

CIVILIAN ATTITUDES TOWARD THE MILITARY THROUGH THE PRISM OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE IN WARTIME UKRAINE

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ABSTRACT

Aim. The goal of the research is psychological analysis as well as the development of the typology of attitude of the civilians of Ukraine toward military personnel in wartime.

Methods. The transcripts of five focus group discussions in five cities of different regions of Ukraine have been subjected to thematic analysis. The criteria for analysis were: a) the quality of contacts, b) regularity (frequency) of contacts with military personnel.

Results. Four types of attitudes of civilians toward military personnel have been identified: “interaction participant” as a real and personalised contact; “interested witness” as real and close irregular contacts; “observer” as a distant and imaginary irregular contact; “re-teller” as a remote, imaginary contact through accidental meetings. Topics for analysis include emotional treatment, attitudes depending on military personnel types, interaction formats and conflict probability, and the associative image of a military man.

Conclusion. The identified attitudes of civilians to military personnel reflect the availability of a dichotomy between the sense of gratitude to military personnel for their heroism vs the striving of civilians to have their own normal life. Proximity to one of the poles determines the type of treatment of military personnel, and, at the same time, the prospective probability and tension of the conflict.

Originality. The study was conducted in September-October 2023, the second year of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. Psychological analysis of the subjective attitude of civilians to military personnel in the social and psychological context of war has been made through focus group discussions.

Keywords: civil–military relations, attitudes toward the military, Russian-Ukrainian war, daily life in wartime, war discourse, qualitative research methods

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2023 polarised life into “before” and “after”, and the division of citizens into military personnel and civilians acquired new senses. In peacetime the problem of treatment of military men by civilians refers to the overall perception of the power and security in the country and determines the potential readiness for interaction for the purposes of ensuring national safety and stability. In wartime the experience of permanent threat, danger, and uncertainty requires adjustment to real-life conditions (Haletska et al., 2022), and the discourse of peaceful life transforms into the military daily reality discourse (Klymanska et al., 2023). The attitude of civilians toward military personnel is affected by the increased level of fear and anxiety among civilians, aggravation of economic, social problems as well as ethical and humanitarian issues, the influence of propaganda and information war, ambiguous attitude to possible mobilisation of someone or his relatives, the sense of gratefulness for defense combined with the sense of one’s non-engagement, etc. In the scientific discourse, the problem of interaction between military men and civilians mainly focuses on one of the temporal contexts of the serviceman’s status: the current one – the status of a functioning serviceman and the image of the army in the society, or the former one – the problem of reintegration of the former servicemen in civilian life after their return from hot spots or completion of war. The tragic context of the Russian-Ukrainian war makes the situation aggravated due to the collision of times:

the past – increased number of veterans for whom military service is over and who are already experiencing the test of the return to civilian life, the current one – personal attitude to the functioning military personnel based on the stereotypes developed in pre-war life as combined with the realisation of complete dependence of one's survival on the actions of military personnel in wartime, and the future – possible change in the civil status of somebody or your close person due to general mobilisation which is a complex psychological trial in the background of two years of war, and, at the same time – the expectations concerning reintegration of military personnel in the society after the end of the war. This meeting of times becomes more relevant through personal meetings with military personnel, and in daily life it predetermines the nature of the relationship “military-civilian”, potentially giving birth to conflicts at the interpersonal level and finally developing the overall mood in the society.

Available theoretical analyses of civil-military relationship is characterised by excessive fragmentation (Brooks, 2019), focusing on the need for protection and support of democratic values inside the national state and beyond it. However, the impression is that those theories work exclusively towards the relationship in a specific state (Bland, 1999; Burk, 2002). The relationship between civilians and military personnel a priori needs to be analysed through the prism of correlation between the cultural and civilisation concepts of war and peace. The semantics of the concepts of war and peace as the integrity of their obvious and latent senses lays down the foundation for the social perception of those phenomena (Parakhonsky & Yavorska, 2019). The concept of war always integrates different emotional senses, their relative weight may differ depending on the psycho-emotional status of the personality and the society, emotional projections, and engagement in the war (Khraban, 2023). Own intentions manifested to the outside through wishes and intentions (Parakhonsky & Yavorska, 2019) can primarily be identified in the attitude of civilians toward military personnel. Obviously, directly in wartime, unlike peacetime, this relationship sounds different, but the effect of the pre-war experience still matters (Bland, 1999).

Long before the outbreak of the war, a number of negative factors mainly related to the systemic underfunding of the needs of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) had a negative impact on the combat training and mobilisation preparation of the army, this also affecting the perception of the army by the society, undermining its image. This resulted in the low level of moral and psychological preparedness of young people for military service, lack of understanding of the importance and relevance of military service for the country (Danilov, 2009). Less than one-third of young people considered the status of serviceman to be attractive, and most of them had a negative, detached, or, at the least, sympathetic attitude to the AFU (Vilyuzhanina, 2011). A similar experience was recorded among the military. A survey conducted during the Russian-Ukrainian war, but before the full-scale invasion, shows the negative assessment of the relationship at the “military-society” level by military personnel, they don't have any sense of their importance for the society (Analitychnyi tsentr UKU, 2020). Finally, the at-

titude to military personnel, the army, and military service is not monolithic in other countries either (Girsh, 2019; Krebs & Ralston, 2022). The social and psychological peculiarity of the mutual perception of civilians and military personnel is the internal conflict manifested in thinking: positive attitude to the role of military personnel as an embodiment of security and protection guarantees as well as the prevalence of positive feelings in the intergroup perception vs divergence in the attitude concerning participation in the war, in particular, of oneself or close people (Kukharuk, 2018).

