective of the future, but also daily, hourly, and minute by minute. Danger awaits individuals at any time, in any place, and under any circumstances, generating a state of uncertainty. Even in relatively safe regions, individuals feel anxiety and nervous tension related to their future. Planning and envisioning the future in wartime is challenging. The uncertainty of the present manifests in significant situations such as: internally and externally displaced persons—leaving Ukraine and going abroad, where everything is unknown, new, and unusual; staying at home and facing the risk of life threats to themselves and loved ones in dangerous regions—uncertainty related to forecasting the future even in the short term (months, days, and hours); loss of employment—searching for it, and consequently, uncertainty related to professional activity, survival, and material security; loss of health—uncertainty related to financial security, material well-being, and even self-care, among others. This list can be extended, but it is evident that recent events in our country indicate that, on one hand, people occasionally find themselves in a situation of uncertainty (though these intervals are now intensively decreasing), and on the other hand, individuals quickly adapt and master the situation of uncertainty.

Psychologists Carlson (2024), Verkuyten (2022), and Jia & Wang (2024) emphasize that in conditions of uncertainty, a quality that helps individuals is tolerance for uncertainty, as individual differences in tolerance/intolerance to uncertainty indicate how easily a person accepts facts that contradict their previous experience. The introduction of the concept of "tolerance for uncertainty" into the psychological apparatus is associated with the need to explain the peculiarities of human behavior in uncertain, ambiguous situations, especially regarding the individual's readiness to accept or avoid them (Briukhovetska, 2015).

In psychology, the category of tolerance for uncertainty is examined from various aspects: as the ability to see new opportunities in a constantly changing world; the inclination toward uncertain situations as tests of one's strength—viewing them as challenges (Sternberg, 2021); perceiving uncertain situations as desirable, which helps expand the repertoire of behavioral strategies and actions (Phan & Ngu, 2021); the ability to reflect on a problem even when all factors and possible consequences of a decision are unknown, with the dominance of common sense over emotional components (Vaara & Whittle, 2022); the ability to endure and accept the nervous tension accompanying uncertain situations (Reizer et al., 2021); the ability to accept, rather than resist, the absence of connection and logic in incoming information; and the ability to perceive new, unfamiliar, and risky situations as a stimulus for seeking solutions to the situation at hand (Siegrist & Árvai, 2020); readiness to adapt to an uncertain situation or idea (Weiner, 2020). This is not an exhaustive list of characteristics of a tolerance-for-uncertainty personality, but it includes the most commonly used and frequently encountered traits.

For an intolerant personality, the following characteristics are typical: perceiving uncertain situations as sources of danger and threat; a tendency to make polar judgments of the "black-and-white" type; a tendency to make hasty decisions, often without considering the actual state of affairs; a preference for obvious and unconditional acceptance or rejection in relationships with others; an inability to think in terms of probabilities and a tendency to avoid opaque and vague situations; a tendency to react with anxiety to unclear situations; a need for categorization—a clear definition of what is happening; an inability to assume the presence of contradictory or ambiguous characteristics within a single object; dichotomous perception; a search for security and an attempt to avoid uncertainty; a preference for the familiar and a rejection of everything unusual, unknown, uncontrollable, and incomprehensible.

For the empirical study, the "Tolerance for Uncertainty" methodology by Budner (1962), adapted by Soldatova & Shaigerova (2008), and the questionnaire "How Do You Feel About Change?" were chosen. The subjects were psychology students from the first to fourth years at the Ukrainian National University M. Dragomanov, Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Pedagogical University, and Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi Vinnytsia Pedagogical University, totaling 546 students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 illustrates the varying percentage levels of tolerance for uncertainty exhibited by future psychologists. This data highlights the different degrees to which these individuals are prepared to handle ambiguous situations and unpredictable outcomes in their professional practice. Understanding these tolerance levels is crucial, as they can significantly influence the effectiveness of psychological interventions and the overall adaptability of future practitioners in a dynamic field.

