

Advancing Sustainable Education: Students' Vocational Fulfillment in Real and Virtual Environments within a Post-Conflict Society

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ABSTRACT:

This paper analyzes the findings of a study on the attitudes and actions of Ukrainian psychology students regarding the awareness and fulfillment of their calling in real and virtual life spaces through the lens of sustainable development and in the context of a post-conflict society. The phenomenon of calling is viewed as a significant personal construct that not only contributes to successful self-actualization and psychological well-being but also establishes a foundation for sustainable professional development. Examining students' perceptions of the term "calling" is crucial as it enables monitoring, psychological support and the development of competencies essential for sustainable professional growth during their education.

An internalized sense of calling is seen as a key to successful professional self-determination in alignment with sustainable development principles, as well as a factor in the effectiveness of further professionalization. It was found that students predominantly perceive calling as an attractive activity that enables them to fulfill their potential while considering social responsibility.

Understanding the meanings and functions of calling among future psychologists is vital in the context of providing psychological assistance to clients dealing with difficulties in professional self-fulfillment, career building, and the development of conscious life strategies, particularly in a post-conflict society.

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The study also revealed that virtual spaces, particularly social networks, serve as a widespread platform for students to realize their calling by seeking relevant and engaging information, fostering social interaction, and expanding communication networks.

To mitigate the risks and challenges of the virtual space when understanding and fulfilling their calling, respondents employ critical thinking, a high level of self-respect, adherence to basic cybersecurity principles, information hygiene and sustainable development guidelines.

Keywords: calling, self-actualization, sustainable development, post-conflict society, future psychologists, virtual space, social networks.

1. Introduction

In the postmodern era, it is no longer sufficient for modern individuals to merely satisfy their basic vital and mental needs while living in stability and tranquility. The experience of well-being is often perceived as stagnation, as tolerance for the uncertainty of societal development increases. People seek challenges, a dynamic life, public recognition, and the exhilaration of self-realization. As Tolvajcic emphasizes, existential anxiety arising from an awareness of human "finitude" carries not only threats but also the potential for authentic self-realization, enabling individuals to overcome their fears and discover the meaning of life (Tolvajcic, 2021).

The media space actively shapes images of success that influence the expectations of young people. Mamontova and colleagues note that social networks have become an essential tool for forming identity, allowing young people to model their "ideal" image (Mamontova, Spesivtseva, Vaznikova & Kutasova). However, this process often leads to the loss of authenticity and necessitates integrating self-perception with real values and goals. According to Espinoza, organizational culture is a crucial factor in fostering creativity and innovation, enabling individuals to achieve self-realization in professional environments, especially amidst the constant transformations of the modern world (Espinoza, 2014).

Egotism and pragmatism have become typical characteristics of the market-oriented individual, as described by E. Fromm, often leading to identity crises, where people feel drained and disoriented due to a lack of meaning or burnout (Fromm, 2013). Khrypko and colleagues argue that vocation is not only a spiritual construct but also a powerful tool for professional development, helping individuals harmonize personal aspirations with societal expectations and laying the foundation for psychological well-being (Khrypko et al., 2023).

The integration of sustainable development principles is also an indispensable part of self-determination. Muresan highlights the role of virtual platforms in supporting sustainable regional development, uniting economic, ecological, and social goals while fostering innovation and knowledge exchange (Muresan, 2009). This creates a basis for new opportunities in self-realization, where resource conservation and environmental care align with fulfilling personal and professional needs. Markopoulos adds that the principles of sustainable leadership are becoming increasingly vital in a digitalized world, promoting the combination of personal growth with care for society and the planet (Markopoulos, 2021).

For Ukrainian youth, the process of life determination is particularly challenging due to factors such as war, economic instability, and social transformations. Boyalskaya and Molodtsova found a significant gap between young people's aspirations for self-realization and their lack of necessary knowledge and skills (Boyalskaya, Molodtsova, 2017). To address these challenges, they propose educational models aimed at developing cognitive and creative competencies essential for successful self-realization. Martela emphasizes that the meaningfulness of work is defined not only by its social benefits but also by its ability to enable individuals to be authentic, realizing their core values (Martela, 2018).