The victorious actions of the AFU after the full-scale invasion drastically raised the status of military personnel. In the rating under the Global Firepower version, the Armed Forces of Ukraine took the 18th place in 2024, the 15th place in 2023, while in 2021 they took only the 25th position, and in 2016-2020 and before 2010 they were not generally included into the 25 most powerful armies of the world (Global Firepower, 2024). A high level of trust in veterans in September 2023 was confirmed by 79% of residents. But the figures are a bit lower than in January 2023 when 91% were of such opinion (Sotsiolohichna hrupa "Reitynh", 2023). In the opinion of veterans, the respect of society for them is rapidly going down: while at the beginning of 2023, 61.7% of veterans thought that society respected them, in October the figure was only 43.3%, and only some 20% of veterans think that the state is performing its duties toward them (Ukrainskyi veteranskyi fond, 2023). The attitude towards military personnel constitutes a reflection and, at the same time, a factor influencing national spirit, patriotism, and unity in complicated times, serves as psychological support for military personnel and a precondition for social reintegration of veterans (Abakina & Krapivina, 2023).

The problem of reintegration of veterans comes as a great test for Ukraine. From the beginning of the war in 2014 the number of veterans in the state has reached some 1.2 million (Folke Bernadotte Academy, 2023). After the end of the Russian-Ukrainian war at least 10% of the residents of Ukraine will somehow be related to veterans' services. And that is the highest figure in percentage as compared to other countries that have also got veterans and veteran policies (Kudimova, 2023). According to the international research data, half of veterans experience difficulties in their reintegration into civilian life, some 96% require additional assistance in the process (Sayer et al., 2010), some 70% identify at least one stress-creating factor in the process of reintegration, related to family or financial problems (Interian et al., 2012). Military personnel often perceive other military men as their family that has been taking care of them and have been securing a structure for them. Getting back to civilian life, they feel that normality is alien – they feel detached from people at home, lack of support coming from institutions, lack of structure, loss of identity, and loss of goal (Ahern et al., 2015; Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018). The distancing between military personnel and civilians, the change in the attitude to available problems and relationship is reflected in the appearance of new terms. For instance, "the guilt of a civilian" – the experience caused by general mobilisation when people, having no military experience, become service-

men and feel incompetent in military actions, but getting back to civilian life they feel guilty since they are no longer performing their military duty (Bondar, 2023). Another new notion is “post-front depreciation syndrome” that stands for revising the attitude to the problems of civilian life as compared to the military life (Lukashevskya, 2023). Contexts, elements of pain characteristic of each group and their meaningful symbols constitute a pre-disposition for prospective social tension both in the real present and in the future social dynamics (Kazarin, 2023).

In scientific discourse there are no well-established theories explaining the context of relationship between civilians and military personnel, and the generally accepted ethical patterns for responding to and interacting with military personnel are mainly of a declarative nature. This makes the problem highly relevant for qualitative research from the “very bottom” aiming to identify and analyse cognitive, affective, and social and psychological aspects of mutual acceptance and interaction. The goal of the research is social and psychological analysis and development of the typology of attitude of civilians to the military in the specific time and spatial context of modern Ukraine.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The empirical basis for the research is made up of transcripts of focus group discussions. The empirical data was collected by the Research Agency “Fama”. Focus groups were held in five cities in different regions of Ukraine, that differ in their proximity to the combat theatre: Chernihiv (close to the frontline), Vinnytsia (the rear), Dnipro (close to the frontline), Lviv (deep rear), Rivne (the rear). 40 civilians aged 20-67 participated in the focus group discussions (16 men and 24 women), and they had a different degree of involvement in the war context. The participants were not acquainted with each other and the facilitators. The characteristics of the focus group participants are provided in the appendix (Table A1).

The most widespread form of focus group discussions used in the research is a guided interview where the topics to be discussed are presented gradually. The focus group participants were recruited following the goal and tasks of the research.

The following research questions were asked:

- What is the current level of attitude of civilians toward military personnel as far as the level of emotionality, ideas, and connotative intentions are concerned?
- How has the dynamics of attitude toward military personnel been reflected in the mass conscience of the Ukrainian civilians over the recent years?
- What is the perception of military personnel in mass conscience – differentiated or uniform?
- What is the associative image of a military man in the minds of the representatives of civilian population?

The transcripts of the conducted focus group discussions were subjected to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2014). The transcripts were mainly processed via thematic coding: at first, each interview was split into a set of thematic blocks, and then the blocks within one topic were put together and analysed. The gradual process envisaged first coding of the emotional, cognitive, and connotative elements of the attitude of the representatives of civilians to different categories of military personnel in the dynamics of their development by the main analyst, and also their contrasting to the associative image civilians have shaped. In the second stage, the thematic matrix was to be filled in. Within the matrix, the material was indexed and sorted out following the scheme that arose right after the familiarisation with the text of transcripts. The goal and the guiding questions for the focus group primarily served as the basis for the matrix, and later the topics raised by the informants were taken into account. After the core dimensions of the topic were identified, the dimensions of the typology of the representatives of civilians toward military personnel were determined.

