

**SENSE OF SAFETY, COPING WITH CONTEMPORARY
THREATS AND INDIVIDUAL SENSITIVITY
ANALYSIS OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SITUATION
RELATED TO THE WAR IN UKRAINE
IN A GROUP OF YOUNG ADULTS***

Mateusz Koziół¹, Bożena Gulla²

Summary. This article refers to the perceived safety of young adults amid contemporary threats, exemplified by the war in Ukraine. It explores coping strategies and the sense of safety based on individual sensitivity, grounded in Elaine's Aron concept of high sensitivity.

The study involved 314 individuals aged 19 to 25, predominantly students and urban residents. Participants were categorized into low (33), medium (94), and high sensitivity (187) groups. Various scales were used to assess individual sensitivity, coping strategies and sense of safety and stress experiences related to contemporary threats among participants.

Results suggest highly sensitive individuals may experience greater vulnerability to contemporary threats. Variances in coping strategies and stress levels were observed among sensitivity groups, highlighting the impact of coping mechanisms on perceived safety. The study emphasizes the necessity for further research on individual sensitivity and suggests tailored interventions to enhance well-being, particularly for highly sensitive individuals.

Key words: high sensitivity, sense of safety, coping strategies, contemporary threats

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¹ 5 Wojskowy Szpital Kliniczny z Polikliniką SPZOZ, Kraków, Poland; Krakowski Szpital Specjalistyczny im. św. Jana Pawła II, Kraków, Poland (5th Military Hospital with Polyclinic in Cracow, Poland; John Paul II Specialist Hospital in Cracow, Poland), ORCID: 0009-0001-8898-7422.

² Instytut Psychologii Stosowanej, Uniwersytet Jagielloński (Institute of Applied Psychology, Jagiellonian University), ORCID: 0000-0002-7773-0170.

Mailing address: Bożena Gulla,
bozena.gulla@uj.edu.pl

Introduction

The recent years have brought many challenging and unpredictable events to the world's society.³ This has been particularly evident in Poland, where global issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic and global warming intersected with threats associated with the war in neighbouring Ukraine, soaring inflation, and controversial legal regulations that triggered intense protests and societal polarization. A period of heightened unrest, uncertainty, fears, and rapidly changing circumstances is incredibly difficult for most individuals. However, within the population, they significantly differ in terms of individual dispositions that condition psychological resilience. The variable considered as the opposite of psychological resilience is individual sensitivity.

Approximately 20% of the population exhibits high sensitivity, as conceptualized by Elaine Aron (1998). The proposed variable is understood as an innate tendency to become overstimulated, coupled with high emotional reactivity and a heightened sense of subtles based on the functioning of the central nervous system. Despite high sensitivity being a risk factor in stressful situations, it can also serve as a specific protective factor, enabling the development of adaptive strategies based on mindfulness (Golonka & Gulla, 2021).

Analyzing the sense of safety and investigating, understanding, and explaining coping strategies in individuals with different levels of sensitivity in the context of the proximity to the actions of war in Ukraine can form the basis for preventive interventions. This allows for preventing the transformation of experienced stress into a psychological crisis among highly sensitive individuals.

The concept of high sensitivity

The concept of high sensitivity proposed by Aron (Aron & Aron, 1997) emerged just 25 years ago. Although this term has liberated individuals from a sense of „otherness“ (Gulla, 2021), it paves the way for a deeper understanding of one's reactions, emotional acceptance, increased self-awareness, and self-acceptance. Sensitivity, described by Aron as sensory processing sensitivity (SPS), exists on a continuum from low to high sensitivity, associated with deeper stimulus processing and stronger affective reactions towards others. Aron (1998) suggests the acronym DOES, describing the characteristics of highly sensitive individuals: depth of processing (D), overstimulation (O), emotional reactivity (E), and sensing the subtle (S). The individual attitude towards sensitivity is shaped during childhood, and positive experiences, especially parental support, contribute to better coping and higher self-esteem (Liss et al., 2008).

Research by Smolewska (2006) identified components of high sensitivity, indicating Low Sensory Threshold (LST), Ease of Excitation (EOE), and Aesthetic Sensitivity (AES). Gulla and Golonka (2021), referring to the DOES acronym based

³ The article was based on research conducted as part of an unpublished master's thesis.

on their research, propose names for the three components identified by Smolewska: Overstimulation (OvSt), Emotional Reactivity (ER), and Sensing the Subtle (StS).