The aim of the article is to analyze the results of a study on the attitudes and actions of psychology students regarding the awareness and realization of their vocation in both real and virtual life spaces, with a particular focus on their role in promoting sustainable development.

2. Materials and methods

The focus of our scientific inquiry, directed at exploring the awareness and fulfillment of calling within the context of sustainable development, included students specializing in psychology at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University. The total number of study participants was 165, with an average age of 21 years. The youngest participant was 17 years old, and the oldest was 25. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of the confidentiality of their responses through anonymity, and voluntarily consented to take part in the research.

The study was conducted in the fall of 2022. During the first, diagnostic phase, we used a questionnaire method (with a custom-developed questionnaire) and semantic differential technique. The instruments were adapted to assess not only individual perceptions of calling but also the awareness of its role in sustainable development. In the data processing phase, quantitative and qualitative analysis methods were employed, including mean values, percentage ratios, and ranking, using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 26). The study concluded with the interpretation and synthesis of the diagnostic findings, enabling conclusions within the framework of the research focus and its connection to sustainable development.

3. Results

At the beginning of the survey, respondents were asked to provide their own definition of the term "calling". Analysis of these definitions revealed several trends. First, some respondents viewed a calling as an inner drive toward activity and self-realization. This was illustrated by responses such as: "an inner inclination toward a specific task or profession"; "a cry of the soul that helps one find oneself"; "an internal urge or predisposition for something"; "a soulful drive toward something" and "a pre-planned internal drive that helps a person realize themselves".

Meanwhile, other respondents associated a calling with a specific task or field of activity. This was reflected in responses like: "a task that one enjoys pursuing throughout life"; "an activity that brings satisfaction and ensures success, free from external imposition" and "a hobby or lifelong pursuit, a task one is passionate about". This division

of responses suggests two temporal orientations: the first group perceives a calling as a life prospect to be achieved, while the second group sees it as a current reality – a defined task one is already engaged in.

Second, responses from future psychologists revealed diverse semantic cores associated with the concept of calling. Some respondents linked it to abilities, potential, and the need for self-development and self-realization. For example: "a predetermined vector of activity that aligns with one's abilities"; "a combination of skills, abilities, and desires driven by intuition"; "a field for the realization of abilities and self" and "a platform for achieving success and developing skills". Many respondents emphasized the emotional aspect of calling, typically with a positive connotation, such as: "a task that resonates and interests a person"; "an activity pursued willingly"; "a task in which one feels maximally comfortable and well"; "a pursuit that brings happiness" and "a lifelong endeavor aligned with the soul and fulfilling". A smaller portion of respondents highlighted existential elements of calling, reflected in responses such as: "a divine purpose that leads to success"; "a sense of satisfaction in a particular activity that becomes life's meaning"; "a task that helps a person feel socially significant"; "a pursuit for which one sacrifices their opportunities and strength, giving life meaning" and "a purpose tied to one's very birth".

These findings differ from the perspectives of E. Laguda, K. Ogunyemi, and E. Ohu, who identified three core elements that characterize the phenomenon of calling: a task rooted in service, a sense of purpose and identity, and a prosocial orientation (Laguda E., Ogunyemi K. & Ohu E., 2018).

Third, future psychologists perceive calling as a free choice of an appealing life path of self-realization, rather than as a social duty, sacrifice, or innate predisposition. This partially aligns with the views of J. S. Bunderson and J. A. Thompson, who argue that individuals choose their calling based on passion or obligation, rejecting the idea of predetermination (Bunderson J. & Thompson J., 2009).