All the members of the research team have considered the results of such analysis of coding and typology. Regular research team meetings and comprehensive discussions of the topics and types have contributed to the development of conclusions based on qualitative analysis. The divergences have been settled via discussions.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The analysis of the results made it possible to identify four types of attitudes of civilians in modern Ukraine towards the military. The division into types was based on two criteria: *a) quality and; b) regularity (frequency) of contacts with the military personnel.*

By the *quality, contacts with the military personnel* could be *real* (happening in the real world and real-time mode) and *personalised* (personalised relationship satisfies emotional, relations-based, and instrumental needs, those are intimate, close, and interdependent relationship, like the one with best friends, partners, or close relatives). This relationship can be voluntary (like with romantic partners) or arbitrary (like with close brothers and sisters). Secondly, those could be *imaginary contacts* (virtual, in social media) and *social* (less close and interdependent, like with colleagues, distant relatives, or acquaintances). Some social relationships are voluntary, like relationships with acquaintances, while some other ones are occasional like with neighbours or distant relatives.

The second criterion was related to the *regularity (frequency) of contacts*: like meetings with the military *regularly* due to one's professional duties or as communication with close people, unlike *irregular or accidental contacts*, when a person was just a witness of some events involving the military.

Hence, four types of standpoints (positions) of individuals (representatives of civilian population) were outlined, which are characterised by different assessments

and perceptions of the military: a) “interaction participant” – a real and close, regular personalised contact; b) “interested witness” – real and close contacts, but irregular; c) “observer”, a disinterested witness, following the neighbour interaction type – a distant and mainly imaginary regular contact (social contact); d) “re-teller” following the type “people say or the Internet is full of that information” – a combination of a distant and imaginary social contact with accidental meetings. All the informants in the five focus group discussions were almost proportionately split into those four positions (Table 1. Distribution of informant positions).

Table 1*Distribution of informant positions*

Type of contact	Real and close (personalised)	Distant and imaginary (social)
Regular	Interaction participant (N=9)	Observer (disinterested witness, neighbor) (N=8)
Irregular, accidental	Interested witness (N=12)	Re-teller following the type “people say or the Internet is full of that information” (N=10)

Source. Own research

In the focus group discussions we identified several topics considered consistently by the representatives of all four types: a) emotionality in the attitude to the military; b) attitude to the military personnel in the categories of positive-negative-neutral attitude; c) detection of changes in the attitude occurring with time; d) differentiation of such attitude depending on the types of the military personnel; e) the format of interaction of civilians with military personnel and the factors promoting or preventing interaction between civilians and military personnel as well as the probability or real occurrence of conflicts between them; f) associative image of a military man (Table 2. Review of positions).

Table 2*Review of positions*

Position name			
Interaction participant	Witness	Observer	Re-teller
<i>Topic: “Emotionality in attitude to the military”</i>			
Low level of emotions	Mixed emotions: – positive – respect, admiration, – negative – indignation, pity	Does not presuppose any strong emotions; description of emotions of others (respect or pity) while meeting military men	Least emotional, respect as a norm. Fear and willingness to protect themselves against strong emotions, evasion of the news.

Position name			
Interaction participant	Witness	Observer	Re-teller
<i>Topic: "The attitude to military personnel in the categories of positive, negative, neutral attitude"</i>			
Positive attitude prevails; willingness to justify incorrect communication of military personnel with civilians, ascribe this to some accident	"Normal" attitude, rather neutral – "we don't touch them, and they don't touch us" [hereinafter citations are provided as they were worded by the informants]. Acknowledgement of parallel existence of civilians and military personnel. Lack of contact, lack of information.	The attitude to military personnel is ambivalent: respect and gratefulness, on the one hand, indignation concerning the rear guys ("big-face guys", sons of deputies, sons of oligarchs, and just regular military personnel who "got their profession before the martial law came into play")	Normal attitude, with ritualised respect.
<i>Topic: "The dynamics of changes in the attitude"</i>			
There are changes, people "have forgotten that war is going on", critical attitude towards assigning military personnel with the mission of "restoration of order and justice" in the future	The changes are considered in the time perspective "used to be" – "is now" – "will be": before 2014 – we don't need them; after 2014 – the attitude to military personnel became positive; from 2022 on – the attitude to them is as to the professionals the society needs badly	The attitude towards military personnel has not become worse, and has not changed, but the willingness to donate has gone down (since money is over). The war will end, and it is not clear what the attitude toward military personnel is going to be since at that time they will no longer be required	Society has obviously become more indifferent to the needs of military personnel
<i>Topic: "Differentiation of military personnel and attitude towards them"</i>			
– those on the frontline and those in the rear (those in the rear are needed); – heroes and those who are boasting; – professionals and non-professionals All categories are worthy of respect (but for the ones who behave inadequately)	The army is just a section of society Outlined separately: – Afghanistan soldiers and "our guys" – those who are at the frontline and those who are in the rear – business military personnel – specific groups evoking negative emotions (National Guard, Territorial Recruitment Centres – aggressive military men (with partial justification)	– those on the frontline and those in the rear – professional, regular military personnel and newly mobilised ones – representatives of territorial defense forces	There is no division of military personnel. Only negative attitude to those in the rear is recorded; as well as to the representatives of the military recruitment centres

Position name			
Interaction participant	Witness	Observer	Re-teller
<i>Topic: “Associative image of a military man”</i>			
– a fairy-tale hero – a highly pragmatic successful warrior	War transforms everyone into heroes. A military man is a “hero” – “a person with superpower”; brave, fair, tired, loyal to the oath. The military personnel who get back from the war will bring order into the country	That is an ordinary person. A boy or a girl. Prototypes - V. Zaluzhnyi [Commander-in-Chief of the AFU] and Da Vinci [D. Kotsiubaylo, the first volunteer granted the title “Hero of Ukraine” in his lifetime]	A mythical, idealised image; defender of the country who is saving the future; solid, strong, both physically and morally
<i>Topic: “Sources of information”</i>			
Direct contacts with military personnel.	Observation of military personnel in the streets, in route buses, in cafes	Information from secondary sources, official mass media, social media	Information from secondary sources, official mass media, social media

