

# Self-Development as a Vector of Sustainable Development of Society: The Perspective of Ukrainian Students

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## ABSTRACT:

The discrepancy between one's own personality and the desired self-image causes dissonance. But one can always change everything if one cares not only about one's own "EGO", but also about the values of a sustainable future. Self-actualization, self-development, self-determination - these are potential determinants of human existence as such. The ideological identity combines the memory of the past, the value realities of the present life, and outlines the vector of respect for the life of future generations, which in turn actualizes the conceptual paradigm of the concept of sustainable development a priori. The implementation of the social component of sustainable societal development involves maintaining and enriching the mental health and psychological well-being of citizens. A powerful internal resource for this is self-development, which is a vector of self-realization, unlocking potential and increasing the resilience of the individual. The aim of the empirical study was to examine the attitudes and activity of future psychologists regarding self-development as a vector for realizing the ideas of the concept of sustainable societal development. Materials and methods: The study involved 156 Ukrainian students studying psychology. Methods of written surveys, statistical processing and qualitative analysis of diagnostic data, ranking were used. Results: It was found that self-development is an important factor in the professional development success of future psychologists, an effective motive for their learning and a significant professional priority. Most respondents clearly understand the connection between their own self-development and the sustainable development of Ukrainian society.

*Keywords: self-development, sustainable societal development, social component of sustainable societal development, students, future psychologists, professional training.*

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## 1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of Ukraine's determined path towards European integration and amidst the protracted war with the Russian Federation, the challenges of achieving sustainable societal development have mounted. Realizing the social pillar of sustainable development requires maintaining and promoting citizens' mental health and psychological well-being. A powerful internal resource to that end is self-development, which serves as a vehicle for self-realization, unlocking human potential, and bolstering personal resilience. The psychologist emerges as a professional who, by personal example and through the substance of their work, catalyzes clients' self-development processes, enhancing their sense of accountability in bringing their own life strategy to fruition. The need for self-development forcefully reveals itself in young people during their professional training. For students pursuing a career in psychology, active self-development is the key to successful professional maturation and subsequent self-fulfillment in life.

## 2. Literature review

The interest in personal self-development itself has existed since ancient times, but it has been more widely considered mainly in the second half of the 20th century. In the last three decades, the philosophical-epistemological, philosophical-ethical and philosophical-sociological aspects of the conscious self-development of the individual have been developed, in particular, by: G.Glezerman, I.Dontsov, Y.Zlotnikov, V.Kiselov, S.Kovalov, V.Lozyvi, D.Shymanovsky and many others.

Based on the existing scientific developments of the above authors, we interpret self-development as a fundamental expression of one's capacity to be a genuine subject of their own life, the ability to independently unfold and enrich one's potential and vital activity. Therefore, we consider it necessary to reveal and emphasize the discursive vectors of the meaning of the concepts of "self-development" and "the process of self-development".

The emphasis on the factor of perfection is present in the works of Chaus A. The researcher argues - self-development is a conscious and personality-controlled process, as a result of which the improvement of the physical, mental and moral potentials of a person, the deployment of his individuality takes place. The process of self-development of the individual is inexhaustible and has no boundaries, just as there are no boundaries to human perfection. The process of self-development is a positive step-by-step process that is not homogeneous, integral or separate activity, but is carried out in various interrelated forms, which include self-affirmation, self-improvement, self-actualization and self-realization (Chaus, 2006).

Actualization of the factor of potential positivity can be traced in the reflections of Kolisnyk O. In particular, he writes - the factors of self-development include: goal setting; self-organization and positive attitude; development of mental abilities; accumulation of energy; development of communication skills (Kolisnyk O., 2006).

The internal potentials, the internal engine of the personal "I" as a core determinant of self-development is the subject of reflection of Maksymenko S. External and internal resources play a significant role in the self-development of the individual.

External resources should be understood as material values, social statuses and social ties that provide public support, help a person externally (Maksimenko S., 2007). External resources include: social support, family, friends, social status, material resources (work, finances), information resources, technological resources, human resources.

The value of internal resources is updated in Pavels' works. Internal resources reveal the essence of psychological personal potential, nature and human skills that help him from within (Pavelkiv V., 2002). Internal resources: health (physical and psychological), emotions, positive thinking, character, skills, abilities, experience, self-esteem, identification, self-control, spirituality.

Domestic researchers generally conclude that a person is constantly changing, "living", that is, in motion and change. And if its internal and external resources are not developed and improved, they degrade and deteriorate.