Fourth, respondents prioritized the personal value of calling for one's life over its societal benefits. They associated calling with personal development, realization of individual potential, and achieving success, status, and well-being. These perspectives contrast with findings by J. T. Bigham and S. J. Smith, where calling was associated with societal contributions, sacrifice, or divine influence, characterizing it as a pursuit that requires self-sacrifice (Bigham J. & Smith S., 2008).

Regarding the spheres in which calling manifests, most respondents (65%) prioritized profession and hobbies. Public activities were mentioned by 35%, while education and learning were indicated by 27%. Only 18% of respondents considered family relationships as a sphere for realizing one's calling. These responses reflect a long-standing societal view, articulated by the Ukrainian philosopher Hryhorii Skovoroda, that "kindred work" is the only path to happiness (Skovoroda H., 1994).

In answering the question of when people typically become aware of their calling, 51% of respondents identified adolescence, 22% pointed to either teenage years or early adulthood, and only 11% viewed childhood as a time for recognizing a calling. Interestingly, while 41% of respondents emphasized that the timing of one's awareness of a calling is individual, none selected old age as an option, potentially indicating traces of ageism in their worldview.

The diverse interpretations of "calling" highlight the influence of cultural and individual factors in shaping this concept. Future research could delve into how demographic variables – such as age, gender, socioeconomic background – or regional contexts contribute to these differing perceptions. This approach would foster a more comprehensive understanding of how "calling" is experienced across various cultural and social landscapes.

The analysis of respondents' opinions on the impact of calling on quality of life revealed that future psychologists generally associated calling with positive emotional experiences. Only two responses referenced challenging aspects of the phenomenon, such as "a cry of the soul that helps one find oneself" and "a pursuit for which one sacrifices their opportunities and strength". More than half of the respondents noted that an unfulfilled calling could lead to crises. However, the perceived influence of calling on quality of life was varied: it was seen as a driver of self-realization, a source of additional responsibilities, and a potential cause of life crises. The distribution of responses is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The Impact of Calling on Quality of Life

Answer options	Number of respondents' choices* (%)	Ranking position
A realized and consciously pursued calling contributes to self-realization and personal development.	77	1
An unrealized calling may lead to feelings of emptiness and purposeless existence	56	2
A person can be successful solely through intellect, willpower, and activity, without fulfilling their calling	29	3
The realization of a consciously pursued calling takes away spontaneity and adds responsibilities	6	4

*The question allowed respondents to select multiple options

The dominant trend in students' perspectives on the positive impact of a realized calling on the quality of life aligns with the findings of researchers B. J. Dik, R. D. Duffy, and B. M. Eldridge, who identified a direct correlation between calling and higher levels of career and overall well-being (Dik B., Duffy R. & Eldridge B., 2009).

It is evident that the realization of a calling is preceded by the process of its awareness, which occurs under the influence of certain factors. The survey aimed to identify students' attitudes toward the factors that contribute to the awareness of a calling. It was found that the most influential factor, according to respondents, is the knowledge of one's own talents and abilities (Table 2). This emphasizes the prevailing view among students that a calling is a phenomenon rooted in the successful realization of one's personal potential.

The second-ranking factor is having established life goals, reflecting the nuanced perspectives of the respondents. Established life goals can serve both as a result of and as a contributor to the awareness of a calling. The third position in the ranking highlights an

instrumental factor – developed intellect and willpower, which are employed in the process of discovering a calling.

Thus, the leading trio of factors focuses on the individual as the primary agent in becoming aware of their calling, with environmental support being of lesser importance in the respondents' views. A rich life experience, ranked fifth, is also not deemed as significant. A small number of students mentioned faith in God as a source for understanding their calling.

