Research Articles

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The Impact of Gender Factor on the Formation of Career Aspirations of Military Personnel of the Armed Forces of Ukraine

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Abstract

The article examines the prevalence of a discrepancy in career aspirations among students attending military academies, with a particular focus on differences based on gender. The study uses the psycholinguistic research method, specifically a free association experiment. Two stimulus words were selected for the psycholinguistic experiment: 'career' and 'family'. The word 'family' serves as an auxiliary stimulus in the experiment. A total of 102 students, all of whom were currently ranked as lieutenants and in their fifth year of studies at the Military Institute of Telecommunications and Information Technology, participated in the experiment. The sample consisted of 74 male (*n* = 72.5%) and 28 female (*n* = 27.5%) participants. The study findings show that primary career motivation for both male and female respondents is the acquisition of social prestige, demonstrated through high status and rank identification, as well as a stable financial situation. Gender differences in career orientation lead to variations in conflict behavior strategies. Both men and women may use cooperation and competition strategies equally. However, in situations of conflicting interests, women tend to orient their social interaction towards confrontation and antagonism. The majority of both male and female respondents view the family as a potential for career advancement. However, some male respondents may experience high inter-role conflict between work and family. Women have various methods of resolving the role conflict between work and family. These include remaining childless, delegating child-rearing duties to their parents, and minimizing work responsibilities to allocate their physical and psychological resources to their family. To create more opportunities for women's career success, it is recommended that military organizations provide training in integrative career approaches that

can help service women approach career development in terms of their professional competencies rather than gender role stereotypes.

Keywords

career aspiration, gender, psycholinguistic experiment, military, conflict between work and family

A person's career plays a crucial role in achieving success and a high material standard of living. This, in turn, affects how other members of society perceive one's social status. Career aspiration is often the primary motivator in career choice and is defined as the desire and intention to achieve career goals through a career development process (Khampirat, 2020). The formation and development of career aspirations are important determinants of an individual's choice of field of study and occupation, and play a critical role in shaping future social mobility and career self-concept (Batyrbekova et al., 2022; Yasmin et al., 2022). Career aspirations are influenced by different practices of socialization. These practices include psychological, historical, cultural, economic, and socio-political parameters. The research findings provide evidence of the role of gender in shaping career aspirations (Korlat et al., 2023; Van Grootel et al., 2018). The changes in the concepts of career and career growth, the reorientation of management principles towards the effective use of human resources, and the provision of equal opportunities for men and women in all aspects of society have resulted in expanded professional opportunities and a significant increase in the number of women in technical and managerial positions. Therefore, it is necessary to study the impact of gender on the formation and development of career aspirations. Research shows that despite the societal association of leadership and prestigious jobs with men and masculinity (Saint-Michel, 2018; Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023), women tend to pursue more prestigious careers than their male counterparts (Wicht et al., 2021). This leads to changes in the gender segregation of the labor market and the end of the practice of relegating women to sales, medicine, and education, where they play supporting roles, while men opt for fields that enable them to establish power dynamics (Eagly et al., 2020; Korlat et al., 2023). In Ukraine, the government has expressed support for this trend through official documents. For example, at the end of December 2022, the National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, also known as 'Women, Peace, Security', was updated. Furthermore, the government approved the State Strategy for Ensuring Equal Rights for Women and Men (https://www.ukrinform.ua/). Ukraine's gender policy is aimed at increasing the number of women in the armed forces, and the integration of women into the institutions of the defense sector is a key aspect of this policy. The gender policy in the defense sector is not only focused on the elimination of the imbalance in the representation of women in the military, but also on the full realization of the career and professional ambitions of Ukrainian women (Khraban, 2024). The relevance of studying the gender aspect of military career aspirations is determined by modern trends in society and the armed forces, where gender relations are regulated

and dynamically change depending on the balance between "conservative traditions, ideologies of masculinity, biological and liberal discourses, bureaucratic needs, and feminist ideologies, which interact in different ways and shape the gender regime of each organization" (Sasson-Levy, 2011).