Aron & Aron (1997) emphasize that high sensitivity constitutes a consistent construct, not synonymous with other psychological variables such as introversion or shyness. Licht (2011) demonstrates positive correlations of SPS with the female gender, psychological distress, and personality traits such as neuroticism, harm avoidance, and openness to experience. In another study (Liss et al., 2008), it was shown that low sensory threshold (LST) and ease of excitation (EOE) factors correlated with anxiety, depression, and symptoms of autism and alexithymia, such as low social skills and difficulties in describing and identifying emotions. On the other hand, individuals characterized by high aesthetic sensitivity (AES) exhibited fewer deficits in communication and a more introspective cognitive style than an externally oriented one. This factor, associated with noticing details, subtleties, and nuances, a rich inner life, and high conscientiousness, may be an asset for highly sensitive individuals, supporting their better adaptation.

With the development of Aron's construct, research has been undertaken to investigate the neurobiological basis of sensory processing sensitivity. The initial genetic factor identified to indicate the presence of SPS is the polymorphism of the serotonin transporter gene segment 5-HTTLPR (Suuberg, 2020). Licht et al. (2011) research verified the hypothesis, regarding an association between SPS and the short genotype of the serotonin transporter 5-HTTLPR. Aron and Aron (1997), drawing on Grey's reinforcement sensitivity theory, emphasize the dominance of the behavioural inhibition system (BIS) as the neuropsychological foundation for SPS. This is attributed to its associated „pause-and-check“. This neural system's properties are linked to profound stimulus processing, involving the need for pause and interruption of actions for analyzing conflicting information, considering pros and cons, and making optimal decisions (Aron et al., 2012).

It's noteworthy that such a mode of responding may be adaptive, connecting with precision in cognitively processing strategies to solve problems, as well as a broad perspective on the situation and consideration of various available information. Acevedo et al. (2014) study, focusing on neuronal activity, pointed to increased brain activity in areas associated with empathy, awareness, and readiness for action in highly sensitive individuals. In a neuroimaging fMRI study by Jagiellowicz et al. (2010), it was confirmed that highly sensitive individuals exhibit an extended reaction time and increased brain activity during the processing of visual stimuli. These findings suggest that SPS may influence more detailed sensory processing and more adaptive coping strategies.

In a meta-analysis conducted by Acevedo et al. (2018), sensory processing sensitivity was compared with other psychological phenomena such as the autism spectrum, schizophrenia, and PTSD. The analysis demonstrated differences in neuronal activity, underlining that SPS and associated strategies, such as empathy and mindfulness, may contribute to an individual's well-being.

Lionetti et al. (2018) based on their research identify three distinct groups of individuals in the population depending on the level of individual sensitivity: „orchids” (high sensitivity, 31%), „tulips” (medium sensitivity, 40%), and „dandelions” (low sensitivity, 29%). The groups also reflected distinct personality traits and differences in emotional reactivity. „Orchids” showed higher levels of neuroticism and introversion but also greater susceptibility to inducing positive moods compared to „tulips”. Aron (1998) emphasizes that highly sensitive individuals form a distinct group, differing from the rest of the population in terms of sensitivity levels, although within this group, there is some heterogeneity related to various „shades” of sensitivity. Based on research by Aron and Aron (1997), two groups of highly sensitive individuals were identified. One-third of respondents reported negative childhood experiences, also exhibiting higher scores in introversion and neuroticism. The second, larger group did not differ significantly from the general population except for higher sensitivity. Smolewska (2006) notes that SPS does not necessarily have to be associated with negative affect but, in combination with other psychological traits, such as openness or neuroticism, can create subgroups of individuals with varying susceptibility to negative emotional experiences.

Emotional regulation and coping processes in high sensitivity group

Research on coping strategies of highly sensitive individuals highlights key factors and approaches. According to Wyller et al. (2017), the negative effects of SPS may result more from secondary cognitive assessment processes than from the sensitivity itself. The subsequent cognitive reactions to intense stimuli and the associated negative emotions may differentiate healthy highly sensitive individuals from those displaying elevated levels of depression, anxiety, stress, or somatic symptoms.