Self-development of the individual is a continuous process, its intensity depends on the degree of awareness of life events, perception, its value and importance for the individual. Self-development is mostly an individual process. Obviously, every person has their own, unique set of personal resources inherent only to him. Individuality is the unique originality of any phenomenon, individual creature, person... At the individual level, self-development is carried out both in unconscious, spontaneous forms (imitation, spontaneous adaptation, play), when the individual does not aim to change himself by his own efforts, and in conscious forms (self-education, self-education, self-creation, self-improvement), where the personality acts both as the subject of purposeful activity, and as an object that needs to be changed with the help of this activity.

No less interesting and informative is the modern foreign discourse on the issues of personal self-development in the context of the relevance of the concept of sustainable development.

Foundational is the perspective of humanistic psychology co-founder C. Rogers, who held that mature self-development becomes a self-initiated process of learning to be free whereby the individual progresses from the scarcely conscious existence of a psychologically dependent person to that of a person who embraces their own feelings, cherishes the deeper layers of their nature and trusts them, finds strength in actualizing their uniqueness, and lives according to values consonant with their experience (Rogers, 1961).

There are different opinions in the scientific space about the primary sparks of self-development. Some literature underlines intrinsic individual traits as career-growth orientations critical motivational drivers, with dispositions like mastery orientation (Boyce; Zaccaro & Wisecarver, 2010) and positive self-attitude energizing inner drive and visualizing developmental aims (Garanina; Balyaev & Ionova, 2019). These qualities provide foundational, self-generated impetus.

However, other researchers emphasize contextual factors as most directly stimulating and shaping improvement, including organizational support provisions (Boyce & Lisa, 2004), multicultural exposure (Tektibayeva, 2016), and shifting socioeconomic environments (Kassymova et al., 2019). There are also views focused on complex person-situation interactions shaping activation (Orvis & Leffler, 2011). Environmental conditions may clarify expectations or moderate trait-behavior relationships.

Further divergence concerns whether self-cultivation should concentrate on career competencies or integrated personal enrichment. Some research spotlights augmenting domain expertise like leadership (Boyce, 2004), and competence development (Miyer *et al.*, 2021) for professional advancement. But others conceptualize improvement more multidimensionally, enriching general life meaning (Nikolaevich & Popov, 2017), actualizing holistically across facets like embodied spirituality (Hooda, 2011), and engaging social issues (Kurzyakova, Vyatkina & Khayrullina, 2015). There are also attempts at bridging vocational and personal betterment.

Similarly, proposed developmental modalities themselves range extensively. Some center on reflective techniques (Kurzyakova, Vyatkina & Khayrullina, 2015), others blended formal and informal learning (Miyer *et al.*, 2021), and some profile yoga and movement-based programming targeting embodiment (Hooda & Sunil, 2011). The variety of perspectives suggests potential for synergies in self-development. Different opinions highlight intrinsic traits and contextual factors as key motivators.

In summary, while the increasing importance of self-development is consistently emphasized, the research reveals divergence on motivational triggers, intended outcomes, and developmental processes. Some emphasize career competencies, while others advocate for multidimensional personal enrichment. Divergence extends to developmental modalities, from reflective techniques to embodied practices. A multifaceted interplay of individual, social, and structural factors appears to stimulate and direct self-improvement efforts.

### 3. Materials and methods

The aim of our empirical study was to examine future psychologists' mindsets and activity regarding self-development as a vector for realizing the concept of sustainable societal development. This research builds on our previous work investigating future psychologists' awareness of the tenets of sustainable societal development and their attitudes toward applying them in subsequent professional practice (Stoliarchuk *et al.*, 2023). Future psychologists remain central in our scholarly inquiry since it is vital at the stage of professional training to shape their appreciation of balancing the fulfillment of current human needs with safeguarding future generations' interests, as well as their willingness to contribute to advancing sustainable societal development.

Given that a psychologist's key instrument is their own self, systematically pursuing self-development allows practitioners to enhance their professional competence and sustain personal resilience. Consequently, this empowers psychologists to deliver effective assistance to clients while simultaneously advancing the social pillar of sustainable development. Ongoing monitoring of nascent psychologists' perspectives on and engagement with self-cultivation as a pathway to realizing sustainable societal development is therefore well warranted.

Students pursuing a psychology degree at Boris Grinchenko Kyiv University in Ukraine participated in the study conducted in November-December 2023. The total number of participants was 156, spanning first- to fifth-year university students. The sample comprised youth from all regions of Ukraine. Over 2022-2023, the geography of enrollment expanded due to high numbers of internally displaced persons resulting from

the war with the Russian Federation. Students across four academic programs took part in the study, specifically: Counseling Psychology, Applied Psychology, Business Psychology and Management, and Extreme and Crisis Psychology. Synthesizing the findings allowed determining the nature of burgeoning psychologists' mindsets and activity vis-à-vis self-development as a means to advance sustainable societal development, which informed subsequent facilitative efforts by faculty.