Source. Own research

Position “Interaction Participant”

This is the position of a civilian representative that is the closest to real contacts. For the most part, the attitude of the “participants” to the military is not very emotional. They are directly involved in the relationship, they do not have time to experience emotional outbursts. When they are asked questions, most of them mention respect (R5_M_29) (The coding of informant statements at the focus groups includes the name of the city where the focus group was held [L-Lviv, Ch-Chernihiv, V-Vinnytsia, D-Dnipro, R-Rivne], participant number, gender [m-male, f-female] and age of the informant [?—means that the age was not specified by the informant]), “I... I can’t even convey the amount of respect I have for them” (Ch5_f_37), my positive feelings (Ch3_f_28), “I have a mega-positive attitude towards these people. It’s really a low bow to them. There are no words to describe how I feel. You just realise that these people have come up and closed you with their bodies” (Ch1_f_46).

“Interaction participants” tend to record different attitudes towards the military, but much more positive than negative: “I feel sorry for the fact that we are losing the best, and the best are really dying, the brave ones who go forward, who are at the front line... the attitude is mostly positive” (Ch2_m_39).

“Participants” note that meetings in public places do not always go according to a positive scenario. There have been cases of inadequate claims to get past the queue “...let me through, I’m a hero here, I’m defending... I have the right to go without

standing in a queue, well, inadequate people...” (Ch1_f_46). Military personnel trying to threaten with weapons also pose a threat for the population: “I’ll just take my weapons and you will all come out” (Ch1_f_46).

It is interesting that people in this case, recording some negative things in the actions and behaviour of the military, try to find excuses for these actions – “...it seems to me that these are the military who may probably not have been to the front, they just behave very bad, they are just a few” (Ch8_f_43).

Instead, no excuses were made for civilians, although it was noted that they sometimes behave inappropriately towards the military. One of the “participants” who works in a medical facility with the military recalled cases of such unethical attitudes toward the military—in a shopping centre, veterans who were in wheelchairs due to brain injuries became the object of scrupulous attention – “.. especially older people could walk with their treasures and just stop and, as they say, stare at people..., just stand there and just look at them like that, without saying anything” (R2_f_29).

“Participants”, as those involved in the process of interaction, tend to record changes in the attitude toward the military. “After the full-scale invasion, of course, people tried to help more” (R1_f_34). The main reason for this change in attitude toward the military, as stated, is that people have become “used” to the war. A very specific change in attitude was recorded at a focus group discussion in Chernihiv:

The realisation that there are military personnel, and a lot of them, leads us to the understanding that the war will last for who knows how long, the understanding that, unfortunately, there are people wounded. And, God forbid, we should run out of military personnel, because... we are given weapons, but no one will give us people. ...I mean, now, ‘oh, the hero has returned’, he has not returned yet, because the war is not over, and that’s why it’s sad. (Ch2_m_39)

Another point that is related to the change in attitudes towards the military is the assignment of the mission of “establishing order and justice” in Ukraine in the future to them. While recognising the role that the military could play in the political regime of the future Ukraine, “participants” were critical about the idea of giving them exclusive powers to establish order in the country: “I would not want a civil war and a *coup d’état*, so I do not expect the military to restore order in the country and in the city in general. I am against it” (R1_f_34).

The attitude to the military in this category of civilian “participants” is differentiated. The difference between the military in frontline units and those in units in the rear is recognised. “The frontline unit is more about direct contact with the invaders, the unit in the rear is about support, that is, there is no combat unit without a unit in the rear” (Ch3_f_28). But attitudes towards them can be different:

mothers, wives of servicemen who are in the first and second lines would like their children to return, their husbands to return, and I think that the wives of those who are now alone at home, they treat those servicemen who are in the rear differently. Well, maybe, a bit negatively, why their men have to fight and ours have to... And these guys are sitting here? (R1_f_34),

“And those who are here are perceived more as people who just go to the workplace” (R2_f_29). But, especially in Chernihiv (a frontline city), there is a clear understanding that units in the rear are needed.

In addition to the division into “frontline” and “rearline”, “participants” also discussed the division into “real heroes, those people to whom we basically send everything, well, we used to send” (Ch1_f_46) and “the others are those who say, I am a military man, everyone owes me. Let me go past the queue, I want this, and who are you here, it is thanks to me that you are alive.... ” (Ch1_f_46).

The associative image of the military for the “participants” is shaped on the basis of direct contacts with the military and is clearly represented by two categories. Firstly, it is a “fairy-tale hero”: “they are heroes because they do not see their homes and do not see their children grow up” “they are heroes because they are brave, because they are fighting, and heroes because they are fighting, they are defending us” (Ch5_f_37), “... he is a fearless defender who stood up and did not hide”, “fearless, responsible and balanced” (Ch1_frontline_f_46), “A Cossack who was defending, was constantly fighting, was in the fight, and now he is in the AFU” (R5_m_29).

Secondly, that is a warrior who exhibits very pragmatic traits – someone who is able to make quick decisions. “Intelligence, wit plus creativity. We have heard many stories that they manage to do much more because of their wit and ingenuity” (R5_m_29).