Emotional regulation, as emphasized by Brindle et al. (2015), has a significant role in the experience of negative psychological states among highly sensitive individuals. Effective coping strategies, such as positive reinterpretation and seeking emotional support, can influence psychological well-being. Yano et al. (2021) also highlight that the effectiveness of coping strategies may vary depending on an individual’s level of sensitivity. Highly sensitive individuals with better mental health tended to employ solutions such as positive thinking, emotional expression, and seeking emotional support—strategies focused on emotions. Gulla and Golonka (2021) emphasize the importance of strategies centered around conscious attention and presence as protective factors supporting such individuals in dealing with challenging situations.

In the context of contemporary threats, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, research indicates that highly sensitive individuals may be particularly vulnerable to negative consequences for mental health. Malinkova et al. (2021) analyze that due to more frequent experiences of high levels of stress and anxiety, highly sensitive individuals

may constitute a group especially susceptible to the negative effects of the pandemic. Their study results suggest that highly sensitive individuals more frequently experienced difficulties, manifested by elevated levels of anxiety or deterioration in the quality of close relationships during the pandemic. These phenomena may lead to a deeper sense of loneliness, fear, and helplessness.

Study objective

The challenges associated with the war in a neighbouring country to Poland for highly sensitive individuals can be a traumatic experience. However, there is a possibility of cognitive processing of this situation that may help protect against excessive fear and suffering. High sensitivity can act as both a risk factor, associated with a strong reaction to stressful situations, and a resource facilitating a comprehensive analysis of the situation. Through deep processing, it allows for better coping with stress. Therefore, this article focuses on the sense of safety and coping strategies of highly sensitive individuals about the threats associated with the outbreak of war in the neighbouring country – Ukraine. The presented study is dedicated to exploring this issue.

Participants

The study was conducted in October and November 2022, several months after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. A total of 314 individuals participated in the study (216 females: 68.8%; 94 males: 29.9%; 4 individuals identifying as non-binary: 1.3%). As a necessary condition for participation, the age criterion of 19–25 years was established. The mean age of the participants was 21.24 ($SD = 1.93$). Basic demographic data were collected. The study group consisted of 80.6% students, 14% individuals with higher education, 5.1% with secondary education, and the remaining participants had primary education. Residents of large cities with a population above 100,000 constituted 53.5% of respondents.

Based on the individual sensitivity variable assessed by the HSPS, the participants were divided into three research groups: low sensitivity (Group 1), medium sensitivity (Group 2), and high sensitivity (Group 3). The first group comprised 33 individuals (10.5%), the second group consisted of 94 individuals (29.9%), and the third group included 187 individuals (59.6%).

Procedure

This online study was voluntary and was conducted through Microsoft Forms. All procedures adhered to APA ethical standards and the recommendations of the Helsinki Declaration. Consent to participate was obtained from all study participants. The average time to complete the questionnaire was approximately 19 minutes.

Measures

The applied methods were published in open access, allowing their utilization in online research, as communicated to the participants.

To measure the variable of individual sensitivity, the Polish translation of the Highly Sensitive Person Scale (HSPS) questionnaire by Aron & Aron (1997) was used. The questionnaire comprises 27 statements, to which participants respond using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely). The questionnaire includes three subscales related to aspects of the high-sensitivity concept: Emotional Reactivity (ER), Sensing the Subtle (StS), and Overstimulation (OvSt)⁴. Smolewska's (2006) research confirms the high reliability of HSPS (Cronbach's alpha .89) and the association of ease of excitation with the activity of the Behavioral Inhibition System (BIS).

Coping strategies. To measure the stress coping variable, the Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced Inventory (COPE) (Carver et al., 1989) in its Polish adaptation (Juczyński & Ogińska-Bulik, 2012) was used. The questionnaire consists of 60 statements related to 15 factors: Active Coping, Planning, Use of instrumental support, Use of emotional support, Suppression of competing activities, Religious coping, Positive reinterpretation and growth, Restraint, Acceptance, Focus on and venting of emotions, Denial, Mental disengagement, Behavioral disengagement, Substance use, Humor. Participants rate each statement on a 4-point scale: 1 (I almost never do this), 2 (I rarely do this), 3 (I often do this), and 4 (I almost always do this).

For this study, the authors' questionnaire instructions were supplemented with the following information: „When answering the questions, focus on your way of experiencing the situation of the war in Ukraine.” Additionally, before proceeding to the questionnaire instructions, the participants were provided with the following request: „Before completing the next part of the study, please focus on your own experience of the war situation in Ukraine. When responding to this questionnaire, consider your way of experiencing this situation.”