The Theoretical Framework

The study's theoretical basis relies on theories of professional development that highlight the correlation between career aspirations and occupational preferences or interests. Gottfredson's Theory of Circumscription and Compromise (Gottfredson, 2002) posits that an individuals' career development and aspirations are a reflection of their self-concept, which is shaped by their perceptions of social characteristics such as gender, class, and ability. At the same time, the choice of appropriate career alternatives is often determined by gender and the prestige of the job. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) focuses on the interaction of individual, behavioral, and environmental factors that influence an individual's career aspirations. The SCCT originally consisted of three interconnected models: interconnected models of career and academic interest, choice, and performance. Later, the original model was expanded with two additional models. One model focuses on satisfaction and well-being in educational and professional settings, while the other focuses on an individual's lifelong career management (Lent, & Brown, 2019; Wang et al., 2022). Lent and Brown (2020) summarized the techniques and methods of career correction in their development of Social Cognitive Career Theory. These include empowering choice, overcoming barriers, providing support, goal setting, self-regulation, facilitating job performance, and increasing job satisfaction.

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Career aspirations have been the subject of a great deal of research and are still an important topic of study. The factors that influence career aspirations are the focus of current research. Researchers have identified several factors that influence career aspirations, including parental education and profession, hereditary and individual traits (such as features of the nervous system, health, and body type), childhood experiences that contribute to personality development, and environmental factors that have a multifaceted impact (such as diet, habits, physical activity, and neuropsychological state). Studying these aspects can aid in comprehending why an individual may compromise their career aspirations or take action to fully realize them (Schels et al., 2022).

Studies that focus on the influence of gender on the formation and development of career aspirations are of interest for this research. Hoff and his colleagues (Hoff et al., 2022) believe that gender is a significant factor in the differences in career aspirations between individuals. Most research on gender mainstreaming points out that women's careers develop differently from men's. For example, Wicht and colleagues (Wicht et

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al., 2021) discovered a paradox in which female adolescents, within the gendered limits of their 'zone of acceptable alternatives', have greater career aspirations than male adolescents, but often have fewer career achievements. Wicht recommends that career professionals and counselors should be especially active in supporting young women to develop the skills necessary to realize their career aspirations and overcome obstacles. This is because unrealized aspirations can lead to 'talent wastage' (Wicht et al., 2021). Korlat and colleagues (Korlat et al., 2023) found that compared to men, women showed less interest in practical tasks typically associated with blue-collar jobs and more interest in social and creative tasks typically associated with white-collar jobs. Korlat suggested that for women, it is the content of the work that is more important than the status of the professions. If this fact is viewed as an expression of particular professional interests, then women are almost invariably less motivated by status, power, and money than men are when directly assessing these motivations (Korlat et al., 2023). The main practical outcome of studying career aspirations from a gender perspective is the identification of patterns that determine the current state of women's careers: 1) women's careers are integrated into a broader life context; 2) family and career are important aspects of women's lives; 3) women's career paths reflect a wide range and diversity of career development models; 4) human and social capital are crucial elements for women's careers (O'Neil et al., 2008).

This article examines the prevalence of a discrepancy in career aspirations among students attending military academies, with a particular focus on differences based on gender.

Materials and Methods

To ensure the most genuine responses, the study uses the psycholinguistic research method, specifically a free association experiment (Khraban, 2022a). Experimental methods in the field of psycholinguistics can help individuals express their opinions without fear of being criticized or ridiculed if others in the community learn about the respondent's feelings and thoughts (Khraban, 2022b). This is especially important in a military environment. In addition, the results of the association experiment are consistent with the actual thoughts and feelings of the respondents.

Procedure

The associative experiment was conducted at Heroes of Kruty Military Institute of Telecommunications and Information Technology (Kyiv, Ukraine) in September 2023 in accordance with the Code of Ethics for Scientists (https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/rada/show/v0002550-09). The participants were made aware of the voluntary nature of the study and their right to opt out anytime. The requisite per-

mission to conduct the study at the military institute was duly sought and subsequently granted by the military institute's administrative authorities. The study involved 102 fifth-year students, specializing in computer science (n = 18.6%), cyber security and information security (n = 30.4%), information systems and technologies (n = 22.6%), electronic communications and radio engineering (n = 28.4%). The participants of this experiment pursued their studies at the institute for a period of four years. Having obtained the Bachelor's degree, they proceeded to undertake further studies at the Master's program. It should be noted that the respondents were not engaged in combat operations, which excludes the potential influence of combat exposure and injuries on their responses. All respondents held the rank of lieutenant. There were no specific requirements for participation in the project. A total of all Master's students who were present for the designated hour of the experiment took part in the experiment. The participants in the associative experiment were 74 men (n = 72.5%) and 28 women (n = 27.5%) between the ages of 20 and 25 years old (mean age 22.3).

