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PERSONAL FUTURE CONSTRUCTING STRATEGIES IN THE NARRATIVES WRITTEN BY INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

Abstract. The long-lasting war in Ukraine had made a large number of people became the forced migrants. The research data, which were collected before the start of the full-scale invasion, reflect the attitude towards the future and the ability to construct it by the internally displaced persons from Donbas and Crimea. Now, when residents of Ukraine are forced to look for safe places in the country and abroad, the conclusions of this study become even more relevant. The research was conducted by the method of written narratives' analysis. The purpose of the study was to reveal the characteristics of the personal future of internally displaced persons and the strategies they use while constructing it.

In the conducted research of the IDPs' narratives, the emotional valence of their attitude to the future, the complexity of their vision of the personal future and the level of attainability of the future described in the authors' stories, were revealed. The strategies of constructing personal future that IDPs resort to and the difference in the usage of these strategies by them and persons without experience of forced resettlement were established. The obtained results expand the understanding of the IDPs' attitude to their personal future, their desire and ability to construct it.

Keywords: internally displaced persons, forced resettlement, personal future, narrative research, construction of the future.

Formulation of the problem. The full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine, the occupation of the territories and hostilities provoked an unprecedented volume of internal migration in the country. The



psychological traumatization of displaced persons and the forced nature of resettlement attract attention of researchers and psychologists to the problems of providing psychological help to internally displaced persons and to their adaptation to life on a new place of living. The activity of the individual, his or her authorial position in life are important in this context. Except of coping with urgent problems and everyday difficulties, it is necessary to understand the ways of building a future life for successful adaptation. This raises the question of how exactly IDPs see their own future and how they relate to it, what strategies they use to construct it.

Since the materials of this study were collected before the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the results make it possible to compare the IDPs' vision of the personal future with the vision of individuals who have not experienced forced resettlement, and to determine the differences between these groups in the strategies used for constructing the future.

Overview of recent findings. The relationship between past, present and future in the individual's psychological time system is important in the context of migration research [1]. As noted by M. Eastmond in the narrative study of forced migration, "Past experience is always remembered and interpreted in the light of the present... as well as the way the future is imagined " [2, P. 249].

Studies of the forced migrants' psychological time reveal the negative impact of predominance of temporal orientation on the past (according to F. Zimbardo) on mental health. It increases temporal disintegration and distress even after a long time after the trauma [3]. In combination with the fatalistic present, it is associated with the occurrence of PTSD [4] and impairs the psychological adaptation of migrants [5]. Researchers [6] suggest dividing time perspectives into past, present, and future after traumatic events. In addition, they recommend oppression of the past (which means to shift attention from the past to other time periods) as adaptive strategy to reduce the risk of depression after trauma.

It is also noted that such negative circumstances as geographical displacement and war limit the subjective perception of the future [7]. Disability to control one's future, plan and make decisions about it harms mental health and well-being [8]. Forced migrants believe that the vision of the future is of key importance for their sense of self-worth [8]. In another study [9], it is noted that the inability to imagine the future is associated by migrants with a lack of self-importance in the world [10, 11].

Among the features of constructing the future the flexibility and consistency of this process, its structure and systematicity, the presence of interpretive and creative activity of the individual in setting life tasks and creating a futurological narrative can be single out. Both personally and socially determined components are important for constructing a personal future. This process is always based on the past and present experience.

The purpose of the article is to reveal the characteristics of the personal future of internally displaced persons and the strategies they use to construct it.

Presentation of the main research material. For better understanding of strategies for constructing the future used by IDPs and whether their strategies differ from those used by individuals without experience of forced displacement, we conducted a study of written stories about the future. The main sample of the study consisted of 60 internally displaced persons from the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, among them 36 women and 24 men. The control sample was formed from people who permanently live in one place and have no experience of forced relocation, in the number of 60 people, among them 36 women and 24 men. It is important to note that the data of the main study was fully collected in January 2022, that is, before the beginning of a full-scale war on the territory of Ukraine. This excludes being in potentially life-threatening conditions due to hostilities of respondents from the "local resident" sample and the impact of chronic war-related stress on them. Thus, differences in previous experience are preserved between the main and control samples, which makes conduction of a comparative analysis appropriate. The main factors, according to which the sample equalization procedure was carried out, were gender, age and level of education of the respondents.

Respondents were asked to write a story "My Future" based on the recommended narrative scheme.

The scheme of the narrative included the following items:

- How do you see your future?
- What emotions does it evoke in you?
- What areas of life does your future consist of?
- How do you plan to achieve the planned goals?