Table 2: Factors Contributing to the Awareness of a Calling

Factors	Number of respondents' choices* (%)	Ranking position
Knowledge of one's talents and abilities	71	1
Established life goals	65	2
Developed intellect and willpower	52	3
Support and advice from close circle	31	4
Rich life experience	27	5
Faith in God	2	6

*The question allowed respondents to select multiple options

During the research, it was important to determine the results of reflection on their calling by psychology students. It was found that the majority of students – 55% – believe they have already become aware of their calling. At the same time, only 26% of the future psychologists involved in our study emphasized that they are already mastering the profession that corresponds to their calling. Meanwhile, 45% of respondents stated that they are still in the process of searching for their calling. The data we obtained correlates with the study of E. Mulyarchuk, who found that only 25% of the students he surveyed claim to have a calling for their chosen teaching profession (Muliarchuk Y., 2017).

For those students who believe they have realized their calling, an additional question was formulated to identify the area of this calling. It was established that the primary direction of their calling for some students is self-development, while somewhat fewer respondents chose the area of helping people, including volunteering, which positively correlates with their chosen psychological profession (Figure 1).

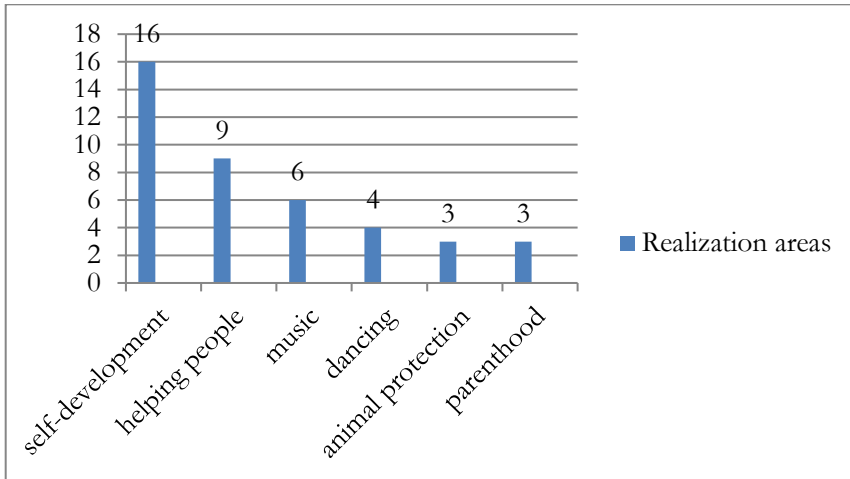


Figure 1. Dominant areas of calling realization (in % of selections)

Also, in a few responses, students mentioned other areas of calling realization, such as: becoming a manicure master, actively participating in student self-governance, writing poetry, and overcoming personal illness.

For the other group of students, which accounted for 45%, a question was formulated asking if they were taking any steps to become aware of their calling. A fifth of the students responded negatively, meaning they are not currently concerned with finding their calling. It is possible that they have deferred the process of understanding their future for the future. Among the descriptions of the 80% of future psychologists who responded affirmatively, the most common actions aimed at realizing their calling were trying out various fields (30% of selections) and self-education, which was mentioned by 22% of respondents. Communication as a means of realizing one's calling was used by 11% of students, while self-analysis was mentioned by 13% of individuals. A few students indicated prayer and personal good deeds in their responses (2% each).

During the study, it was important to understand the opinions of the respondents regarding the influence of society on the processes of realizing and fulfilling one's calling among Ukrainians. It was revealed that most future psychologists place the responsibility for this on the individual, considering the influence of society to be insignificant (Figure 2). About a fifth of the respondents pointed to the negative influence of society, as its developmental instability forces individuals to think not about their calling, but about survival. Fewer than 10% of students believe that domestic society helps Ukrainians realize and fulfill their calling through free choice of profession, hobby, or status.