The average respondent age was 21, with the youngest participant being 17 years old and the oldest 27. All participants, informed of the study's purpose and the confidentiality afforded by the anonymity of their responses, voluntarily consented to take part in the survey. The diagnostic phase relied on a written questionnaire administered through Google Forms (original content design). Quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques were leveraged to process the data, including averages, percentages, and ranking using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 26). The obtained diagnostic information underwent interpretation and generalization during the closing study stage.

#### 4. Results

At the outset of our survey, we sought to ascertain the role students assign to self-development while pursuing a psychology degree. To that end, respondents were asked to select the three most important factors for success in their professional maturation. We found that for future psychologists surveyed, the leading factors were internal: self-confidence, willpower and high self-esteem (first rating position); additionally, self-development, encompassing self-education, figured prominently (second rating position). These factors even exceeded the significance accorded to lecturers' degree of professional competence and students' motivation to become psychologists (third rating position). Table 1 summarizes the aggregated responses regarding the most critical success factors for fledgling psychologists' professional maturation.

**Table 1.** Factors of success in the professional development of future psychologists.

Factor name	Number of student votes* (%)	Rating position
Self-confidence, will and high self-esteem	73,5	1
Self-development, self-education	68,3	2
Level of professional competence of teachers	53,3	3
Motivation for acquiring the profession	39	4
Academic achievement	37,3	5
Degree of control of teachers and administration	5,2	6

\*The survey allowed the respondent to choose several answers

We regard such findings as a favorable sign pointing to students' sense of agency in their professional maturation process.

The criticality of development and self-development as key processes underpinning the psychology students' mastery of their future profession is borne out by the results pertaining to their current academic motivation, as laid out in Table 2. Students were asked to rate the importance of given motivational drivers for their professional training on a 10-point scale; based on their inputs, we ranked those motives. Intellectual gratification, unlocking and enriching one's potential through development and self-development (third place ranking) emerged in the top three motivations. This speaks to fledgling psychologists' entrenched intrinsic motivation to pursue this career path and their recognition of the value of development and self-development mechanisms for realizing their potential.

**Table 2.** Motives of educational activity of future psychologists.

Motive name	Students' average assessment of the importance of the motive	Rating position
Acquire deep and solid knowledge	8,99	1
Become a highly qualified specialist psychologist	8,93	2
Get intellectual satisfaction	8,87	3
To develop and self-develop our own potential	8,87	3
Ensure the success of future professional activities	8,66	4
Successfully study and pass tests and exams	7,64	5
Do not neglect the study of academic subjects	7,27	6
Always be prepared for classes	6,56	7
Fulfil the requirements of teachers	6,40	8
Keep up with your classmates	6,19	9
Earn the respect of your parents	5,96	10

The ranking of future psychologists' professional values aligns with the previously outlined findings. Here, students rated the significance of given professional values on a 10-point scale, enabling a ranking of those values. It was determined that amidst their professional training, the foremost priorities were: deriving gratification from their work, professional self-actualization, and professional self-development (Tab. 3).

**Table 3.** Professional values of future psychologists.

Value name	Students' average assessment of the importance of the motive	Rating position
Feeling of satisfaction from work	9,40	1
Professional self-realisation	8,95	2
Professional self-development	8,83	3

Financial support	8,63	4
Serving the community	8,22	5
Career growth	8,22	5
Recognition of work results by others	7,23	6
Status in society	6,94	7

The survey findings clearly outlined above bespeak psychology students' appreciation of the importance of self-development during their professional maturation.

Subsequently, we sought to establish whether prospective psychologists link self-development with the sustainable development of Ukrainian society. The majority of respondents do see a direct connection (Fig. 1), explaining this through the integration of the individual's activity into societal life. Some students aptly clarified that their engagement in volunteer work aids in bolstering the country's defense capability and restoring fellow citizens' living conditions and psychological resources.