Sense of safety

To measure the variable of the sense of safety, the Safety Experience Questionnaire (KDB) by Klamut (2019) was used, consisting of subscales related to the sense of safety and reflections on safety. The questionnaire comprises 9 statements, and participants are required to respond using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).

⁴ In the Polish adaptation of the scale (HSPS) – version for adults – two separate factors were distinguished: excessive stimulation and depth of processing. The results of the analyses indicate that the Polish version of the HSPS is a reliable ($\alpha = .90$) and valid tool, which is also confirmed by correlations with neuroticism and extraversion (Bobrowska & Liberska, 2023).

Threads in the contemporary world

Additionally, to gather information on whether other events posing threats in the contemporary world were significant for the participants, two additional questions were formulated and placed in the final part of the questionnaire. The first question was „To what extent do you experience stress or anxiety in connection with the following situations“. The specified threats were: the COVID-19 pandemic, economic crisis, climate crisis, and crisis related to the depletion of natural resources. Participants were instructed to respond by choosing one of four options: 1 (I am not stressed at all), 2 (I am not particularly stressed), 3 (I am stressed), and 4 (I am very stressed). The second question was „Please indicate any other situation that you experience and that causes stress or anxiety in you,“ aiming to identify other stressors present in today’s world that were relevant to the individual well-being of the study participants.

Results

The analysis was conducted on SPSS version 29.0 (IBM SPSS Statistics, IBM Corporation, United States). *P* values < .05 were considered statistically significant.

H1 Individual sensitivity in the research sample corresponds to data collected in other studies and allows for division into three sensitivity groups observed in previous studies.

Before proceeding with further statistical analyses, normality tests for the distribution of variables were performed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) and Shapiro-Wilk tests. The distributions of most studied variables deviated from normal distributions; therefore, non-parametric tests, specifically the Kruskal-Wallis test and one-sided pairwise Spearman correlations were applied.

Participants were categorized into specific groups based on their levels of individual sensitivity, as identified by Lionetti et al. (2018), following cutoff points proposed by Plues et al. (2018). The authors identified three sensitivity groups and established the following cutoff points for scores on the Highly Sensitive Child Scale and Highly Sensitive Person Scale: 3.8 between low and medium sensitivity groups and 4.7 between medium and high sensitivity groups. It is emphasized that these exploratory cutoff points should be treated as approximate indicators of group membership.

The mean scores obtained by participants on the HSPS ranged from 1.00 to 6.70, allowing for the categorization of participants into three sensitivity groups based on the designated cutoff points. The number of participants in each sensitivity group is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of respondents in three sensitivity groups

	Number of respondents	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Low sensitivity	33	10.5	10.5
Medium sensitivity	94	29.9	40.4
High sensitivity	187	59.6	100.0
Total	314	100.0	

The distribution of the individual sensitivity variable differs from the results obtained in previous studies. To confirm this observation, a chi-square test was conducted, comparing the obtained values in the study with the expected values for low sensitivity (29%), medium sensitivity (40%), and high sensitivity (31%) groups (Lionetti et al., 2018). The chi-square test revealed significant differences between the expected and obtained values ($\chi^2 = 127.555$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$). In this study, the high-sensitivity group proved to be dominant. The reasons for this phenomenon are discussed in the conclusions. The results for the individual sensitivity variable $Z(314) = .059$, $p = .009$ indicate that its distribution deviates from a normal distribution. Analysis of kurtosis values (1.15, $SE = .27$) and skewness ($-.51$, $SE = .14$) demonstrated that the distribution is left-skewed and leptokurtic.

H2 Depending on the level of individual sensitivity (low, medium, high sensitivity), there are differences in the intensity of specific coping strategies.

To verify the relationships between the individual sensitivity variable and various coping strategies, one-sided pairwise Spearman correlations were conducted. The analyses revealed statistically significant relationships for certain coping strategies, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient between coping strategies and individual sensitivity ($N = 314$)

Coping strategies	Spearman's rho	Individual sensitivity Correlation coefficient
Use of instrumental support	r_s	.106**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.030
Use of emotional support	r_s	.230**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	< .001
Positive reinterpretation and growth	r_s	.182**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	< .001

cont. tab. 2

Coping strategies	Spearman's rho	Individual sensitivity Correlation coefficient
Restraint	r_s	.106**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.030
Focus and venting of emotions	r_s	.438**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	< .001
Denial	r_s	.139**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.007
Mental disengagement	r_s	.270**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	< .001
Behavioural disengagement	r_s	.296**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	< .001
Humour	r_s	.187**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	< .001

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (1-tailed)

The higher the individual sensitivity, the greater the utilization of each of the coping strategies mentioned above. As a result of the conducted analyses, no statistically significant relationships were found between the variable of individual sensitivity and the utilization of the following strategies: Active coping, Planning, Suppression of competing actions, Religious coping, Acceptance, and Substance use.