By default, the associative image of a military man is a male image. However, women in the military are a reality of the Russian-Ukrainian war. A woman in the army is worthy of respect: “she must be brave, courageous, and a good specialist... there are many female snipers now, many combat medics, they are very courageous, very brave (Ch5_f_37).

Position “Witness or Interested Observer”

This position implies, unlike the previous position, irregular but real contacts between civilians and the military. Some of those focus group participants who do not have relatives among the military, do not have close acquaintances, but meet the military at work (from time to time), in transport, on the streets, form the type of so-called “witness” whose opinion is based on the results of observation. Quite often, such a person may have the following desire, as expressed by one of the group members in Dnipro: “I only see soldiers when I go to the shop. I really want to come up and ask them how is it there” (D5_f_61).

The prevailing attitude towards the military in this category of people is respect and positive emotions. Perhaps, expression of respect for the military is a tribute to socially approved/expected reactions: “positive, what other emotions can there be, they are our heroes, what else can we do. Only the best emotions” (Ch4_f_?).

Most negative emotions and indignation were expressed at the focus group in Lviv. The indignation was caused not only by the brutal actions of the TRC representatives, but also by the very fact of the military presence on the streets of Lviv: “In general, you see a military man, and that’s it, and you have a negative emotion. Why should I see them on the streets of a peaceful city in wartime? Why should this be happening now?” (L6_M_43). This group of “witnesses” has mixed feelings about the military: on the one hand, positive feelings such as respect and admiration, and on the other hand, negative feelings such as indignation and pity. It can be both pride and fear (L7_m_54). Obviously, such mixed feelings are also associated with a certain sense of “guilt” toward the residents of those parts of Ukraine where active hostilities are taking place: “compared to what is happening in the east, we are still living in paradise” (L7_m_54).

The attitude of this category of focus group participants to the military is quite peculiar. Traditionally, they reiterate that they treat the military with respect, repeating the so-called positive socially approved cliché (reflected in the use of the term “normal”) – “When you see a military man, you treat him with respect, of course, because service in the army is hard work. So, it’s normal, everyone treats them with respect. ...Who else should be treated well if not the military?” (V5_f_38). Probably, this is how the desire to get separated from the military and everything related to it is manifested. This is a subconscious desire to distance oneself from the war – “we do not touch them, and they do not touch us.... So, there is no contact, no information, and the attitude is rather neutral” (D5_f_61). And almost always, what the “witnesses” say is accompanied by a “but” along with respect.

I had a house, and the military lived with me for a whole year. For some time, they changed from one group to another. I provided them with everything. But when I arrived once, I was left without windows, without doors, they broke everything, broke bottles (Ch6_m_?),

“...I have friends who have an attitude towards the military, you know, if they didn’t sit in our houses, we wouldn’t be bombed. Or you know, they say that they get such amounts of money...” (Ch4_f_?). Partially reflecting this “but” in the witnesses’ statements is the position

Respect to civilians, and then to the military... I pay a lot of respect to civilians, because you can say that they kept the war backwards, or that first attack, invasion, it took place, I guess, due to the unity of people, since the army or such entities that were supposed to prevent all that were just not ready. (R8_m_38)

The participants of the focus groups, whom we called “witnesses”, paid much more attention to changes in attitudes towards the military in terms of “what it used to be” – “what is now” – “what will come”. Compared to the “used to be” – “has become”, they mainly mentioned that society has already adapted to martial law, and accordingly, the attitude towards the military has changed from “uneven breathing” to “equal”.

The war has become “normalised” and along with this process, the attitude toward the military has also become normalised.

The question of what the future holds for us as a society was also raised.

We need to be mentally prepared for when the war ends, or is approaching its end, there will be a lot of military people. And of course, after that, there will be a large percentage of military men who will be more active, they will show themselves. We need to prepare the population for this. (L6_m_43)

In order to make this process go smoothly, a suggestion was made in Rivne, where the issue of the military coming back from the war and restoring order or justice was quite acute:

I’m just saying that there should be social lifts that would bring these people to power. I understand that there is no need to kill someone or overturn something. We need social lifts in our society so that people can go to power, not just the same people. (R6_m_60)

Differentiation among the military is roughly the same as in society, and the army as an institution represents a cross-section of society: “the military is the same society, the same people who were like us yesterday. Today they put on a uniform, nothing has changed” (R6_m_60).

The lines of division of the military and, accordingly, the attitudes towards different groups of military are different: “Here is the division. Those who are at the frontline, those who are fighting – they are all respected. And those who are in the rear are treated negatively because of their behaviour” (D4_f_51);

In general, people still divide the military into those who are in the rear and those who are at the frontline. Well, everyone knows about the recent problems with the TRC staff. The problem is a painful one. It is not a problem of today and yesterday, it is an old one. And that’s why the attitude of ordinary citizens is extremely negative” (R3_m_44);

“If the war ends, half of the government will flee because they are afraid of the military. There is a possibility that there will be another Maidan. The concept of a “rear prick” has not disappeared” (L6_m_43).

When “witnesses” talk about the division of the military into different subgroups, they usually add “in my circle”, “the gradation is there”, “I have acquaintances who believe...”, thus separating themselves from what is being said in the plane of mass consciousness.

These focus group participants are more likely than “participants” to talk about the benefits that some military receive from the war, about a pragmatic approach to military service: “There are those who, you know, are well-settled. They are satisfied with the war, and their finance is on the rise. And there are those who water the land with blood and pay with their lives” (D5_f_61).