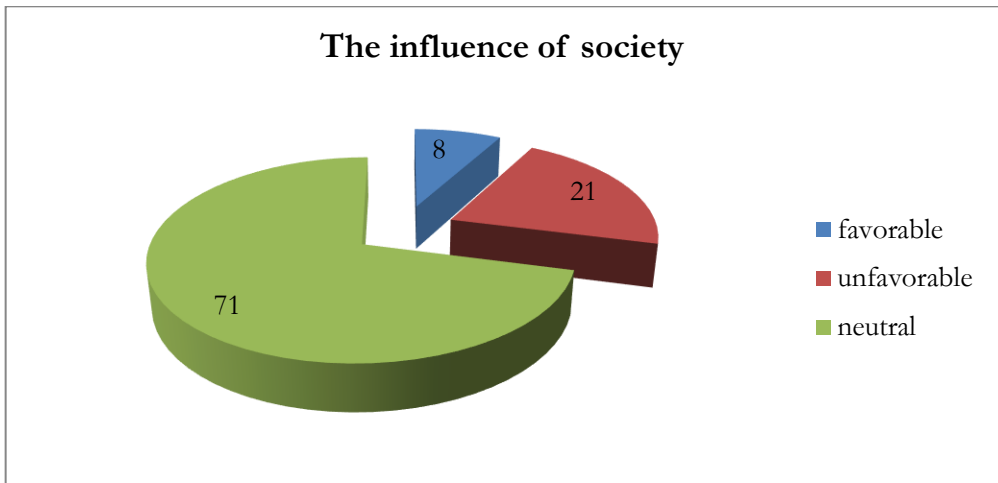


Figure 2. *The influence of society on the awareness and realization of calling (in % of selections)*

As our respondents are students, it was important to explore their views on the impact of the university environment on the awareness and realization of their calling. The responses to this question echo the data we previously presented regarding the connection between students' callings and their future professional activities, as nearly half of the respondents emphasized that the university environment facilitates the awareness and realization of their calling through opportunities to acquire the desired profession or deepen their psychological competence (Table 3).

Table 3: The impact of the university environment on the awareness and realization of calling by students

Aspects of influence	Number of respondents' choices* (%)	Ranking position
Support through opportunities to acquire the desired profession or deepen knowledge of psychology	44	1
Calling does not intersect with student status	40	2
Support through the organization of education and leisure	36	3
Education hinders the realization of calling	16	4

*The question allowed respondents to select multiple options

Meanwhile, 40% of the respondents indicated no connection between their professional training and their calling. It is clear that the decision to pursue a psychology profession for these students is influenced by other factors. Some respondents linked their calling to educational activities outside their professional field or research activities, as well as leisure activities organized within the university environment. It is also noteworthy that a considerable number of students believe that professional training hinders the realization

of their calling. This can be explained by various factors, such as choosing a profession that does not match the potential or expectations of the young person, or in the case of alternative areas for calling realization, the student's educational workload may prevent them from pursuing it.

Considering the respondents' professional training, we asked whether a psychologist can succeed without choosing the profession based on a calling. The students' answers varied, but nearly a quarter of the respondents (26%) believe that calling is a key factor for success in the professional activities of a psychologist (Table 4). The opposing position is held by more than half of the respondents, who believe that the absence of a calling as a motive for a psychologist's activities can be compensated by a sense of duty, responsibility, or professional experience. Additionally, 51% of students are convinced that a calling not realized in professional psychological activities would distract the individual from effectively performing their job duties.

Table 4: The success of a psychologist's activities when choosing a profession without a calling

Answer options	Number of respondents' choices* (%)
Impossible, as work or activities aligned with their calling will be more attractive	51
Impossible, as the job will be burdensome and overwhelming	26
Possible, if guided by a sense of duty and responsibility	23
Possible, if they gain sufficient professional experience	32
Possible, if the professional activity eventually becomes enjoyable	28

*The question allowed respondents to select multiple options

Some of the respondents are optimistic, believing that the absence of a calling as the primary motive for choosing the profession of a psychologist will not hinder them from developing a preference for their field and working successfully over time.