However, in the instructions was noted that compliance with the proposed scheme is not obligatory. Such a clarification was made for the purpose the respondents could express their thoughts in more free and casual way.

At the first stage of the analysis, the received stories were reread several times in order to determine their structure, the main characteristics of the study participants' attitude to their own future, and the presence of behavioral manifestations of strategies for constructing a personal future. At this stage, a certain part of the collected narratives was removed from the total number due to their relatively small volume. Thus, the material for further analysis was 42 IDPs' stories about the future and 41 stories written by people who had no experience of forced resettlement.

The second stage of the analysis was devoted to the interpretation of the contents of the author's stories about the future. It gave an opportunity to respond to the research tasks, to single out the strategies of constructing the future manifested in the narratives and to determine the differences in their usage by the respondents of the two samples.



The first step of this stage of the analysis was to determine the emotional valence of the respondents' attitude to the personal future and to separate the key topics that evoke the greatest emotional responses in them [12].

The main question, which was the object of analysis: "How do respondents perceive their own future and what emotions does it evoke in them?" In order to answer it, it was decided to define four types of emotional valence of attitude towards the future: positive, negative, neutral and ambivalent.

A positive emotional attitude towards one's own future is characterized by an optimistic, life-affirming vision of it, the author's enthusiasm for future life events is shown in the story. In addition, characteristic of this type of attitude is the selection of words that have a vivid positive coloring, events and spheres of future life are described in a more detailed way.

A negative attitude is demonstrated in pessimistic vision of the future, in comparing it with the past in favor of the latter, in the lack of perspective and reluctance to make plans, anxiety about the future.

Neutral is a vision of the future without the predominance of positive or negative feelings, the story contains realistic plans and goals for the future. In the texts themselves, there are no expressed emotions or expectations for realization of plans.

An ambivalent attitude towards the future combines positive hopes with fears and anxieties about one's own future. It is also characterized by uncertainty and authors' reflections about changing of circumstances that may require adjustment of plans.

The results of the analysis of the emotional valence of IDPs' and local residents' attitudes towards the future are graphically presented in the diagram (Fig. 1).

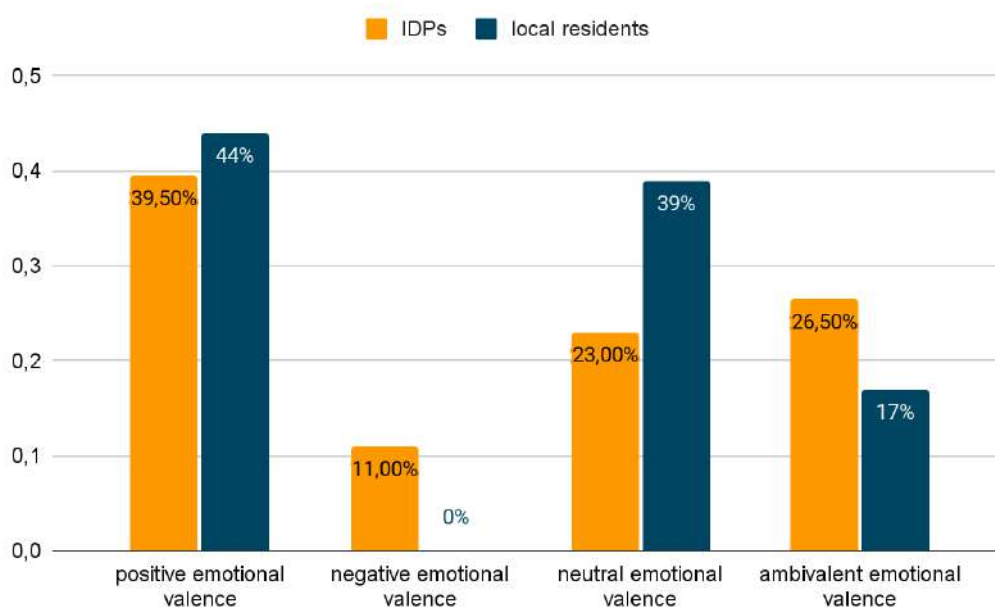


Fig. 1. Emotional valence of attitude towards the future of IDPs and local residents

The presence of a negative emotional valence of attitude towards the future in 11% of the narratives of IDPs and its complete absence in the stories of persons who have no experience of forced resettlement attract the most attention. There is also a 10% greater number of stories written by resettlers with an ambivalent emotional valence of attitudes towards the future, which also include a negative component.