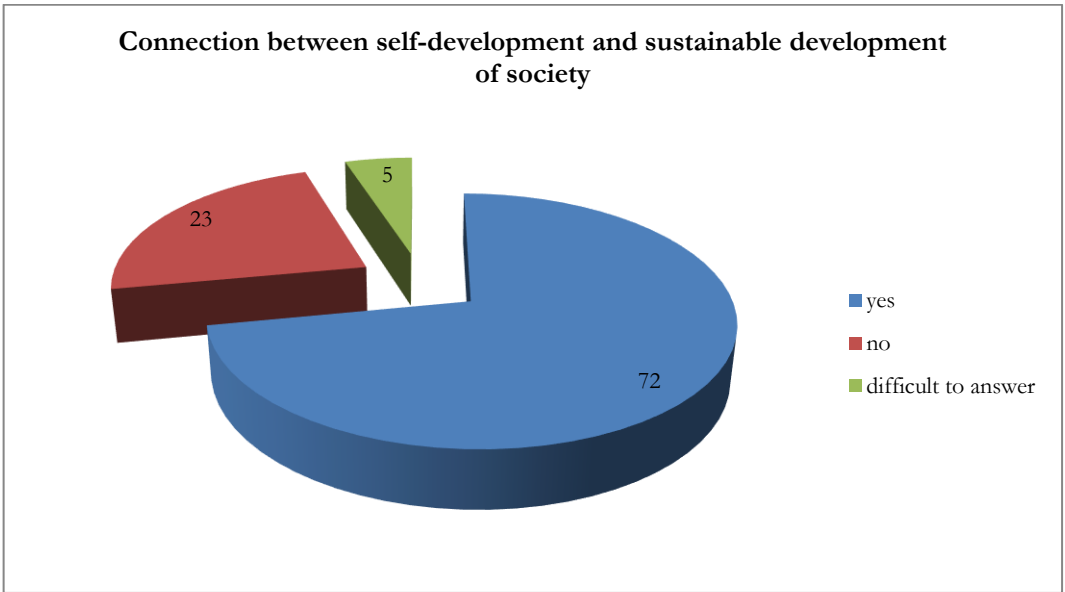


Figure 1. Students' perception of the connection between self-development and sustainable development of society (in % of elections).

However, it bears noting that some respondents did not perceive a connection between self-development and Ukraine's sustainable societal development. Explanations included living abroad or studying a foreign language to subsequently leave the country, self-development activity aimed solely at personal gratification, and the like.

The next query sought to determine how often students engage in self-development. The answers revealed that over half of respondents believe they undertake self-development frequently, with 29% of psychology students doing so on an ongoing basis (Fig. 2).

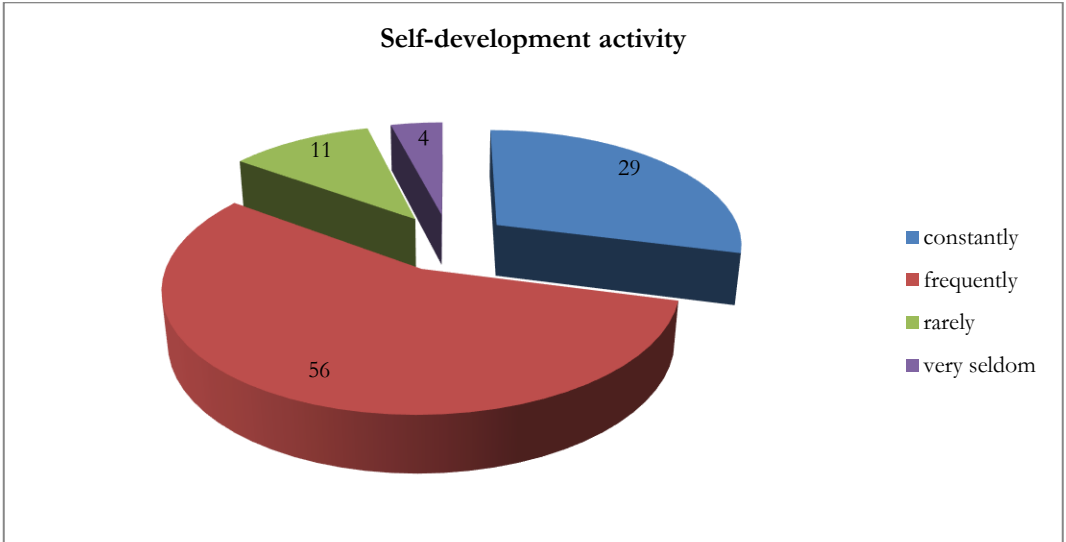


Figure 2. Changes in the intensity of students' self-development in the conditions of war (in % of elections).

Therefore, there is a predominant tendency among students for systematic self-development. However, despite most future psychologists recognizing its importance, some respondents (15%) lack engagement in actualizing it.

Amidst the protracted war between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, it was vital to ascertain whether the events of this war impacted the self-development of the students we surveyed. Processing their answers revealed that half of the sample did not observe changes in the intensity of their self-development (Fig.3).