During the free association experiment, respondents were offered the following instructions: "For the association experiment, examine the stimulus word and immediately record any word that comes to mind on the answer sheet. Two minutes are allowed to complete this task". Two stimulus words were selected for the psycholinguistic experiment: 'career' and 'family'. The word 'family' served as an auxiliary stimulus in the experiment. The hypothesis was that associations to the stimulus word 'family' could help to understand whether societal expectations that women are primarily responsible for taking care of their homes and families act as a barrier to their career aspirations. As a research method, a six-phase approach to the thematic analysis was utilized. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method of data analysis that involves the researcher's interpretation in selecting codes and constructing themes (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Thematic analysis allows for valuable insights and the generation of new hypotheses, even in cases where there is a lack of prior research to draw upon (Saunders et al., 2023). The initial stage of reflexive thematic analysis entails familiarization with the data, encompassing an immersion in the textual data and a thorough reading and re-reading of the data (e.g., the responses to a proposed stimulus word in an associative experiment). The reading process should be conducted in an analytical and critical manner, with a focus on identifying key concepts and evaluating their significance. This necessitates a reflection on the part of the researcher regarding how those participating in the experiment come to comprehend their experiences and the assumptions they formulate in interpreting these experiences. This requires the researcher to consider how those taking part in the experiment come to understand their experiences and the assumptions they make in interpreting them. In the second phase of this study, the data are subjected to a systematic analysis through the use of a process known as coding. Codes are employed to identify and categorize data characteristics that may be pertinent to the research question. The process of encoding can be conducted at either the semantic or latent level

of meaning. In essence, codes serve to provide either a concise overview of a given data set or an exact description thereof. Typically, these descriptive or semantic codes remain intimately aligned with the data itself and the underlying values of the participants involved. The third stage of analysis involves the transition from the initial set of codes to a more comprehensive set of overarching themes. This phase of the analysis involves the examination of the coded data, with a particular focus on the grouping of codes that share a common, unifying characteristic. This process enables the generation of a consistent and meaningful representation of the data. The development of themes can be seen to encapsulate "something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the fourth stage of the process, the identified themes are subjected to a detailed analysis. This stage of analysis employs a recursive process, whereby all data is subjected to a final rereading to ascertain whether the selected themes are representative of the entire dataset or whether they merely reflect a particular aspect of it. The outcome of the work may be the integration of disparate topics or the decomposition of a voluminous topic into more granular and sequential components. The fifth phase is focused on the identification and naming of topics. In the process of identifying topics, it is of the utmost importance to elucidate the distinctive attributes that distinguish one topic from another. It is essential that each topic be clearly defined in terms of its focus, scope, and purpose. Each subsequent theme is built upon and further develops the preceding theme(s). Collectively, these themes provide a coherent and comprehensive representation of the data. In the sixth phase, a comprehensive presentation and detailed description of the findings are provided. It is crucial to maintain a logical and meaningful sequence of topics. Topics should be linked in a coherent manner, with an appropriate foundation in previous topics, to form a unified narrative based on the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2023). This thematic analysis was carried out using inductive coding and was organized with the help of the qualitative analysis software NVivo 8 (https://qsr-nvivo.software.informer.com/8.0/).

Limitations

The study focuses on the career aspirations of military personnel in the early stages of their careers. But it's important to remember that the importance of different work-life aspects may change throughout your career. Family responsibilities also vary depending on the stage of life. Thus, the study's findings cannot be generalized to all age groups.

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Results and Discussion

Table 1 summarizes the coding and theme development results based on the associations to the stimulus word 'career'. The number of associations received is shown in parentheses.

Table 1

Results of Coding and Theme Development Based on the Associations to the Stimulus Word 'Career'