To determine differences between the three identified sensitivity groups in terms of specific coping strategies, analyses were conducted using the Kruskal-Wallis test. Additionally, post-hoc Dunn tests were performed to verify between which groups there was differentiation in each case. Statistically significant differences between sensitivity groups were observed for some coping strategies, and the results are presented in Table 3.

As a result of the analysis, it was shown that the low-sensitivity group achieved the highest mean scores for the strategies of Positive Reinterpretation and Growth ($M = 2.71, SD = .67$) and Humor ($M = 2.25, SD = .83$). In contrast, the high-sensitivity group obtained the highest mean scores for the strategies of Use of Emotional Support ($M = 2.72, SD = .84$), Acceptance ($M = 2.87, SD = .60$), Focus and Venting of Emotions ($M = 2.93, SD = .64$), Denial ($M = 1.95, SD = .59$), Mental Disengagement ($M = 2.54, SD = .56$), and Behavioral Disengagement ($M = 2.09, SD = .64$).

No statistically significant intergroup differences were obtained for the strategies of Active Coping, Planning, Suppression of Competing Actions, Religious Coping, Restraint, and Substance Use.

Table 3. Results of the Kruskal-Wallis test and the post-hoc Dunn's multiple comparisons tests, showing the significance of differences in coping strategies in three sensitivity groups

	Kruskal-Wallis test		Pair-wise comparisons ^a		
	H	<i>p</i>	GR1-GR2	GR1-GR3	GR2-GR3
Use of instrumental support	12.508	.002	-64.093*** (18.209)	-51.002** (16992)	13.091 (11.378)
Use of emotional support	15.804	<.001	-38.591 (18.274)	-63.541*** (17.052)	-24.950 (11.419)
Positive reinterpretation and growth	6.650	.036	10.203 (18.222)	33.619 (17.004)	23.415 (11.386)
Acceptance	7.637	.022	30.528 (18.193)	-.106 (16.977)	-30.634* (11.368)
Focus and venting of emotions	50.383	<.001	-49.521* (18.269)	-104.758*** (17.047)	-55.237*** (11.415)
Denial	8.834	.012	-18.052 (18.202)	-42.343* (16.985)	-24.291 (11.374)
Mental disengagement	26.692	<.001	-19.562 (18.218)	-66.797*** (17.000)	-47.235*** (11.384)
Behavioural disengagement	22.760	<.001	-35.419 (18.183)	-71.216*** (16.968)	-35.796** (11.362)

^a) Significant at .05 level (*); Significant at .01 level (**); Significant at .001 level (***).
GR1 = Low Sensitivity Group; GR2 – Medium Sensitivity Group; GR3 = High Sensitivity Group. Top values are mean differences between groups and bottom values are standard errors.

H3 There is a relationship between the level of individual sensitivity and the level of an individual's sense of safety – the higher the individual sensitivity, the lower the sense of safety.

The analysis of correlations revealed a statistically significant relationship between the variables: individual sensitivity and level of an individual's sense of safety ($r_s = -.203$) ($N = 314$). (This correlation is significant at the .01 level (1-tailed).) The value of the Rho-Spearman coefficient indicates a weak negative relationship between the variables, suggesting that the higher the level of individual sensitivity, the lower the level of a sense of safety.

H4 The sense of safety is associated with the dominant coping strategies used by the individual.

To examine the possibility of predicting the level of a sense of safety based on the levels of individual coping strategies, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The *F* test showed the model's significance ($F = 5.533, p < .001$), suggesting that the model explains a significant portion of the variability of the dependent variable. Based on the R-squared coefficient of determination, it is observed that it explains 22% of the independent variable. The results for the variables constituting significant predictors of the dependent variable are presented in Table 4. It was found that only three of the examined strategies were significant predictors.

Table 4. Multiple regression analysis for coping strategies predicting sense of safety

Coping strategy	<i>B</i>	Std. Error	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	3.510	.394		8.918	< .001
Religious coping	.086	.039	.121	2.213	.028
Behavioural disengagement	-.253	.081	-.227	-3.117	.002
Substance use	-.198	.051	-.218	-3.904	< .001

The higher the level of Religious Coping, the higher the level of a sense of safety. The higher the levels of Behavioral Disengagement and Substance Use, the lower the level of a sense of safety.

