

The Ability of Positive Adaptation and Students' Attitudes towards Economic Migrations

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On the basis of the conducted analyses it can be stated that there are relations between trait resilience and attitude towards emigration, sense of behavioural control in this area and previous experience of temporary work abroad. Resilience is not significantly correlated with subjective norm, emigrant's prototype, or patriotic attitude, although in all the cases one can notice a pattern of averages concurrent with the assumed tendency. The resilience-trait can be a significant factor in activity and mobility on the labour market.

Key words: *Economic Migration; Students; Attitudes; Resilience; Personality Traits*

Economic migration is a common phenomenon. It can be perceived from different perspectives: sociological, cultural, economic, historical, and psychological ones. Migration is connected with the processes of globalisation, however, its basic conditionings lie in the discrepancies between the levels of economic development of different countries. In every economy there can be found a number of factors that either accelerate or inhibit this process. Economic factors influence the willingness to migrate on the social level because of their impact on living conditions (the ability to fulfil people's needs) as well as the perception of economic changes and the people's expectations about their life chances and dangers in the future. Research on economic migration suggests that the main cause of going abroad is the dissatisfaction with the income that one receives in one's home country or the lack of income (in the case of the unemployed) and the low level of the fulfilment of social and economic needs.¹ In the report (*Diagnoza społeczna*) it has been pointed out that 8.3% of the employed and 22.9% of the unemployed declare the willingness to emigrate for economic reasons, which constitutes a relatively high percentage when compared with the total

¹ Kryńska E. (2000). *Mobilność zasobów pracy. Analiza i metody stymulacji*. Warszawa.

emigration in the years 2011–2013 (approximately 2%).² This means that the number of people who declare the willingness to emigrate is a few times higher than that of the people who in fact do.

According to yet another important study one-seventh of the respondents work abroad or have worked abroad since Poland joined the European Union, over 2/3 personally know someone who has worked abroad, and every fourth respondent has declared the readiness to find a job abroad.³ However, there are some differences pertaining to age: the percentages of people declaring the readiness to look for work abroad or their plans to try to find a job abroad are highest among the youngest respondents, that is, those aged 18–24 (39%). The percentage incidence of the willingness to emigrate systematically decreases with age.

In the *Diagnoza społeczna 2013* it has been presented, in turn, that 30% of economic emigrants from the years 2007–2011 emigrated again in the years 2011–2013. Thus, the great majority have no repeated emigration experiences, which might be the result of a failure to fulfil the plans connected with emigration, as well as with the successful fulfilment of all the goals of the emigration. What appears particularly interesting is that among the people who have returned from emigration there is a higher percentage of those who are now professionally active in Poland than of those who are professionally passive. Authors of the report have not shown any data that could make possible the establishment of the relationships between emigrational experiences and being active on the labour market. One can only speculate that emigrational experiences make people more creative at work or that economic migration and the willingness to pro-actively look for sources of income have a common source. If the latter interpretation is correct, it suggests that among the possible influences there are some subjective factors, not only situational ones.

Assumptions

In the present paper I intend to assume the psychological perspective. To be more precise, I am interested in decision making in the economic migration of young adults. That is because in the psychological sense economic migration can be understood as an active

² *Diagnoza społeczna 2013. Raport.* (2014). Czapiński J., Panek, T. (Eds.) Warszawa: Instytut Pracy i Spraw Socjalnych.

³ *Poakcesyjne migracje zarobkowe* (2013). Warszawa. Fundacja Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej.

form of *problem-focused coping*. I treat economic migration as a deliberate action aimed to solve a problem in one's life.

Nevertheless, one ought to take into account the fact that the decision to emigrate for economic reasons is often made in the situation of an inner conflict. It is a probably an *approach-avoidance conflict*. Apart from the profits that may be gained an individual assesses the risks and costs of emigration. Making the decision is typically a long process of reflection and planning connected with a change in one's life. This process can lead to formulating an intention in the discussed area. Intention is to be understood as a conscious, verbalised intention to undertake a certain action within a defined period. Intention precedes purposeful action.

According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour *intention* can be treated as a conscious state of readiness to perform a given action, and it is conditioned by three factors: *attitude toward the behaviour*, *subjective norm*, and *behavioural control*.⁴ Attitude is a balance of the convictions about the benefits and the costs of performing a behaviour, weighed according to the importance that the subject attaches to them. Subjective norm is the conviction about what one's significant others expect of an individual performing (or not) a given behaviour, weighed as the individual's motivation to meet these expectations. Perceived behavioural control is the conviction about the possibly to successfully perform an action. It originates in the evaluation of the achievability of a goal and of one's own competence. It can be proposed that this theory suggests that the decision to perform an action is based on the subjective evaluation of its reasonableness, normality, and achievability of the purposeful action.

In consonance with the discussed theory, behaviour is a function of intention and perceived behavioural control, and intention is a consequence of attitude, subjective norm, and the sense of behavioural control. Furthermore, it is assumed that all the other causative factors in the origins of an action influence behaviour through these three indicators.