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes	Examples of associations (men's/ women's)	
Individual human potential and internal driving factors	– psychological attitudes (career orientations); – motivation; – behavioral strategies	– self-confidence in one's own abilities; – desire for leadership; – sense of duty and responsibility; – ambitions	men's	Opportunities (2), dominance (5), progress (1), connections (3), success (2), status (3), determination (1), prestige (1), skill (1), self-improvement (1), hobby (1), excellence (1), dream (2), success (4), authority (1)
			women's	Adult (1), perseverance (1), to step on people (1), aggression (1), successful (1), fortunate (1), great (1), respect (3), competition (1), future (3), success (4), power (2), dream (1), mind (1)
External driving factors	– understanding of military service within the framework of the military-political situation; – constitutional duties of military personnel as guarantors of multidimensional security of all social groups	– conscious service to one's country; – desire to defend others; – relevance of the profession; – prosocial motivation	men's	Future (1), officer (1), Ukraine (1), Motherland (1), army (1), military (1), glory (1), signalman (1)
			women's	Service (1), troop (1), military service (3), victory (1), military (1), to achieve peace (1)
Socioeconomic status	– social and status-rank identification; – psychological well-being	– material and economic status; – life satisfaction; – hedonistic approach; – eudemonistic approach	men's	Pleasure (1), girls (1), car (8), prosperity (3), dough (1), money (22), rest (4), earnings (3), salary (1), stability (1)
			women's	Money (14), car (1), swimming pool (1), mahogany coffin (1), Nobel Prize (1)
Advancement	– professional growth; – career development	– types of career orientations; – status or vertical type of career growth; – qualification (horizontal) type of career growth; – psychological well-being	men's	Advancement (5), position (2), status (1), rank (3), boss (1), will be (1), career ladder (1), corporate ladder (1), promotion (4), advancement in rank (1), general (2), progress (1), business (5), investment (1), suit (1), experience (2), development (2), improvement (1), achievement (1), hard (1), work (1),

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes	Examples of associations (men's/women's)	
				time (2), toil (1), problems (1), responsibility (4), sense (1), proficiency (1), competence (1)
			women's	Position (5), leader (4), rank (4), promotion (2), director (1), office (1), general (1), books (1), development (7), combat experience (1), progress (2), fatigue (1), mind (1)

Table 2 presents a summary of the quantitative results of the associations obtained in response to the stimulus word 'career'.

Table 2

Quantitative Characterization of the Associations to the Stimulus Word 'Career'

Theme	Quantitative characterization of the associations obtained (n/%)	
	men	**women**
Individual human potential and internal driving factors	28/21.7	22/27.9
External driving factors	8/6.2	8/10.1
Socioeconomic status	45/34.9	18/22.8
Advancement	48/37.2	31/39.2

Table 3 summarizes the coding and theme development results based on associations to the stimulus word 'family'. The number of associations received is shown in parentheses.

Table 3

Results of Coding and Theme Development Based on the Associations to the Stimulus Word 'Family'

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes	Examples of associations (men's/women's)	
Importance of the family as an institution	– emotional support; – strong economic ties	– kinship, – marital relations; – family vacations and celebrations; – family organization; – upbringing of children; – quality of life	men's	Importance of the family as an institution
			women's	

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes	Examples of associations (men's/women's)	
Conflict between work and family	– absence or violation of harmony; – deviation from the ideal of perfection	– health problems; – problems related to organizational commitment and job performance; – family problems	men's	Conflict between work and family
			women's	
Balance between career and personal life	– an environment for high productivity and creativity; – positive emotions; – work activity undertaken for the benefit of family interests; – attainment of psychological well-being; – attachment to the parental family	– motivation; – revivification; – success; – productivity; – comfort zone	men's	Balance between career and personal life
			women's	

Table 4 presents a summary of the quantitative results of the associations obtained in response to the stimulus word 'family'.

Table 4

Quantitative Characterization of the Associations to the Stimulus Word 'Career'

Themes	Quantitative characterization of the associations obtained (*n*/%)	
	men	**women**
Importance of the family as an institution	36/26.9	57/45.2
Conflict between work and family	15/11.2	1/0.8
Balance between career and personal life	83/61.9	68/54.0

The associations that respondents gave to the stimulus word 'career' were divided into four thematic groups: "Individual human potential and internal driving factors", "External driving factors", "Socioeconomic status", "Advancement" (Table 1, Table 2). The "Individual human potential and internal driving factors" thematic group includes sub-themes with lexical content characterizing respondents' career aspirations, career motivations