They also mentioned the soldiers returning from the front. There are some “emotionally unbalanced among them. Some start shouting, waving their hands, a couple of minutes pass, they calm down and the dialogue goes back to normal” (V5_f_38), there are aggressive soldiers – “Aggressive military man appears. Someone with a grenade can appear and make themselves known. A car is driving, you don’t give way to it, he can show himself” (L6_m_43) and another group of the military starts being singled out – “And those who come are more closed, so constrained, those who are fighting for our state... they speak very little...” (L7_m_54).

Thus, when differentiating the military and the attitude towards them, representatives of those whom we have called “witnesses” pay more attention to the psychological state of military men and their behavioural manifestations than to their role in society. And this is natural, since on the surface, in public space, it is the behavioural characteristics that are more visible.

For this group of “witnesses”, the associative image of a military man is unequivocally “heroic” – “a man with superpowers” – “the sky, the sun, in the middle of the field stands a tall, stout, strong, bearded, fully uniformed man with weapons in his hands, serious, strong, wise, courageous, kind at the same time, restrained, a warrior, a defender” (V5_f_38).

Emphasis can be placed on different aspects of his/her “heroism” – “a hero, courageous, fair, tired, loyal to the oath” (R4_f_42); different gender aspects –

Equality, sacrifice, love. Equality, because both men and women serve in the army. Different genders, different values, in general, very different segments of the population. Sacrifice, because people sacrifice their lives, their past, so to speak. Love, because we must not forget that many people are fighting not because of hatred for russians, but because they love their loved ones and want to protect what is most precious to them. (L4_f_21)

War turns everyone into a hero –

This is a simple man who just got caught up in the war. Just like all of us. Caught in the trenches, afraid, like all of us, afraid to die under fire, laughing when necessary, crying when grieving. He got caught in the war, he has to take an assault rifle and go facing his death, to fulfill his duties. (R6_m_60)

And it was these “witnesses” who put forward and voiced the myth associated with the heroism of the military: “Everyone hopes that these people who fought, who saw something, who fought for something, well, let’s say, they died, gave their lives, shed their blood there. Now they have to come and restore order” (R6_m_60).

Thus, “witnesses” are a step away from direct interaction between civilians and the military to the side of observing the military on the streets, in buses, and cafes. They see the military in different situations and try to bring their experience of accidental encounters, as well as experience gained from the Internet and social media, into their understanding of the military.

Observer Position (Disinterested Neighbour from the Adjacent Apartment)

This position presupposes obtaining information from secondary sources, “second-hand” information. At the same time, unlike the position of a “witness”, who is indirectly responsible for the information provided and strives for an objective assessment, an “observer” bears no responsibility for the information provided.

In the case of the “observer,” we can note the effect of expectation—a cognitive distortion resulting from the influence of previous experiences and stereotypes on the perception of information. “Observers” in focus group discussions tend to voice what they have already heard. They do not give out new information. When they state something, they usually add “among my friends”, “I heard this opinion”, “I read it on Twitter”, “I saw it on the news”. For them, it is important to confirm their point of view by referring to their environment.

The position of an “observer” does not imply any strong emotions. This category of focus group participants did not show any emotions, except for the cliché “respect” (D7_m_55, D1_f_34) and the quotes like “one old lady said it”, “oh, I feel sorry for you” (D7_m_55).

The attitude of the “observers” to the military is ambivalent:

On the one hand, it is respect, because not everyone can leave everything, their whole family, their home and go to war, to protect us, to sit in the trenches, that is, to have almost nothing. And on the other hand, for some, those who have a higher status, even though they went, even though they put on a uniform, they are staying in comfort... (D6_f_28),

a socially approved answer expressed in standard phrases. “Gratitude for the fact that I have a peaceful sleep, that I have an opportunity to work, that I have an opportunity to rest” (V6_f_45), pride and, at the same time, sadness – “pride that this person is defending our country, on the one hand, and on the other hand, well... It’s sad. Because, honestly, I don’t know how many people will actually come back and be okay” (V1_f_27).

“Observers” record a split attitude towards the military in the traditional way:

Attitudes will be different, because someone has sacrificed their health, paid for our victory with their blood. And someone... I won’t say that they are just idling there. But first and foremost, the personnel should be on the frontline, not some guys who were taken from fieldwork 3 months ago, trained a little bit somewhere and sent to the front” (V6_T_f_45),

“There is no respect for people in the rear” (V6_f_45).

“Observers” talk about a change in attitudes toward the military. “In a year and a half, the attitude towards the military has improved. When the full-scale invasion began, I think many of us did not think that we would survive, and survive for such a long time” (V1_f_27). Today, the attitude “towards the military has not cooled down.

We are now completely dependent on them” (V6_f_45). At the same time, the desire to donate has decreased, and this is perceived as a natural phenomenon: first, “Well, as for donations, people will donate less because they are running out of money” (V1_f_27), and second, there is a direct link between the duration of hostilities and the decrease in the intention to help Ukraine on the part of Western allies,

... when we were promised support at the beginning of the war, that Europe, America, we will help there, everything, we hoped that the war would not last long. There was hope that we would throw these 1,000 hryvnias, those 500 hryvnias... everyone wanted to help, there was some intention to help. But weapons can run out... And when we realise that a year and a half has passed, and as I see on the Internet, the European Union has given us only 30 percent of the amount of weapons it promised, you have to understand that we cannot, no matter how much we give, no matter how much money we give... (V6_f_45)

What will happen next? “The war will be over, we will no longer need their help, we will be peaceful, we have won the war. We don’t know what the attitude towards those guys will be afterwards... Everything will depend on people themselves” (V6_f_45). Therefore, in the future, we can foresee a kind of symmetry in relations — “if we sow well, we will get the same response. If we treat them as some kind of trash, we will receive the same in return. We need to be prepared for this” (V6_f_45).