The difference is that in stories with ambivalent emotional valence, individuals having certain negative worries about their own future compensate and supplement them with positive assumptions, creating a colorful picture of the future. However, such positive compensation does not reduce the overall amount of negative attitude towards their own future, which is showed in the IDPs' written stories. Its presence is explained by the past experience, worries related to resettlement and events taking place in the respondents' hometowns. Current living conditions and the presence of perspectives for the future also influence the attitude towards the future. Since the displacement was forced and sudden, setting up life in a new place takes a lot of time and resources, the relocation seems to become a new reference point. Whereas for people without experience of forced displacement, the future becomes a logical extension of the past and present. They perceive it more calmly and confidently, which is reflected in their stories about the future, because almost twice the amount of narratives of local residents have a neutral emotional valence.

The next step focus of the narratives' analysis was searching for an answer to the question: "Which spheres of life does the predictable future of IDPs and local residents consist of? » The analysis of the spheres of future life contained in written narratives makes it possible to reveal how completely or comprehensively the respondents describe their future. The characteristic that corresponds to the presence of a description of the spheres of future life was called the complexity of the respondents' vision of the personal future. Detailed descriptions indicating one's own desires and plans in various areas of life are characteristic of a more complex and clear vision of the future than stories that contain only general expectations.

Based on spheres of life mentioned number in the descriptions of the future, three levels of complexity of a personal future vision were distinguished.

The first level (the level of unexpressed complexity of the vision of the future), when there are no details about separate spheres of life in the story, it contains only a description of the general vision of the future or one of its spheres. At the second level (moderate complexity of vision of the future), the story about the future can already be divided into two or three separate spheres, in which the respondent shows his or her own creative potential in constructing the future life. And at the last third level (expressed complexity of the vision of the future), the story about the future is divided into more than three separate spheres, there is a detailed description of one's own desires, plans and hopes for each of them.



The percentage ratio of the levels of complexity of the vision of the personal future by the respondents of both samples is presented in the diagram (Fig. 2).

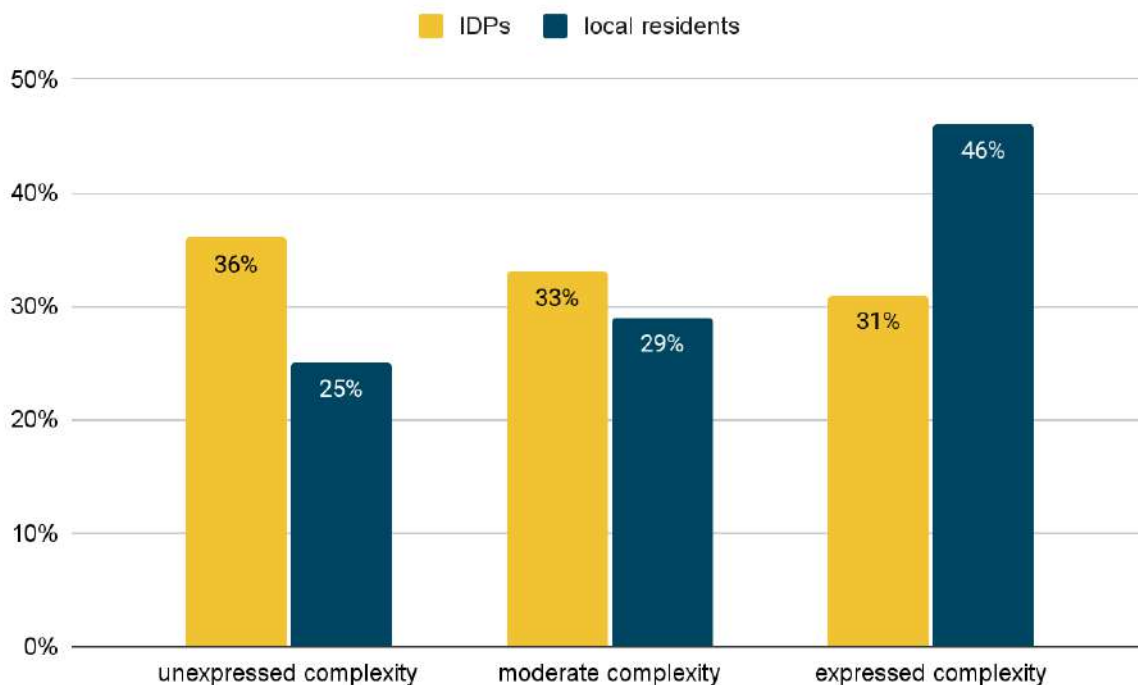


Fig. 2. Levels of complexity of IDPs' and local residents' vision of the future

According to it, we can conclude that the resettlers' vision of the future is less complex, the division into different spheres of life is much less demonstrated in the stories about it. Moreover, most of the narratives of this sample contain only a general vision of the future, without a detailed description of at least one of its spheres. On the other hand, among the narratives of local residents, the expressed complexity of the vision of the future is more widespread, that implies the presence of a description of at least three spheres of future life.