and incentives, and behavioral strategies for building a professional career. For both male and female respondents, the main intrinsic career motivation that is seen as a key factor in the unveiling and actualization of each person's potential is the achievement of social prestige, and for those participating in the experiment, prestige is not only formally assessed by enumerating social status attributes (*dominance, power*), but is also defined by concepts such as 'authority', 'respect', and 'importance' (*authority, respect, successful, great*). Respondents view prestige as a factor that is not initially given but can be earned through a successful career, similar to authority and respect. There are differences between men and women when it comes to career orientation. The main driving force behind men's career choices is professional competence, which is seen as an integrative quality of a highly motivated personality in a state of continuous improvement that is required for professional growth (*excellence, progress, self-improvement*). For women, career advancement is primarily about competing, overcoming obstacles, and solving complex problems (*perseverance, competition*). For women, professional competence is less important than the process of struggle and victory. The different career orientations of men and women lead to a divergence in their behavioral strategies for building a professional career. During conflict interaction in a team, men will equally use both co-operative and competitive strategies (*relationships, excellence*), whereas for women, social interaction in a situation of conflicting interests may be directed toward confrontation and antagonism (*to step on people, aggression*). This approach shows that women in the Armed forces of Ukraine continue to hold on to a masculine perception of work and career when it comes to forming career orientations. They rely on the framework and concepts of a traditionally masculine tournament model of career, which is based on linear, hierarchical career advancement and resembles tournaments as a series of wins and losses in the race for first place. The negative connotations of the lexical content of the "Individual human potential and internal driving factors" thematic group (Table 1) reinforce the argument put forth by Banks and colleagues (2021), who highlight that the tournament model can potentially lead to the emergence of several counterproductive and unethical behaviors, largely because team members tend to prioritize gaining an advantage over their colleagues, whom they often perceive as adversaries in competition rather than as equals.

The professional specificity of military service, based on the autotelic values embedded in the organizational culture of the army, is reflected in the lexical content of the "External driving factors" thematic group (Table 1, Table 2). This refers not so much to the professional duty of soldiers as guarantors of multidimensional security of all social groups, but to the meaningful service to the motherland and the desire to protect others, which "makes military service unique in comparison with other forms of human activity" (Smaliukienė et al., 2023). The associations gathered in the "External driving factors" thematic group conceptualize the meaning of military service, with particular emphasis on the personal desire to serve the country and its people, codified in military

literature as "a knightly ethos, as a catechism set at the top of the hierarchy of values of the axio-normative order of the armed forces" (Wardzała-Kordyś & Bodziany, 2012) and in psychological literature as prosocial motivation (Smaliukienė et al., 2023). As Bodziany and Kałużny (2021) note, in military contexts, prosocial motivation refers to the perception of military personnel that their activities in the military sphere are purposeful and meaningful for society. The interest in military service is not solely based on "pragmatic gains (as pay and benefits) and self-centered benefits (as self-development, job skills or adventure) but also to altruistic motives expressed in terms of duty and patriotism" (Bodziany & Kałużny, 2021). The lexical content of the "External driving factors" thematic group (*victory, peace, future, Ukraine, Motherland*) shows that respondents inclined to prosocial behavior have high self-efficacy, i.e. they feel confident in their ability to control and influence the situation. Respondents' search for the meaning of military service is shaped by their identification with the army (*officer, military, signalman*). Male and female respondents demonstrate an equal propensity for prosocial behavior.

The "Socioeconomic status" thematic group (Table 1, Table 2) reflects the social expectations of the respondents as a factor that influences their identification with a certain social group in social and status terms. According to Social Identity Theory, an individual's perception of their position in the social structure of society facilitates their integration into social interaction and promotes psychological acceptance, adaptation, and internalization of social environments and clusters (Kalin & Sambanis, 2018). Manstead (2018) observes that the development of a professional military identity does not always occur within the family; many individuals from diverse social and class backgrounds choose military careers. It is suggested that the identification of a person with a particular group occurs at a particular moment through a set of characteristics, and only when the characteristics match does the personality identification occur. Leaving one group and joining another can lead to predictable changes in social identity, which may be associated with changes in different parameters depending on the type of activity. According to the lexical content of the "Socioeconomic status" thematic group, for both male and female respondents, their monetary income is the primary indicator of their social and status identification and, consequently, of their material and economic well-being (*car, money, prosperity*). The analysis of the lexical content of the "Socioeconomic status" thematic group allows us to conclude the respondents' understanding of the nature of their psychological well-being and its main characteristics. The male respondents show a hedonistic approach where they consider life satisfaction as a crucial factor for their psychological well-being (*pleasure, girls, rest*). Female participants tend to favor the eudaimonic approach, which views psychological well-being as the fulfillment of an individual's self-actualization within specific life circumstances. This involves achieving a balance between professional commitment and personal fulfillment. This conclusion is based on the observation that the "Socioeconomic status" thematic group is constituted

by associations that represent visible and external status symbols, such as "mahogany coffin" and "Nobel Prize" (Table 1, Table 2).