The participants also had the opportunity to indicate other threats in the contemporary world related to stress. Among the provided responses, situations mentioned by more than one participant were identified and are presented in Table 5. The results concern the entire group of participants, without division into sensitivity subgroups.

Table 5. Other situations indicated by respondents as contemporary threats

Indicated threat	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
The threat of armed conflict, and concerns about the escalation of war in Ukraine or other parts of the world.	36	11.5%
Concerns regarding political polarization and decisions made by politicians in Poland.	15	4.8%
Financial concerns, regarding both public and personal finances, with a focus on inflation, corruption issues, and the high cost of living.	12	3.8%

Indicated threat	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
General uncertainty in terms of one's personal future and the future of the world.	7	2.3%
Changes in national law, especially in the context of abortion laws in Poland.	6	1.9%
Concerns about the threat of a nuclear attack.	5	1.6%
Social threats, such as societal transformations or a crisis of values within the society.	4	1.3%
Health-related threats, encompassing diseases and lifestyle-related health issues.	3	1%
The danger associated with changes in the natural environment and its pollution.	2	0.7%

Discussion

The hypothesis regarding the verification of whether individual sensitivity in the research sample of the Polish population corresponds to data collected in other studies and allows for subgroup division was only partially confirmed. According to the assumption, the results obtained in the HSPS allowed for the identification of three sensitivity groups. However, their numbers significantly differed from the expected values based on the Lionetti et al. (2018) research. In contrast to data obtained in foreign studies, in this study, highly sensitive individuals formed the dominant group. They constituted 59.6% of the participants. Therefore, potential reasons for these results should be considered. It is noteworthy that despite obtaining a sample consisting of respondents in various educational contexts and non-students, the surveyed group was predominantly composed of students in humanities and social sciences. These fields generally require a higher level of emotional sensitivity, empathy, and social intelligence compared to STEM disciplines. There was also a significant majority of female participants. Although high sensitivity is a trait applicable to both genders, previous studies have shown a connection between this trait and the female gender (Licht, 2011). These factors can be considered as potential reasons for the observed significant prevalence of highly sensitive individuals in the studied sample.

The hypothesis regarding differences in the intensity of use various coping strategies depending on the level of individual sensitivity was partially confirmed. Analyses showed that higher scores of individual sensitivity were associated with higher scores for the following strategies: Seeking instrumental support, Seeking

emotional support, Suppressing of competing actions, Focusing on and venting emotions, Denial, Mental disengagement, Behavioral disengagement, and lower scores for strategies: Positive reinterpretation and growth, and Humor. It should be emphasized that although statistically significant relationships were found between the variables, their strength was low, except for the correlation between individual sensitivity and Focus on and venting of emotions, where the strength of the relationship was moderate. Regarding the fifteen examined coping strategies, nine of them showed significant differences between at least two of the identified sensitivity groups. Based on the conducted analyses, it was determined in which sensitivity groups the indicators for individual strategies reached the highest levels. In the low sensitivity group, these were the strategies of Humor and Positive reinterpretation and growth. This group, therefore, most frequently employed strategies considered adaptive, potentially indicating better adaptation of its members. The Seeking instrumental support strategy had the highest value in the moderate sensitivity group. For the strategies of Seeking emotional support, Acceptance, Focus on and venting of emotions, Denial, and Behavioral disengagement, the highest mean values of indicators were obtained in the high sensitivity group. It is important to notice that in this group, strategies focused on emotions and avoidance were predominant. Through the conducted analyses, it was revealed that Behavioral disengagement emerged as one of the two strategies acting as negative predictors for the sense of safety in this study. Avoidance strategies are considered less adaptive and may be linked to negative effects (Sztandera, 2022). Avoidance can also intensify negative experiences related to stress and anxiety, leading to a decline in the individual's mental well-being (Hayes, 2005). Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that individuals in the high-sensitivity group might experience the consequences of contemporary world threats particularly intensely. This is further supported by the finding that individual sensitivity was negatively correlated with the sense of individual safety. The use of avoidance strategies by highly sensitive individuals might indicate emotional overwhelm and less effective stress coping, even though in this group, strategies such as Acceptance and Seeking Emotional Support were also frequently employed. These strategies focus on the effective control of one's emotions and are considered especially effective in this group (Yano et al., 2021).