The next analysis' step of the authors' stories was the determination of the level of attainability of the future. The level of attainability of the future corresponds with the question: "Does the respondent have a vision of how he or she will achieve what have been planned?"

The main indicators that determine the attainability of the future that has been described in the narratives are:

- what does the respondent focus on: the general picture of the desired life or specific goals and plans of various scales;
- presence of intermediate stages' description;
- consideration by the story's author of the necessary resources and his or her modeling of the ways of achieving the desired;

- realistic vision of the desired results, taking into account the circumstances of the respondent's life in the present and the steps that were taken to achieve these results.

According to the formed list of indicators of the attainability of the future, it is possible to distinguish the abstract and the concretized future. The abstract future is characteristic of stories in which the authors describe only a general vision of a dream life, quite often with exaggerated results, sometimes even focusing on socially desirable material goals, rather than one's own values. The concretized future, in turn, appears in narratives in which the stages and ways of achieving the future are described in detail, the stated goals are correlated with the available resources and efforts of the authors, the goals correspond to the values that are presented in the written narratives.

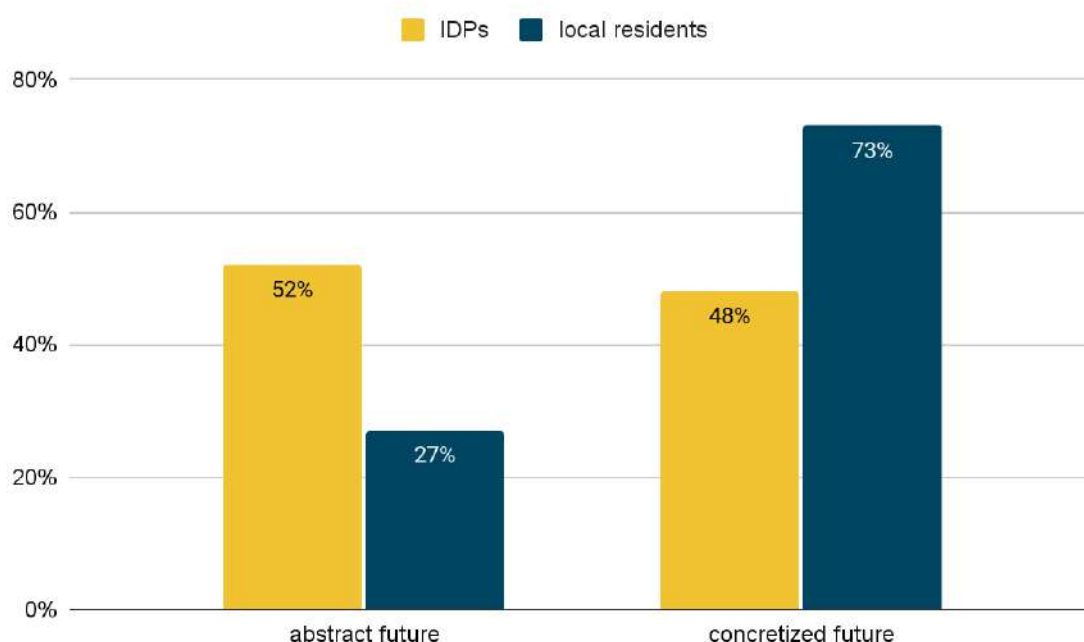


Fig. 3. The level of attainability of the future of IDPs and local residents

In the IDPs' narratives, the abstract future is twice as often described (Fig. 3), while the future, which is discussed in the stories of local residents, is concretized in most cases.