Traditionally, “observers” reproduce the differentiation of the military into “frontline” and “rear-line” soldiers. It is also traditional to divide the military into “professional, career” military and newly mobilised,

Not only career military went to war, but people who had their families, who had their jobs, who worked somewhere, some as electricians, some as well, different, someone was a programmer, a musician, that is, a person... you cannot equalise, yes, if you are already a military man, you have to be perfect, meet certain markers” (V6_f_45),

as well as separately talk about “the personnel who are in military recruitment and enlistment offices, who are quietly working somewhere in the headquarters, that is, they are not on the frontline... ” (V6_f_45), who are suspected of having a pragmatic attitude to the war.

Unlike the previous positions, representatives of this “observer” position do not idealise the military.

This is an ordinary person. It can be a guy. It can be a girl. It can be someone older, for example, a man over 40. ...we should not consider these people as something supernatural. We have to understand that they are military men, they came from civilians, that is, from among you and me (V1_f_27)

Optimism and a thirst for victory are the most important features of an associative image (V6_f_45). Prototypes of the associative image: “Da Vinci is a young, handsome guy, strong, reckless, intelligent, ideological, and right in the sense that this is my

country, this is my land” (V6_f_45) and V. Zaluzhnyi – “Courageous, brave, intelligent for sure, strong, optimistic for sure” (V7_f_?). Other traits mentioned by “observers” are patriotism (D1_f_34; D6_f_28; D7_m_55) and

strength, firmness, that is, to go to war, no matter how rudely I put it, you need to have been made of steel. In other words, to go to the front, to do such a terrible thing, to pick up a rifle and go to kill, even for the sake of victory, you need to have courage, that is, not everyone can shoot, even if it is at the enemy, since you are shooting at a person. (D6_f_28)

So, an “observer” is a person who is not involved in the interaction, not included in the interaction. The “observer” is just curious, while the “witness” cares. The witness is in one boat, and the observer is in another boat. Metaphorically, these two positions can be compared to neighbours. A “witness” is a person who lives in the same house as you do, you have common engineering systems, common walls, he cares about what is happening in your apartment, he is responsible for the information he gives you about what is happening in your apartment. The “observer” is the person in the window of the house opposite your house. He looks at everything from the outside. He is curious, but does not care/is indifferent.

Re-Teller Position

This is the least interested, the most distant from direct contact position of a person. As a rule, they “sing” from someone else’s voice and judge everything perceiving it through someone else’s eyes. These are people who do not have close relatives at the front, do not meet military personnel at work, even former ones, and, moreover, they seem to be somewhat closed to information about the war as something that could violate the integrity of their worldview. “Somewhere I hear something, or some classmates, distant, so I don’t communicate, no, I have no relatives” (D8_f_40).

Among the emotions expressed by the “re-tellers” are pity – “strong pity, and such very unpleasant emotions when you see young guys, 20-30 years old and without arms, or without a hand, or even without a leg, or without two legs” (V2_m_65), and respect (some of them repeat respect like under the spell)— “With respect, with respect. I treat them with respect” (L2_f_67). But they all note that they are used to this respect – “there is respect, but somehow it has already become so accustomed for the eye. I mean, there are no vivid emotions” (D3_m_26).

The word “fear“ is quite often used by representatives of this group, unlike others (V4_m_20, V8_f_58, L3_f_48, L5_f_45). “Since the beginning of the war, when I saw the military, I was scared because of a huge psychological impact.. ” (L3_f_48), “I look at a person in uniform and think, maybe this person has already experienced the horror of war or is just going to go there... I saw people without limbs. It’s scary what war can do” (L3_f_48). Perhaps that is why there is a desire to protect oneself, first

of all, from this horror, from this information, to be away from those people who have this information. “I don’t read the news very much, I don’t read or watch it for days” (D8_f_40). “Well, it also happens that if you are travelling in a compartment, and some military take a seat next to you. It happens a lot in supermarkets. So I try to avoid them. Because somehow I don’t want to” (D3_m_26). Therefore, a young man in his 20s expresses his feelings as follows “I am glad for them that they have returned to the citizenship, so to speak. That they were released or something, so I’m glad for them that they have escaped from there” (V4_m_20). And there is also admiration for these guys who survived this horror and remained optimistic—“...what optimists they are. They don’t complain about anything, they tell some stories, some of their battles, but they tell them with such enthusiasm” (V8_f_58).

The attitude of civilians toward the military is actually a continuation of the conversation about emotionality. All representatives of this group assess the attitude towards the military as normal: “We have normal respect for the military. So it’s normal, everyone treats them with respect. We have only positive attitudes towards the military, because they are our defenders. Who else should be treated well if not the military?” (V2_m_65).

The concept of “normality” also includes both positive attitudes towards some people – “respect for these people, and an understanding that you need to have character, to have some willpower to not be afraid to become a defender of your land” (V3_m_56), and condemnation of others – “it’s a shame that this person went through such a thing, and then he wastes his life just sitting and talking about nothing with others over a drink” (V3_m_56);

Some people’s deputies, they say, signed up for the territorial defense, and here they are such heroes, and they promote themselves in such a way. That is, they pretend to be some kind of warriors and defenders. In fact, they are the same chameleons who just change their colour, and that’s it”. (V3_m_56)

Negative attitudes toward the military are also explained by the fact that they (the military) have become an obstacle to the realisation of some personal plans, for example: “they kicked students out to study online because they needed dormitories” (V4_m_20), so there are no positive feelings in this regard.