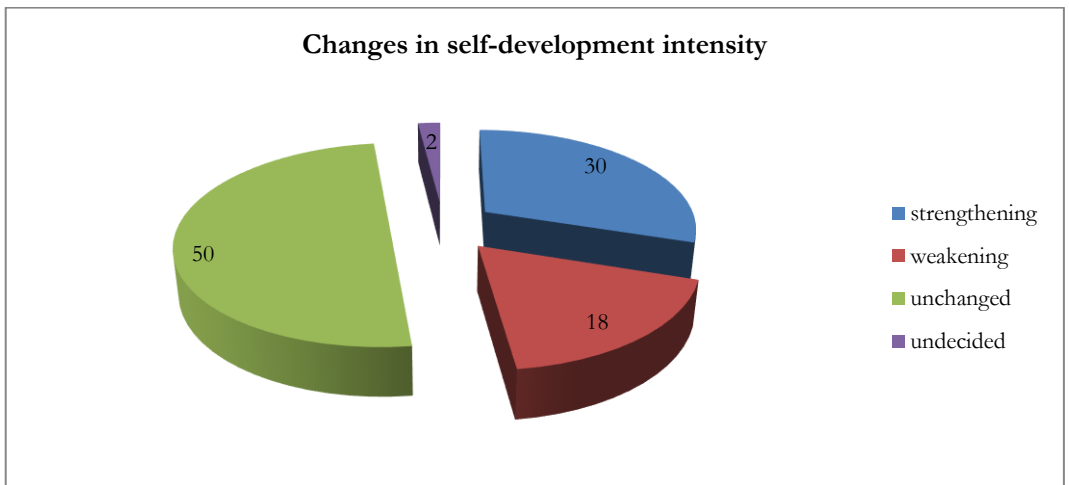


Figure 3. Changes in the intensity of students' self-development in the conditions of war (in % of elections).



Nearly a third of respondents indicated intensified self-development. In comments, some of them specified that self-development allows distraction from anxiety and prolonged stressful experiences, and also helps better master the chosen socially meaningful psychology profession. However, 18% of the sample, 28 students, evidenced the opposite reaction. Under the sway of chronic security breaches and declining well-being, these respondents' desire and efforts for self-cultivation weakened. Clearly, this contingent of students requires psychological support.

The next phase of our study involved identifying the areas of self-development future psychologists engage in. Among the responses, where students could choose several options, the most prevalent one pertained to their future profession (Fig. 4).

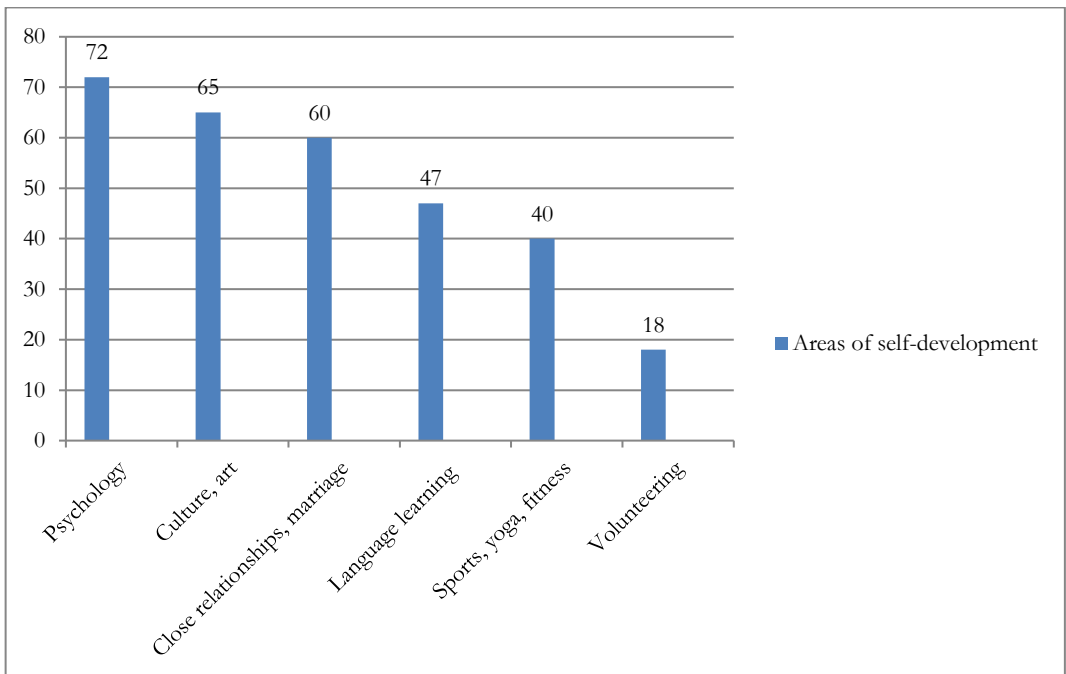


Figure 4. Spheres of self-development of psychology students (in % of elections).