Taking into account the analysis' results of the complexity of the vision of the future, it can be stated that the future in the narratives of persons who have no experience of forced resettlement is more detailed, its various spheres and means of achieving the desired results are indicated. Compared to this, the personal future as depicted in the stories of IDPs is more blurred and abstract; it contains general hopes, wishes or, on the contrary, fears about future events. The explanation for the existing difference lies in different past experiences. Traumatic events before and during



resettlement, difficulties in adaptation to life in a new place, sudden destruction of plans that IDPs have made before resettlement leave an imprint on their perception of the future, its predictability. In addition, the mentioned can affect the desire to construct the future, even make them undervalue this process. Despite this, the availability of resources in the present among the respondents of the two samples may differ. In the plans for the future persons who have no experience of resettlement can rely on the resources they have accumulated throughout their past life. While IDPs during resettlement, in many cases, suffered significant property losses, changed their social status, etc. Therefore, most of their available resources are spent on solving current problems in the present. It is likely that the respondents of this sample find it more difficult to detail their stories about the future because they still do not understand what and whom they can rely on while constructing the future.

The last step in the analysis of the narratives was the identification of behavioral manifestations of theoretically modeled strategies for constructing the personal future, such as: the strategy of planning the personal future, the strategy of avoiding the future, the strategy of establishing the future in the present, the strategy of individual or social construction of the future, the strategy of adapting to circumstances.

The first conclusion during the analysis of the strategies of constructing the future in the authors' narratives was that the number of strategies manifested in the stories could be different. It varies from 1 to 4 strategies in one story. This gives a possibility to talk about the complexity of the strategic set of respondents. The number of strategies in the stories of the respondents of two samples also differs. The difference is more prominent in cases where more strategies are used. Thus, among the narratives of local residents, 12% contain behavioral manifestations of 3 strategies of constructing the future, and 4 strategies - 10%. Whereas in the narratives of IDPs, they are presented in 9.5% and 2% cases, respectively. The number of narratives in which behavioral manifestations of 1 strategy of constructing the future are observed is almost equal for the two samples - 48% in the stories of IDPs and 44% of local residents. The difference in this case appears in the strategies that are used in isolation. In the majority of IDPs narratives, in isolation is used a strategy of avoiding the future. While for persons with no experience of forced displacement, the only strategy that appeared in the narratives is the strategy of planning the future or the strategy of building the future in the present, in almost equal numbers. Behavioral manifestations of 2 strategies of constructing the future are present in 40.5% of the narratives of IDPs and in 34% of the stories of local residents.

Thus, we can consider the strategies of constructing the future in the authors' stories and the differences in their usage by the respondents of the two samples in a more detailed way (Fig. 4).

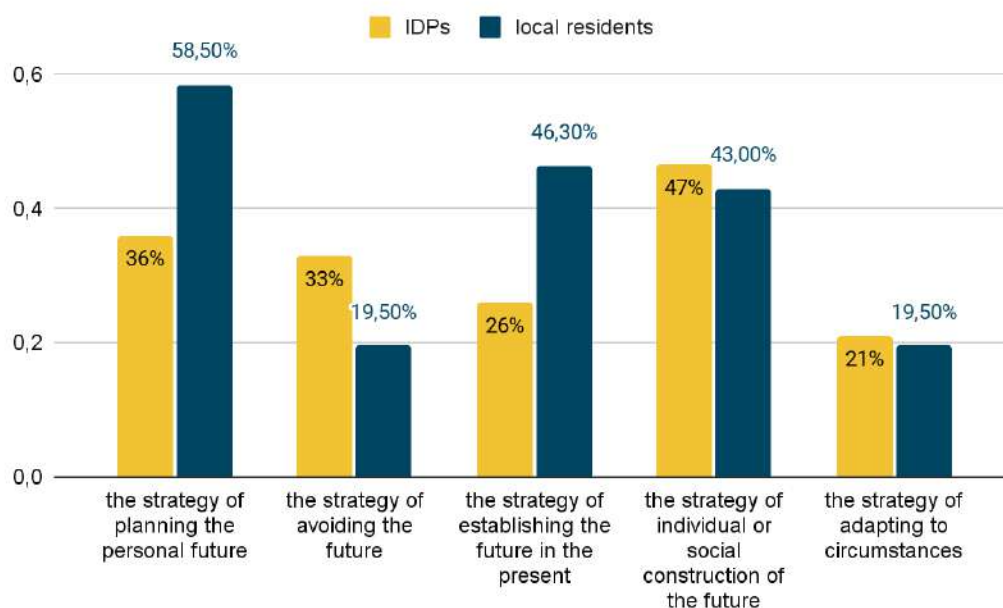


Fig. 4. Strategies of constructing the personal future in the narratives of IDPs and local residents.

As can be seen from the obtained results, the biggest difference is observed in the respondents' usage of the strategy of planning the personal future, the strategy of establishing the future in the present and the strategy of avoiding the future.