In general, the “re-tellers” express their attitude in standard cliché phrases: “Society supports and will continue to support and help our military” (D2_m_?). The “re-tellers” almost never spoke about changes in attitudes toward the military or simply did not notice them. These focus group participants did not speak about different groups of military either –all people are different.

The associative image of a military man among the representatives of this group is quite similar to the mythical idealised image that appears in the media. Most of the “re-tellers” name them as sources of information. They are the defender of our country, who saves our future. So that we have this future and so that we do not disappear as

a nation, as a country. This is the defender. He is “stout, strong, physically prepared, physically and mentally strong. In general, he is a person with an iron will.... of great endurance. Such a polite, tolerant person” (V2_m_65). Doubts were expressed about his appearances – “He looks strange. Indeed, it used to be like this, you would look at a military man, he was fit, neat, and tidy. And now you look at what he is wearing, where did he get that?” (L3_f_48). The strangeness of a military man’s appearance is perceived because his appearance does not match the “model” one that the media broadcasts.

CONCLUSION

Mutual civilian-military attitudes and relations during wartime is of strategic importance since it affects the country’s defense capacity, psychological wellbeing of both civilians and military personnel, as well as constituting a predictor of social reintegration of military personnel in the post-war period. The identified positions in the attitude of civilians toward military personnel reflect the dichotomy between the sense of gratitude to the military for their real heroism vs the striving for a normal, happy life of one’s own. Such striving for a happy life may be reached through subconscious or purposeful avoidance of any thoughts about the war and everything related to it. Closeness to one of the two poles of this dichotomy pre-determines the type of attitude to the military, and, at the same time, the degree of tension rate an internal conflict. The proneness to distance oneself from the present context of war to reduce the intensity of emotions has also been traced in our research into the routine life in wartime in the autumn of 2022 (Klymanska, 2023) and can be viewed as a non-specific reaction to experiencing a particularly significant threat. The specificity of the war in Ukraine should also be taken into account since it was not expected to be so large-scale in terms of brutality, duration, destruction, and particularly human losses. At the same time, the unexpectedness also refers to the victorious fight of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in its opposition to the second strongest army in the world, from the country the population and the size of which are tens of times larger. War and peace, life and death, pride and sense of guilt, fear and hope, war in the country and relatively normal daily life in the rear. It should be understood that the attitude of civilians to military personnel is just one of the vectors of the social and psychological situation in Ukraine during the war and through the post-war lens. It should be acknowledged that the attitude of civilians towards military personnel is the tip of the iceberg, while intrafamily relations with military, the relationship between the families of military personnel and families of non-military personnel, etc. act as stumbling blocks. It should be borne in mind that the tip of the iceberg may well appear to be the tip of the volcano. Numerous researches and scientific analyses of the problem recognise the fragmented nature of such studies and stress their dependence on different factors. While analysing the multi-vector nature of the factors involved in the relationship of the US military personnel and

civilians depending on different situations of war (Strachan, 2006), the author stresses the need for understanding the impact of their situational peculiarities. Since it is those peculiarities that x, it is qualitative research that is required for the identification of the right questions that will enable us to trace the actual attitude toward the military and the factors determining it.

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APPENDIX

Table A1*Informant description*

Informant code number	Informant description	Types of positions
	Chernihiv (close to the frontline)	
Ch1	Woman, 46, teacher	participant
Ch2	Man, 39, lecturer in the State Emergency Service	participant
Ch3	Woman, 28, civil servant	participant
Ch4	Woman,?, medical nurse	witness
Ch5	Woman, 37, civil servant	participant
Ch6	Man, ?, driver	witness
Ch7	Woman, 64, pensioner	witness
Ch8	Woman, 43, volunteer	participant
	Dnipro (close to the frontline)	
D1	Woman, 34, maternity leave	observer
D2	Man, ?, mechanical engineer	re-teller
D3	Man, 26, programmer	re-teller
D4	Woman, 51, medical worker	witness
D5	Woman, 61, pensioner	witness
D6	Woman, 28, teacher	observer
D7	Man, 55, light industry worker	observer
D8	Woman, 58, medical worker	re-teller
	Lviv (deep rear)	
L1	Man, 61, engineer	observer
L2	Woman, 67, pensioner	re-teller
L3	Woman, 48, kindergarten teacher	re-teller
L4	Woman, 21, NGO worker	witness
L5	Woman, 45, maternity leave	re-teller
L6	Man, 43, lecturer	witness
L7	Man, 54, light industry worker	witness
L8	Man, 46, light industry worker	witness
	Rivne (rear)	
R1	Woman, 34, maternity leave	participant
R2	Woman, 29, medical worker	participant
R3	Man, 44, unemployed	witness
R4	Woman, 42, lecturer	witness
R5	Man, 29, NGO project manager	participant
R6	Man, 60, private businessman	witness
R7	Woman, 20, master of manicure	participant
R8	Man, 38, private businessman	witness

	Vinnytsia (rear)	
V1	Woman, 27, barista	observer
V2	Man, 65, pensioner	re-teller
V3	Man, 56, private businessman	re-teller
V4	Man, 20, student	re-teller
V5	Woman, 38, mobile communication company supervisor	witness
V6	Woman, 45, shop assistant	observer
V7	Woman, ?, private businessman	observer
V8	Woman, 58, medical worker	re-teller

Source. Own research.