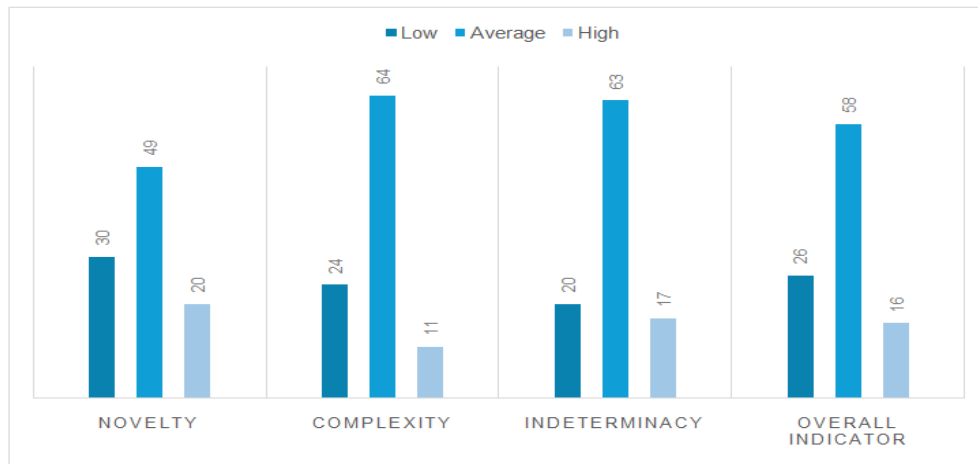


Figure 1.Percentage Indicators of Tolerance Levels for Uncertainty Among Future Psychologists (%)

The highest indicators for a high level of formation were recorded on the "novelty" scale at 20%. The subjects in this group tend to perceive situations of uncertainty as opportunities for gaining new experiences, striving for change, new experiences, and knowledge, enjoying uncertainty, viewing it as a challenge to their capabilities, and seeing resources and new perspectives.

In 17% of the subjects, a high level of "indeterminacy" was found. The results of this group indicate a rejection of the situation of uncertainty, a desire for clarity, transparency, consistency, orderliness, and recognition of rules and principles.

In 11% of the subjects, a high level was found on the "complexity" scale, indicating that the subjects perceive uncertainty as certain difficulties in achieving their goals. Such subjects often experience anxiety, nervous tension, and sometimes even aggression when faced with uncertainty. They either struggle against it, creating chaos and hostility toward their surroundings, or conversely, do nothing and do not consider any alternative ways out of such situations.

The indicators of the average level of tolerance for uncertainty were distributed approximately equally; however, the "complexity" and "indeterminacy" scales exhibited the highest degree of expression.

A low level was found in one-third of the students (30%) on the "novelty" scale, meaning that students, when faced with uncertainty, feel discomfort, fear change, and complex tasks. Everything new evokes resistance in them, and they do not see opportunities and prospects in situations of uncertainty.

A low level of formation was found in a quarter of the students (26%) on the "overall tolerance for uncertainty" scale, indicating that students perceive situations of uncertainty as threatening and dangerous.

To study attitudes toward change, the questionnaire "How Do You Feel About Change?" by K. Frailing and I. Fisher was used.

Table 1. Quantitative Indicators of the Dominant Strategy of Attitude Toward Change Among Psychology Students, n=546

No.	Dominant Strategy	N	%
1	Type A. Traditionalist	186	34.07
2	Type B. Realist	294	53.85
3	Type C. Free Thinker	66	12.09

The analysis of the results from this questionnaire aimed to investigate the dominant strategy of attitude toward change. The results showed that the majority of students (294) choose Type B. Realist, accounting for 53.85%. These results can be interpreted accordingly, indicating that the subjects realistically assess changes, even when those changes are associated with painful losses, perceiving changes as features of growth, development, and life. Conversely, changes at any cost are not their style; they implement new problem-solving approaches only when they consider them appropriate and justified.

One-third of the students chose the Traditionalist type (34%). The results indicate that the subjects approach changes with some fear, respect old orders, cherish traditional values, or realistically regard changes, taking their time to accept them into their lives, and if they do accept them, only those they consider justified, appropriate, or even as a forced step in their lives.

The least chosen type was Type C. Free Thinker, with 66 students, accounting for 12.09%. Such students do not adhere to traditions and customs, are not supporters of conservative ideas, and outdated structures and ideas bore them. The subjects in this group enjoy diversity.