The respondents' perception of the determinants of their career and professional development is revealed by the lexical content of the "Advancement" thematic group (Table 1). This lexical content is congruent with the findings of Segarra and Gentry (2021), who indicate that a professional career can be conceptualized as a socially structured human activity with the potential to generate socially valuable outcomes and enhance the quality of life of an individual. Some respondents broaden the notion of a professional career and separate it from the military specialty that has been acquired or even from the military profession itself (*suit, business, investment*). In the course of service, individuals may become aware of their needs, skills, and the labor market situation. This may lead to changes in their understanding of their career path. The focus of the respondents' professional activities and careers is determined by their values, competencies and needs. Respondents indicated their career preferences: 1) technical and functional competence, which is manifested in the desire to be an expert in a particular field (*development, skill, improvement, proficiency, competence*); 2) managerial competence, which is demonstrated by the aspiration to attain leadership positions (*boss, general, office*); 3) entrepreneurial creativity, which is reflected in the desire to create something new and worthwhile, and underscores the importance of originality and innovation (*business, investment*). Consideration of the relationship between personal career preferences and assigned military duties can lead to greater job satisfaction, a sense of stability, and confidence in one's abilities. The lexical content of the thematic group "Advancement" (Table 1, Table 2) differs between male and female respondents, allowing us to identify the influence of gender on approaches to professional careers. Male respondents focus on the structural parameters of the military organization; they see a career as an increase in their status in a vertical hierarchical structure by passing through successive positions through holding positions or obtaining ranks (*position, rank, career ladder, promotion*). This status or vertical type of career advancement is perceived by male respondents as a factor that can negatively affect their psychological well-being (*hard, work, time, problems, toil, responsibility*). Female respondents place a high value on individual qualities such as work experience, leadership skills, professional potential, and investment in professional development (*leader, books, development, combat experience, progress*). It could be argued that in this case, preference is given to the combined type of career growth, which combines the horizontal (qualification) type with the status type. Female respondents perceive the combined type of career growth as less stressful because it provides an opportunity for maneuvering. This allows them to prepare psychologically and professionally for further career advancement.

The analysis of associations to the stimulus word 'family' made it possible to consider the concept of career aspirations in terms of a family relationship model. The main assumption is that a person's career aspirations are largely determined by specific require-

ments and resources in the family sphere, given the traditional value of family and family relationships in Ukraine. This statement is consistent with the findings of Demerouti et al. (2012), who posit that the family can serve as either a source of conflict or support for the individual. The associations provided by the respondents to the stimulus word 'family' were categorized into three thematic groups: "Importance of the family as an institution", "Conflict between work and family", "Balance between career and personal life" (Table 3, Table 4). The lexical content of the "Importance of the family as an institution" thematic group reveals a gender gap in the formation of the concept of 'family' between the male and female respondents. Female respondents view the family from both a romantic (*love, happiness, holiday*) and a pragmatic perspective, which is primarily about raising children and fulfilling household duties (*children, husband, shopping, big house, home, house*). Male respondents tend to have a romantic (*happy, romance, love, affection*) and egocentric (*feast, food*) view of family relationships. In contrast to the men's focus on building family relationships, the "Conflict between work and family" theme suggests that some male respondents may experience high levels of work-family role conflict despite having more favorable conditions for career building (*poverty, disappointment, pain*). This may be due to the perception of responsibility that accompanies the status and values that are correlated with marriage (*duty, responsibility*). On the other hand, the associations gathered in the "Balance between career and personal life" thematic group (Table 3, Table 4) indicate that both male and female respondents view family as a factor that contributes to a positive emotional state (*positive emotions, calmness, coziness, happiness, warmth, comfort, cat*) and increases psychosocial resources, such as a sense of security (*reliability, safety, health, support*). Thus, respondents perceive family relationships as a potential for career advancement. The resulting associative array reflects the relevance of gender stereotypes related to family relationships, indicating that inequality between the sexes hinders women's career advancement. As observed by Zhu and Chen (2022), Armijo et al. (2022), and other researchers, women often face a double burden and are expected to work harder than men. At the same time, in the associations provided by female respondents, the relationship between work and family is not in conflict. Additional information must be obtained to interpret this finding, and further research will be needed. This phenomenon may be elucidated from two distinct perspectives. In the first case, it can be assumed that the state's policy of integrating women into the armed forces creates conditions that enable women to combine military service with motherhood. According to the Preference Theory (Hakim, 2000), women who are considered 'adaptive' and strive to balance their professional and family responsibilities may not fully dedicate themselves to work. They may simply be present at the workplace without demonstrating full engagement. Unlike many professional fields in the private sector, the armed forces have no effective levers to stimulate productivity; payment depends on the position, military rank, length, intensity, and conditions of military service, but not on the amount of work performed. Therefore, the armed forces create