The hypothesis concerning the relationship between the sense of safety and the dominant coping strategies employed by an individual was confirmed. As anticipated, some coping strategies turned out to be significant predictors of the sense of safety. In the case of the predictors of Behavioral disengagement and Substance Use, a negative relationship was found. In the case of the predictor of Religious coping, the relationship was positive. It should be noted, that these relationships were weak. It is also worth examining the strategy of Positive Reinterpretation and Growth, for which the result was close to the accepted threshold of statistical significance ($p = .058$). Emphasizing the war in Ukraine, to which participants were instructed to respond through questions related to coping strategies, is a situation beyond individual

control. Hence, according to the goodness-of-fit hypothesis, more adaptive actions for this type of stressor may involve minimizing emotional reactions associated with it (Forsythe & Compass, 1987). The Positive reinterpretation and growth strategy can be categorized as an element of emotion regulation, understood in the context of awareness and acceptance of one's internal states, and building a sense of agency in this regard (Brindle et al., 2015). Similar to the findings in the study by Sztandera (2022), this strategy alongside Religious coping as an emotion-focused strategies, proved to be beneficial in stressful situations beyond individual control. Religious coping or spirituality can undoubtedly be a significant source of support for the individual facing unpredictability and threats associated with situations such as the war in Ukraine. The importance of the spiritual sphere is underscored by the author of the concept of high sensitivity (Aron, 1998), who highlights its role in enhancing the individual's well-being and internal balance. Behavioural disengagement and Substance use as avoidance strategies, as predicted, turned out to be detrimental to the individual's sense of safety.

The hypothesis regarding the relationship between individual sensitivity and the sense of individual safety was confirmed. Higher scores on the HSPS were associated with lower levels of the safety variable. The sense of safety can be understood as a factor shaping the psychological well-being of the individual (Ostafińska-Molik, 2014) and serving as an indicator of their quality of life (Klamut, 2019). The obtained result corresponds to data from other studies, which indicated the relationships between individual sensitivity and psychological issues such as anxiety, social functioning disorders, low mood, irritability, depression, and psychological distress (Ahadi & Basharpool, 2010, Smolewska, 2006, Liss et al., 2008, Licht, 2011). The obtained results are consistent with previous research, according to which highly sensitive individuals, in the context of modern world threats such as the COVID-19 pandemic, may constitute a particularly vulnerable group to the consequences for mental health (Malinkova et al., 2021). However, it should be emphasized that although a statistically significant relationship was found between the variables ($p < .001$), its strength was low.

Strengths and limitations

The strengths of the study include the analysis of highly sensitive individuals and individual sensitivity in the context of contemporary threats, especially the war in Ukraine, contributing to the development of Aron's concept and emphasizing the need to support individuals facing the difficulties of the modern world.

Limitations of the study include the online and self-report nature of the data obtained from the participants. There is also a disproportion between groups representing different levels of individual sensitivity, and the study sample was not representative of the Polish population. Other variables such as the level of introversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, and other personality and situational variables weren't included the analysis.

Future research

Many authors (Greven, 2019) indicate the need for further research, especially in the context of developing the methodology and validation of the HSPS. Studies could focus on exploring the relationships between this trait and other psychological characteristics. It is also worth reflecting on the introduction of screening studies for high sensitivity (Smith et al., 2019) in the context of psychological assistance, considering differences in preferable coping strategies among sensitivity groups.

Conclusions

The study highlights the complex relationship between sensitivity, coping mechanisms, and perceived safety, indicating that individual sensitivity can be understood in a multifaceted way. On the one hand, it is a trait associated with a lower sense of safety, conceptualized as an essential element of the individual's mental well-being. On the other hand, due to the accompanying of sensing the subtle, it may represent an individual resource in coping with stress. Additionally, the study revealed that different sensitivity groups differ in the strategies employed and the subjective sense of stress related to contemporary threats such as the war in Ukraine. Highly sensitive individuals frequently used less adaptive strategies than low sensitivity individuals indicating worse adaptation. Avoidance strategies were linked to negative outcomes, including increased stress and anxiety which emphasizes the importance of effective emotional regulation on psychological well-being. The study also confirmed the assumption that the choice of specific stress-coping strategies is significant for the individual's perceived sense of safety.