Considering the widespread use of online communication among modern youth, we included a series of questions in the survey to explore the specifics of how respondents perceive and realize their calling in a virtual environment. Given that part of the respondents (74 individuals) are still in the process of discovering their calling, we sought to determine whether they use social networks for this purpose. The analysis of the responses revealed that only 14% of the respondents, future psychologists, consistently use social networks, particularly Facebook and Instagram (Figure 3). A significantly larger portion of students (32%) mentioned that they occasionally use social networks and messengers as an alternative source of information. More than a third of the respondents do not intentionally seek their calling through social media interactions, but they do take note of useful information if it appears. Meanwhile, 19% of future psychologists indicated that they ignore social networks as an unreliable source for discovering their calling, preferring self-reflection and interaction with qualified professionals.

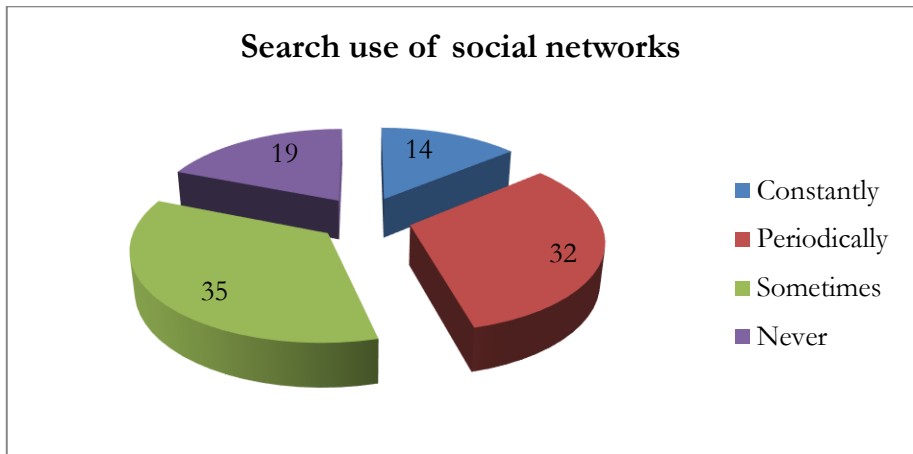


Figure 3. Use of social networks for discovering one's calling (in % of selections)

The next question addressed the 55% of respondents who are convinced that they have already discovered their life calling. We explored whether they use social networks to fulfill their calling. Some future psychologists noted that they do this regularly, as their calling is based on virtual communication (such as blogging or managing virtual psychological diaries). The majority of respondents turn to social networks quite often in search of necessary information or contacts (Figure 4). About a quarter of the respondents indicated that they do not frequently use virtual environments for fulfilling their calling but do so occasionally, and only 3% of future psychologists stated that they never do so.

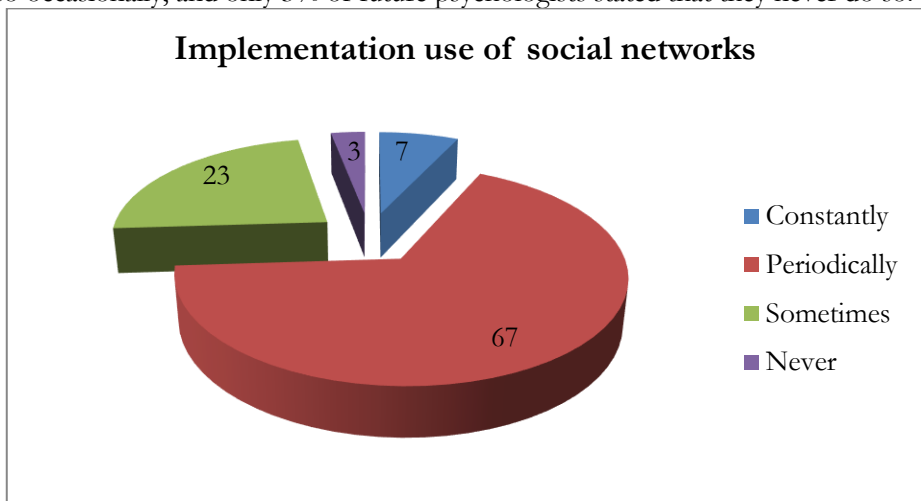


Figure 4. Use of social networks for realizing one's calling (in % of selections)