conditions in which a woman, under the guise of motherhood, can allocate her physical and psychological resources in favor of her family. Women's prioritization of personal over professional life and avoidance of work does not affect their financial stability, so there is no conflict between work and family. On the other hand, women who prioritize their careers may choose not to have children to ensure their career advancement (Wang et al., 2024). Some women strive to balance family and a successful career. However, there is a general assumption that women must follow the male career model to achieve professional success. This means that women must share child-rearing and household responsibilities with their partners (Armijo et al., 2022; Zhu & Chen, 2022). There is a high density of associations related to the parental family in the "Balance between career and personal life" thematic group (*support, mom, dad, parents*) (Table 3, Table 4). This suggests that women may attempt to balance their family responsibilities with their work obligations by delegating family responsibilities to their parents rather than to their husbands. In any case, as O'Neil et al. (2008) argue, "women's own definitions of success may have less to do with externally defined, traditionally male, corporate criteria and may be more likely to rely on internal criteria such as a sense of personal achievement, integrity, balance, etc."

Conclusions

Our study contributes to the literature on gender differences on career aspirations. The study findings show that the autotelic values embedded in the organizational culture of the Army are the most important external factor in the career aspirations of both male and female respondents. At the same time, prosocial motivation is crucial: interest in military service is based not only on pragmatic and self-centered benefits, but also on altruistic motives such as duty and patriotism. The primary career motivation for both male and female respondents is the acquisition of social prestige, demonstrated through high status and rank identification, as well as a stable financial situation.

In the context of career orientations, men are interested in achieving professional competence, while women are interested in competition, overcoming obstacles, and solving complex problems. Gender differences in career orientation lead to variations in conflict behavior strategies. For instance, both men and women may use cooperation and competition strategies equally. However, in situations of conflicting interests, women tend to orient their social interaction towards confrontation and antagonism. That is, in the Armed forces of Ukraine, servicewomen rely on the framework and concepts of the traditionally male tournament career model when forming career orientations.

Both men and women seek psychological well-being in their career aspirations. Respondents of the male gender exhibit a hedonistic approach, where life satisfaction is considered a crucial prerequisite for psychological well-being. Female participants tend to favor the eudaimonic approach, which views psychological well-being as a balance between engaging in a particular professional activity and achieving one's self-realization.

The findings indicate that the majority of both male and female respondents view the family as a factor that contributes to a positive emotional state and an increase in psychosocial resources, such as a sense of security. Thus, the involvement in family relationships is viewed as a potential for career advancement. However, some male respondents may experience high inter-role conflict between work and family. This could be attributed to a preference for vertical career advancement that requires considerable effort, as well as to the responsibilities and values associated with getting married. The female respondents did not reveal any conflicts in the relationship between work and family. This is because the focus is on a career that combines both horizontal and status types, and which is perceived by female respondents as providing opportunities for maneuverability and therefore less stressful. Depending on their career aspirations, women have different approaches to resolving the role conflict between work and family. Women who prioritize their careers may choose to remain childless. Those who attempt to balance family responsibilities with work may delegate child-rearing duties to their parents. Women in the 'adaptive' category seek to allocate their physical and psychological resources to their family by minimizing their work responsibilities.

To create more opportunities for women's career success, it is recommended that military organizations provide training in integrative career approaches that can help service women approach career development in terms of their professional competencies rather than gender role stereotypes.

To attract qualified professionals to the defense sector, military organizations should align their principles and policies with private sector organizational standards. This will help qualified professionals realize their career aspirations, regardless of gender.

From a methodological standpoint, it is recommended that future psycholinguistic studies based on association experiments use more than one stimulus word. This approach allows for the consideration of the interrelation of different constructs when interpreting the psychological mechanisms underlying the phenomenon under study.

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