The study results have noteworthy implications for supporting highly sensitive individuals. Popularizing knowledge about the construct of high sensitivity and developing tailored assistance to meet individual needs appears crucial. Aron (1998) emphasizes the significance of psychotherapy in supporting highly sensitive individuals. Smith et al. (2019) argue that Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) can facilitate understanding one's temperament, learning acceptance, and limiting avoidance of sensitivity-related consequences in personal experiences. ACT can provide tools for reframing individual actions related to cognitive processing, proving ineffective in acknowledging and appreciating personal experiences. Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) may be useful in assessing how thoughts and beliefs can impact mental health and individual actions. Golonka and Gulla (2021) observe that a resource of sensing the subtle can be strengthened through cognitive training and mindfulness. Soons et al. (2010) suggest that mindfulness training, can be a significant part of therapy for highly sensitive individuals. It may contribute to increased self-acceptance, empathy, personal development, and self-transcendence, as well as stress and social anxiety reduction.

Numerous scientific studies point to the relationships between individual sensitivity and various negative mental health phenomena. A specific example is the study by Jauka et al. (2022), where the authors emphasize that certain traits in highly sensitive individuals, such as a sense of uniqueness, fragility, and an inclination to avoid discomfort. These traits may lead to negative consequences, including social withdrawal and more intense negative experiences, posing a risk of psychopathological symptoms. Therefore, focusing on developing effective stress-coping skills, strengthening emotional regulation, and building healthy social relationships seems crucial to minimize the potentially negative effects of high sensitivity. Intervention programs aimed at supporting individual resilience, such as the SPARK resilience program applied by Pluess and Boniwell (2015), can be helpful in effective coping of highly sensitive individuals.

Support groups can be created to allow for the expression of negative emotions and the mutual sharing of emotional experiences. Psychologists may suggest participation in mindfulness training and training in the development of coping strategies. The exercise of attempting cognitive reframing is essential, allowing individuals to view threatening situations from a broader perspective. To increase psychological resilience, psychological interventions should focus on a comprehensive understanding of the situation, recognizing one's resources for coping in that situation and motivating personal engagement in actions. Healthy adaptive defense mechanisms (such as a sense of humour and self-distancing) and the therapist's understanding, accepting, and reflective attitude can also be helpful. The goal of these interventions would be to maintain health and balance in situations of threats abundant in today's reality, in which highly sensitive individuals may be more vulnerable than others.

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POCZUCIE BEZPIECZEŃSTWA, RADZENIE SOBIE
ZE WSPÓŁCZESNYMI ZAGROŻENIAMI I INDYWIDUALNA WRAŻLIWOŚĆ.
ANALIZA SYTUACJI PSYCHOLOGICZNEJ ZWIĄZANEJ Z WOJNĄ NA UKRAINIE
W GRUPIE MŁODYCH DOROSŁYCH

Streszczenie. Niniejszy artykuł podejmuje problem postrzeganego poczucia bezpieczeństwa przez młodych dorosłych w obliczu współczesnych zagrożeń w świecie, na przykładzie wojny w Ukrainie. Prezentuje wyniki badania dotyczącego strategii radzenia sobie oraz poczucia bezpieczeństwa w oparciu o indywidualną wrażliwość, bazując na koncepcji wysokiej wrażliwości Elaine Aron. W badaniu wzięło udział 314 osób, w wieku od 19 do 25 lat. Wśród badanych największy odsetek stanowili studenci oraz mieszkańcy dużych miast. Respondentów przypisano do grup niskiej (33), średniej (94) oraz wysokiej wrażliwości (187). Zastosowano metody kwestionariuszowe w celu oceny indywidualnej wrażliwości, strategii radzenia sobie ze stresem, poczucia bezpieczeństwa oraz poziomu stresu w kontekście współczesnych zagrożeń wśród uczestników. Wyniki sugerują, że osoby o wysokiej wrażliwości mogą doświadczać większej podatności na współczesne zagrożenia. Zaobserwowano różnice w strategiach radzenia sobie i poziomach stresu w zależności od grupy wrażliwości, co wskazuje na znaczenie mechanizmów radzenia na postrzegane poczucie bezpieczeństwa. Badanie podkreśla konieczność dalszych badań nad indywidualną wrażliwością oraz sugeruje dostosowane interwencje w celu poprawy dobrostanu, w szczególności osób wysoko wrażliwych.

Słowa kluczowe: wysoka wrażliwość, poczucie bezpieczeństwa, strategie radzenia sobie, współczesne zagrożenia

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