Students emphasized having a broader range of psychological interests than their chosen academic program covers, which we regard as a very favorable indicator. Respondents also specified this involves reviewing additional psychological literature, completing educational online courses, participating in psychological trainings and webinars. The next self-development area students identified was the cultural and artistic domain, within which they engage in music, dance, vocals, attend theatre workshops, etc. Importantly, the orientation toward self-cultivation in culture and the arts reflects students' aspiration for spiritual enrichment, which is unambiguously positive in future psychologists' training. Interestingly, the cultural-artistic sphere even "edged out" close relationships and marriage, which also preoccupy many respondents, in prevalence. The popularity of this self-development area resonates with the needs of students as

representatives of adolescent and early adulthood; they actualize it by mastering and honing skills of equitable, non-violent communication, developing emotional intelligence, and self-education.

It was determined that 40% of psychology students independently enhance both their native and foreign language proficiency. The increased interest in the Ukrainian language against the backdrop of abandoning the Russian-language means of communication, which were widespread among pre-war youth, is positive.

Against the backdrop of prolonged stressful experiences, many students leverage physical activity as a self-development area. Voluntary assistance to individuals and society (volunteer work) is a means of self-actualization and self-improvement for 18% of respondents, while 17% chose ecology as their self-development sphere. Some students indicated their own self-development vectors, specifically: sexual education, cooking and healthy eating, politics, basic medical knowledge, IT technologies, and religion. As we can see, the nature of self-development among respondents is predominantly humanities-oriented, including in the context of their chosen profession. At the same time, the broad range of identified self-cultivation areas among future psychologists is an expression of actualizing the social component of sustainable societal development.

The next survey question elicited students' current motivation for self-development and allowed choosing multiple answer options. The most popular motive among polled students, predictably, was deepening professional competence (first place ranking); the desire for intellectual and cultural enrichment also featured prominently (second ranking position). Rounding out the top three was the ambition to enable one's abilities (Tab. 4).

**Table 4.** Motives for self-development of future psychologists.

Value name	Election statistics (%)	Rating position
Deepening professional competence	65	1
Intellectual and cultural enrichment	63	2
Developing your abilities	51	3
Strengthening our own resilience	44	4
Building a successful career	35	5
Identity enrichment	26	5
Finding your vocation	22	6
Self-assertion among others	8	7
Overcoming a personal crisis	8	7
Teachers' recommendations	4	8

Importantly, for many respondents self-development serves as a resource for bolstering resilience, which is especially topical amidst wartime conditions. Over a third of the polled students recognize the positive role of self-cultivation for subsequent successful employment and career-building. Some future psychologists associate self-development with enriching their own identity and finding their calling. For 8% of surveyed students, self-development is a means of self-affirmation among others (“not lagging behind others, being successful in everything”), as well as a coping strategy conducive to constructively

overcoming a personal crisis. As we can see, most students are driven by internal motives for self-development, since the external motive – teacher recommendations – is only relevant for 4% of future psychologists.

Analyzing students' responses to the final survey question allowed identifying typical obstacles to their self-development. Among respondents, the most prevalent turned out to be the time deficit associated with intense academic workload and the desire to complete educational assignments well (Fig. 5). An unfavorable state manifested at both the mental level (apathy, anxiety, fear, despair) and the vital level (fatigue, exhaustion, drowsiness, disordered eating patterns, etc.) also featured as a widespread self-development barrier among respondents. Students link all these manifestations to the war, the threat to life, and prolonged distress over the loss of a sense of security, anxiety over an uncertain future.