To investigate the indicators of attitudes toward change and tolerance for uncertainty, a correlation analysis was conducted using Spearman's criterion (r). A positive correlation was established between the desire for the new ($r=0.086$ at $p\leq 0.05$) and the ability to quickly adapt to new situations and resolve them (complexity— $r=0.121$ at $p\leq 0.05$) with the type "Realist." A "positive assessment" by an individual of their skills and capabilities (behavioral repertoire) as sufficient to achieve their (subjectively important) goals and satisfy needs, along with the ability to respond quickly and flexibly to changing conditions, facilitates mastering the situation of uncertainty. These data indicate that the situation of uncertainty has a positive impact on the individual, as it promotes the acquisition of new knowledge and experience and serves as a catalyst for further movement in both personal and professional spheres.

A significant correlation was also established with indicators such as "complexity" and the Traditionalist type ($r=-0.196$ at $p\leq 0.05$). On one hand, a traditional and conservative attitude toward uncertainty serves as a reference point that aligns with the individual's personal experience, orientation toward "others" (in a broader sense—tradition), with the ability to assimilate a model in cognitive, evaluative, and behavioral aspects. On the other hand, it acts as a barrier to viewing situations of uncertainty as opportunities and prospects for further development. This tendency indicates a perception of the situation of uncertainty as a complex situation that is impossible or difficult to resolve and is accompanied by negative experiences (despair, anxiety, etc.).

Thus, the results of the empirical study showed that, in most cases, individuals approach situations of uncertainty predominantly negatively or cautiously, and only a small portion of students view them as challenges to their capabilities that would reveal new attractive prospects.

Traditionally, in everyday situations, "people strive to minimize the impact of uncertainty on their lives and, accordingly, reduce the level of anxiety that accompanies it. This reaction to uncertainty is understandable from an evolutionary perspective. Our psyche is structured in such a way that it attempts to predict what will happen next, to forecast events and consequences step by step. The inability to cope with the new or unknown exacerbates the accumulation of negative experiences and fixation on negative thoughts directed at analyzing all possible outcomes of the situation. Individuals find it challenging to cope with the feeling of incompleteness and the unknown resolution of the situation, the absence of consistency and predictability in what is happening. People are even willing to forgo potentially beneficial situations if they contain an element of uncertainty and unpredictability. However, gradually stepping out of the comfort zone may reveal that this feeling of uncertainty is not as frightening as it initially seems. A little chaos in their lives allows them to learn to live differently under new rapidly changing, unpredictable circumstances. A positive attitude toward uncertainty involves rejecting the illusion of stability and the unambiguity of the world picture, accepting uncertainty, which is accompanied by negative experiences but carries new opportunities (Kisaruk, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Situations of uncertainty are characterized by multiplicity of judgments, inaccuracy, incompleteness and fragmentation, probability, unstructuredness, illogicality, deficit, lack of information, variability, contradiction, and ambiguity, as well as the incomprehensibility of actions and behaviors. When describing the content and characteristics of situations of uncertainty, researchers unanimously agree that they prompt individuals to experience both negative (fear, anxiety, and nervous tension) and positive emotions in new unstructured, ambiguous, poorly predictable, and changing life conditions.

The state of uncertainty is that period when an individual is still unsure of how effective their actions will be and how successful the outcome will be, as all options for resolving the situation are equivalent. A lack of information, its quality, and the absence of experience in relevant life areas do not allow for a realistic assessment of one's capabilities, limit the perspective of actions, and lead to erroneous conclusions. Consequently, individuals become fearful of constructive decisions and risks, thinking about the consequences of their actions, which in turn leads to a loss of faith in their capabilities, decreased self-esteem, loss of prospects, and the inability to realize their potential in the future. However, it is possible and necessary to experience moments of uncertainty without fear and discomfort; the key task in this situation is not to be afraid to step out of the comfort zone, to allow oneself calculated risks, to make plans, and to believe in one's capabilities, perceiving them not as threats but as challenges. To achieve valuable results, one must take risks and act under conditions where all circumstances are unknown and may contradict the individual's existing experience. For this category of individuals, an uncertain situation is a challenge from fate; they thrive on this feeling, accepting it as potential opportunities and prospects. Therefore, to consciously experience and accept

uncertainty, recommendations aimed at a thoughtful consideration of one's fears, concerns, negative expectations, and hesitations in decision-making in uncertain situations will be appropriate, turning them to one's advantage while experiencing positive emotions of effective actions and successful outcomes.

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