Persons with no experience of forced displacement are more than 20% more likely to use more productive strategy of planning the personal future and strategy of establishing the future in the present.

At the behavioral level, planning of the personal future is presented in imagining the desired future and correlating it with one's own values and meanings, thinking about the ways and means of achieving goals of various scales. The difference of the strategy of establishing the future in the present is that the individual who uses it already spends part of the resources available to him for success or well-being in the future. Resources can be both material (such as money invested in real estate and bank accounts) and non-material (such as time devoted to education or taking care of one's own health).

Both strategies provide a certain confidence in the future, the ability to predict it and think it through beforehand. This explains the comparatively less usage of these strategies by the resettlers as they already have the previous experience of unexpected and rapid circumstances change. Largely, this experience affects the willingness to use available resources for the future goals' achievement. As those of them who used such a strategy in the past did not achieve the desired results and wasted resources due to external circumstances. The availability of these resources is also important, since IDPs have to start life over and in a new place, while for



local residents the future is a continuation of the usual and stable flow of life. As a respondent who has no experience of forced resettlement writes in his story: "... (My) Future is completely predictable and calm. It is a continuation of what I have today." Respondents of this sample often use the following characteristics of the future: clear, calm, understandable and predictable. Such an attitude towards the future makes it easier to make plans and prepare for it in the present.

It is quite expected that IDPs almost 15% more often use the strategy of avoiding the future, which is characterized by the absence of the image of their own future, and most importantly, by the lack of desire to form such an image. A person in whose future construction process this strategy dominates tries to avoid talking about the future and cannot describe his or her own goals and aspirations. It should be noted that verbal manifestations of avoiding the future could have different emotional coloring. From negative and neutral emotional colors, expressed, for example, in such phrases as "It is uncomfortable for me to think about the future" or "I don't know what will be in the future", to statements which emotional coloring seems positive, such as "Everything will be fine" or "My future will be beautiful". However, the absence of any specifics or expressed ideas and wishes about the future is common to all these answers, which indicates an avoidance of the topic of the future.

The strategy of individual or social construction of the future is primarily related to the independence of decision-making concerning one's own future and expectations regarding external assistance in its constructing. To one degree or another, its poles, individuality and sociality, are represented in the constructing of the future of any person.

The presence or absence of this strategy in each narrative was determined according to its inherent behavioral manifestations. Its use is more widespread among IDPs, but the difference in quantity is not as significant as the difference in usage.

The respondents of both samples rarely mentioned the individual construction of the future, mostly in the stories different options of social constructing were considered, the importance of others in the life of the authors was emphasized. In the IDPs' stories, the need and desire to care for others can be traced almost twice as often, in 14% of cases, while in narratives of local residents only in 8%. However, in 14.5% of the local residents' stories, are noted both the positive influence of others on the future, in the form of support or help, and the negative, which manifests itself in the reduction of personal resources due to spending on others. It means that the very direction of the social strategy is different. IDPs are more focused on caring for significant others, while individuals without a forced resettlement experience are more likely to expect the help from others in the future.

Almost equal is the number of respondents of both samples who use the most flexible approach to constructing the future, namely, the strategy of adaptation to

circumstances. From the strategy name, it is clear that changes in circumstances are taken into account while constructing the future, also, the analysis of previous experience and new trends is used.

Conclusions. By comparing the narratives of IDPs with stories about the future of the control sample, the following conclusions were drawn. Despite the predominance of positive emotional valence of IDPs' attitudes towards the future, their stories about the future are characterized by a greater amount of negative emotional coloring than the stories of persons who have no experience of forced resettlement. The IDPs' vision of the future is relatively less complex, because the stories about the future contain fewer detailed descriptions of various spheres of life than those of local residents. Also, in the IDPs' narratives an abstract future is described much more often.

The most widespread in the IDPs' narratives is the strategy of individual or social construction of the future, in the variant of social construction with a focus on caring for significant others. The strategy of avoiding the future widely used than among the stories of local residents. The strategy of planning a personal future and the strategy of establishing the future in the present are described in a comparatively smaller number of IDPs' stories.

The obtained results expand the understanding of IDPs' the attitude to their personal future, their desire and ability to construct it. Further prospects of the research consist of optimization of strategies for the constructing of future used by IDPs. The practical significance of the research lies in the possibility of using the obtained results in counseling and psychotherapeutic practice, the work of social and volunteer services of assisting internally displaced persons, in the development of training programs for the rehabilitation and adaptation of IDPs.

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