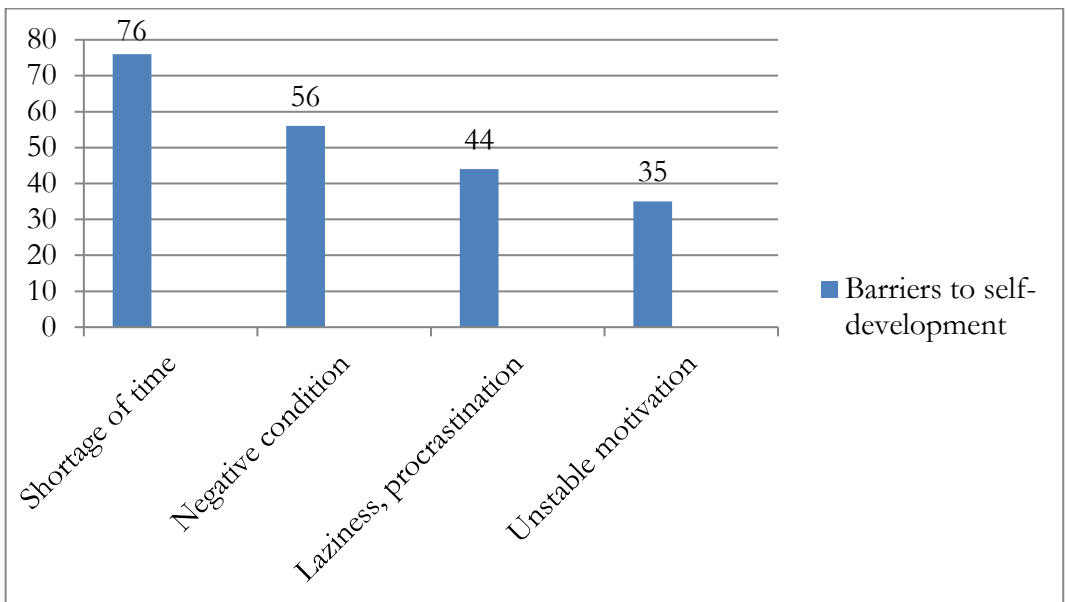


Figure 5. Obstacles to the self-development of psychology students (in % of elections).

Almost half of the surveyed students (44%) see laziness and procrastination as the greatest difficulty, which resonates with the selected variant of inconsistent motivation. Four students each complain about insufficient skills for self-development and the inadequacy of results relative to invested efforts. Three recognize the dearth of financial means for self-cultivation (e.g. lack of funds to attend paid trainings) as an issue, while one student acknowledged that lacking self-confidence and doubting their intellectual potential pose the main challenge.

The focus of our research also included the question of what risks incorrect understanding of self-development and its purpose for the subject of its implementation may pose. Students of psychology identified overload, imbalance of self-actualization and

decreased self-esteem (Fig. 6) as the most typical negative consequences of self-development:

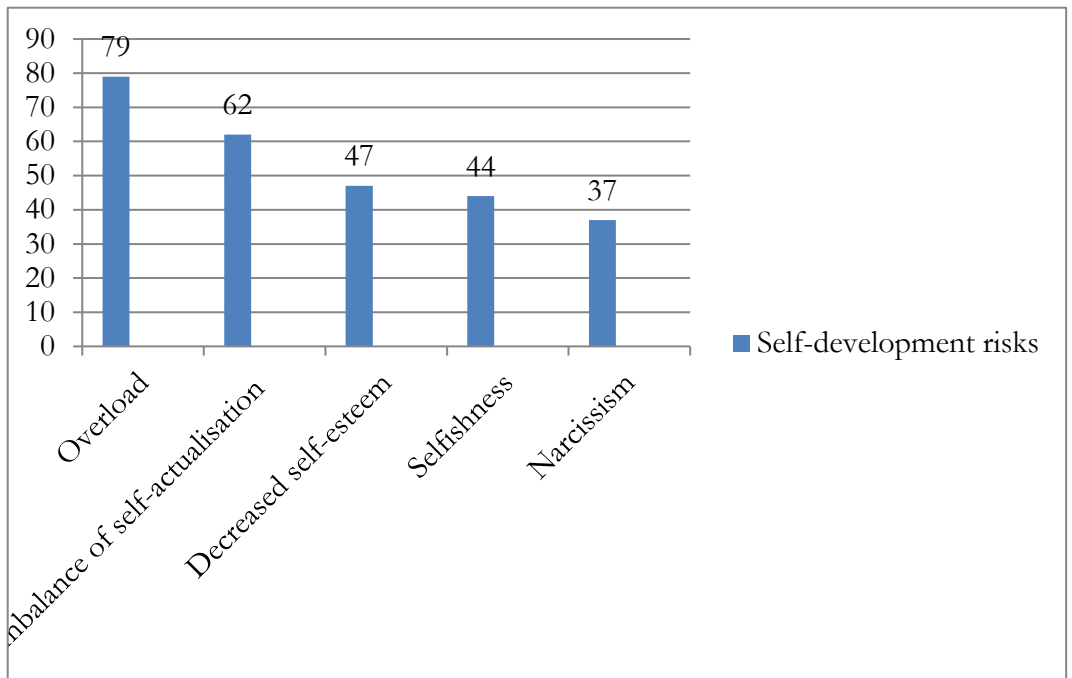


Figure 6. Risks of misunderstanding self-development (in % of elections).

Respondents rightly see a high probability of the subject of self-development experiencing overload, chronic stress due to significant internal polyfunctional demands, and, as a consequence, provoking emotional burnout. As one student aptly put it, even self-development requires holidays. Another powerful negative consequence of one-sided self-development, for example only in the professional sphere, may be an imbalance of self-actualization due to neglect of alternative areas of life (family, leisure) provoked by the mechanism of hypercompensation.