Since it was previously established that the majority of the students surveyed extensively use social networks for both discovering and realizing their calling, it was important to understand the specific purpose of this usage. The analysis of respondents' answers revealed that most of them use social networks primarily as a resource for

searching for information, as well as for social interaction and expanding their communication networks (Table 5). More than half of the respondents indicated that the virtual space helps them track current trends and social demands related to their calling. It is also noteworthy that more than a third of the respondents engage in self-presentation and self-development through social networks, and find like-minded individuals and potential clients related to their calling.

Table 5: Functions of Social Networks for Discovering and Realizing One’s Calling

Answer options	Number of respondents' choices* (%)
A tool for searching for necessary/interesting information	82
A platform for self-presentation and self-development	39
A basis for social interaction and expanding communication networks	71
A way to find potential clients and like-minded individuals	33
Tracking current trends and social demands	54

*The question allowed respondents to select multiple options

When asked to describe the risks they faced during the search and realization of their calling in the virtual space, 89% of respondents mentioned hate and virtual aggression from other users as a reaction to their posts, while 28% referred to hype, the undue excitement around an event or person. Almost all the respondents (96%) had encountered misinformation, which is a significant issue in our society, especially due to the ongoing war with Russia. Additionally, 24 future psychologists identified threats of manipulation (financial, informational, psychological, etc.) in the virtual environment.

As we can see, the risks and challenges mentioned by the students are typical of any interaction within virtual spaces. Therefore, the future psychologists surveyed rightly emphasized that effective tools to avoid or counter these threats include critical thinking, a high level of self-respect, adherence to basic cybersecurity rules, and information hygiene.

Hate and misinformation in virtual spaces are particularly pressing risks that highlight the need for targeted strategies to mitigate their impact. Future discussions on this topic could explore the integration of critical thinking and cybersecurity skills into professional training programs, enabling individuals to navigate virtual environments safely while maintaining their vocational focus. Such strategies would not only address these challenges but also shed light on the role of digital resilience in fostering vocational fulfillment.

In this research, the authors did not aim to clearly differentiate between calling and destiny, unlike some researchers. We also acknowledge that our study could be enriched by utilizing standardized diagnostic questionnaires, which would help gather valuable empirical data regarding the connection between calling, self-perception, psychological well-being, and other related aspects.

4. Conclusions

Individuals do not always recognize their impact on society through the significance of their activities. However, they remain agents of their own life trajectory, which can be more effectively built and fulfilled by relying on their sense of calling. The phenomenon of calling is an important psychological construct integrated into the core of an individual's orientation. It facilitates successful self-actualization, psychological well-being, and alignment with sustainable development principles. Exploring students' attitudes toward the definition of "calling" opens opportunities for monitoring, psychological support, and the development of competencies necessary for sustainable professional growth among young people.

An internalized sense of calling acts as a foundation for professional self-determination that aligns with sustainable development principles and serves as a factor for effective professionalization. The study revealed that students predominantly perceive calling as an attractive activity that allows them to realize their potential while recognizing personal responsibility for its fulfillment. Notably, only one-fourth of respondents reported pursuing a profession that aligns with their calling, while about half of the students are still in the process of discovering it.

Understanding the meaning and functions of calling among future psychologists is critical for their ability to provide psychological assistance to clients facing challenges in professional self-fulfillment, career development, and fostering conscious attitudes toward sustainable development. The study also confirmed that the virtual environment, particularly social networks, serves as an essential platform for students to understand and fulfill their calling. Through the search for relevant and engaging information, social interaction, and the expansion of communication networks, students utilize this space for personal and professional growth.

To mitigate the risks of the virtual space when understanding and fulfilling their calling, students apply critical thinking, a strong sense of self-respect, basic principles of cybersecurity, information hygiene, and maintain a focus on sustainable development.

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