Chronic personal dissatisfaction, devaluation of current achievements, decreased self-esteem and self-respect as signs of the neurotic nature of self-development are unfavorable for full life implementation. At the same time, future psychologists acknowledge the risk of egoism due to the subject's concentration only on the progress of their own personality while simultaneously ignoring the needs of other people. Moreover, some students see the risk of self-development in symptoms of narcissism that appear or are exacerbated on the basis of idealization of one's own achievements, a sense of one's own omnipotence. In fact, there is no limit to the self-improvement of the individual, but their weaknesses are always preserved.

## 5. Discussion

Recognizing the psychologist's powerful role as a professional in actualizing sustainable development ideas, we observe significant transformations in Ukrainians' social consciousness brought about by the war and constant threats to vital activity and personal well-being. At the same time, against the backdrop of today's difficult, crisis-ridden circumstances, many Ukrainians' self-development and self-improvement processes intensify. This bespeaks Ukrainians' crystallization of existential values and their aspiration for further integration into the democratic European space.

Therefore, in undertaking the described study, we set out to diagnose the mindsets and activity of future psychologists regarding self-development as a vector for realizing sustainable societal development concepts. The survey results showed that for most respondent psychologists, self-cultivation serves as an effective mechanism of professional maturation and life self-actualization. Typical motives for future psychologists' self-development were identified: the inner need for self-actualization by leveraging personal and professional potential; striving to attain utmost professional competence amidst considerable public demand for psychological assistance; confirming professional identity and agency in one's own life-creation given uncertain, unstable societal development; ambition to build a successful career guided by current labor market requirements, with expanding one's competitiveness by mastering various psychological techniques and practices as the tool. These motives pointly signify manifestations of activity, responsibility and agency in fledgling psychologists, and their capacity to effectively advance sustainable societal development ideas.

We recognize that our research could be enhanced through applying standardized diagnostic questionnaires conducive to garnering valuable empirical insights into the drive for self-actualization, degree of psychological well-being, and the like. Tracking the dynamics of students' self-development ambitions and engagement throughout their professional training also appears worthwhile.

Self-development, both as a concept and as a real moral and psychosomatic phenomenon, a priori carries and embodies an extremely positive meaning and futuristic sense. But in life, as we know, everything can be the opposite, contrary, unexpected... The desire for self-improvement, focus on self-education, priority on the search for self-identity can lead to tendencies of selfish content. For example, harsh self-improvement regimes can fuel perfectionist tendencies and increase risks of disappointment, exhaustion and even depression when unrealistic standards inevitably remain unmet. Intellectual snobbery as the most unpleasant variant of the downside of self-improvement. Narcissistic tendencies manifesting in a visually noticeable sense of superiority over others. The threat of an existential crisis that can result in a sense of loss of meaning in life. Conscious isolation that can lead to isolation and destructive loneliness. Sociopathy or, on the contrary, perceiving others as "experimental material". Recognizing these and other potential pitfalls, psychologists can mitigate harm and maintain healthy self-improvement to support positive long-term outcomes.

However, the findings from the diagnostic cross-section already clearly demonstrated that future psychologists' self-cultivation fuels powerful avenues for their professional maturation: integrative, manifesting in deepening and systematizing

competence; resource-based, enabling adaptation to complex social conditions; and innovative, forming the basis for the individual's creative expressions across various domains – education, communication, work, etc. Systematically pursuing self-development allows fledgling psychologists to establish themselves, from the stage of professional training already, as active, responsible agents advancing sustainable societal development.

## 6. Conclusions

Self-development is a prerequisite for high-quality professional training of future psychologists, the key to their subsequent successful professional activity, and the basis for realizing sustainable societal development ideas.

The article primarily emphasizes internal factors influencing self-development, such as motivation and personal resilience. Deeper examination of external factors like institutional support, societal expectations, or economic conditions would offset limitations of this study and could inform future research. This cross-sectional study provides a timely snapshot but cannot speak to progression or endurance of documented attitudes. Tracking students throughout their academic journey and into early careers could reveal crucial evolutionary patterns. Broadening the research across different age groups, fields, and regions may also prove valuable. It would be impactful to explore this issue in the context of military conditions or post-traumatic stress.

The surveyed psychology students are generally characterized by established multifaceted intrinsic motivation and constant activity towards systematic self-cultivation. However, in assisting to overcome typical self-development barriers among students, teachers should fulfill a facilitation role, enriching resilience and reinforcing fledgling psychologists' enduring motivation for personal betterment.

While our study provides a valuable perspective on the current situation, it only briefly touches on deeper understanding that could be uncovered through long-term monitoring of participants' attitudes toward self-development.

Self-development is the path to one's true self. And every person walks this path alone, relying solely on their own resources and experience. All events on this path constitute their unique legacy that shapes one's personality under any circumstances. For life itself is the best teacher. And over time, by overcoming its challenges, a person arrives at a profound self-awareness and unlocks their own potential.

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