There is a number of attempts to broaden the discussed theory. It seems that the most important of them is the Prototype/Willingness Theory⁵, which introduces some significant modifications: firstly, perceived behavioural control has been substituted by *previous behaviour*, with the assumption that having performed the same or similar

⁴ Ajzen, I. (1991). Theory of Planned Behavior. In *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179-211. DOI: 10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T

⁵ Gibbons, F. X. – Gerrard, M. – Blanton, H. – Russell, D. W. (1998). Reasoned action and social reaction: Willingness and intention and independent predictors of health risk. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(5), 1164-1181. DOI: 10.1037/0022-3514.74.5.1164

behaviour in the past makes it more likely that it will be performed again in the future, as a result of habit or rationalisation. Secondly, in place of *intention* two coupled constructs are introduced: *intention* and *willingness*. As aforementioned, intention is a conscious purpose of doing something. Willingness, in turn, is a tendency to benefit from an opportunity. The modification is substantial, because actions in human life are not only the result of precedent planning – their character is often opportunistic. What is more, since the times of Freud it has been known that many human actions are regulated subconsciously. Thus, in favourable conditions a motivation to act may arise that is grounded in an individual's personality structures. The third modification consists in the addition of the element termed *prototype*. Prototype is the conviction about the information that an individual gives about themselves to others when acting in a particular way. If an individual is convinced that a certain way of acting shows a person in a favourable light, the individual is then more willing to perform such actions.

If we try to learn of the readiness of an individual to emigrate for economic reasons we must first specify whether we want to know about intention or willingness, or if we want to unify both the constructs. Unification is justified inasmuch as in reality the measurements of intention and willingness are correlated, which is why when inquiring about one of the variables we receive an answer determined by the other variable. That is why, even though mathematical calculations can be employed to separate the variables of both factors in analyses of correlations, I have decided to aggregate both the measures, thus creating a construct under the working name of "readiness for economic emigration".

In order to provide a reliable diagnosis of this readiness it should not only be investigated on the basis of the declarations of wanting to emigrate or to take advantage of an opportunity to take up work abroad, but, in accordance with the theories presented above, one ought to also take into account the affective/cognitive indicators of such readiness: attitude, subjective norm, prototype, behavioural control, and previous emigrational behaviours. All of them were taken into consideration in the research presented in this paper. However, the catalogue of dependent variables has been extended. I introduced a variable under the working name of "patriotic stance". It appeared important to me, because in the Polish society there is a significant group of "eurosceptics", "anti-globalists", and "nationalists". Those supporting the above worldviews might have a negative perception of economic emigration.

⁶ Werner, E. E., & Smith, R. S. (1982). *Vulnerable but invincible: A longitudinal study of resilient children and youth*. New York: Adams, Bannister & Cox.

The aim of the research presented below was to find the answer to the question about the relation between readiness for economic emigration (and its various determinants) and an individual's ability of positive adaptation (termed *trait resilience*).

Resilience is a term pertaining to the ability to cope with difficulties, stress, and social pressure. The phenomenon has been described by scholars investigating the adaptation of children burdened with a high number of factors extremely adverse to development. It has been observed that not all children subject to an accumulation of adverse factors in their environments present abnormal development trajectories or behaviour disorders.⁶ About 1/3 of the population appear to be resilient, which is a substantial group. A number of authors have tried to explain the phenomenon. However, this is not a place to present the entire catalogue of factors facilitating positive adaptation. Let us state, then, that the sources of resilience are the constructive influences of significant others, of the broader social environment, and certain personal traits. Thus, there exist personal and external resources that allow an individual to successfully counteract disturbing factors. What is more, it has been observed that the discussed resilience is not stable, but it is formed in a developmental process. One of the important conclusions of the scholars of resilience is the fact that it is formed in real confrontations with life problems rather than conditions of isolation from negative factors. Thus, it may be called an inoculation mechanism, that is, a reasonable exposure of a child to various tasks requiring effort to adapt which results in the increase in resilience, analogously to hyper-compensation in sport. The above assumption directs our attention to the intrapsychological mechanisms determining the ability to adapt positively despite being burdened with risk factors. It can be stated that the ability of positive adaptation can be understood as an individual trait that differentiates people. In psychology attempts have been made to define this ability. At least a few ought to be mentioned. They are the *sense of coherence*⁷, *hardiness*⁸, *ego-strength*⁹ as well as *ego-control* and *ego-resiliency*¹⁰. They are multidimensional constructs, even though their elements are

⁷ Antonovsky, A. (1987). *Unraveling the mystery of health: how people manage stress and stay well*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

⁸ Kobasa, S. C. (1979). Stressful life events, personality and health: An inquiry into hardiness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37(1), 1–11. DOI: 10.1037/0022-3514.37.1.1

⁹ Erikson, E. H. (1964). *Insight and responsibility*. New York: Norton.

¹⁰ Block, J. H., & Block, J. (1980). The role of ego-control and ego-resiliency in the organization of behavior. In W. A. Collins (Ed.). *Development of cognition, affect, and social relations: The Minnesota symposia on child psychology* (Vol. 13) (pp. 39–101). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

closely correlated, which is why treating them as single variables is justified. One should also note that these superior constructs are also interconnected, that is, they have a common core. They can be presented on a single plain. What is more, the above plain includes a number of other human traits, such as emotional intelligence, critical thinking, and taking care of oneself. The correlations are so powerful that they justify the inclusion of these variables in the aforementioned general category¹¹. The traditional traits mentioned above are connected with the optimal course of the development process in favourable environmental conditions. However, contemporarily a number of data in neurogenetics have been collected that clearly indicate the genetic background of the discussed competence. Adaptive abilities are undoubtedly dependent on the activity of the genes coding neurotransmitting. It is first and foremost connected with the genes responsible for serotonergic and dopaminergic paths in the brain. The key mechanisms here consist in balancing the influences of the limbic system by the controlling influences of the prefrontal cortex. The balance is achieved late in ontogenesis, typically after the age of 25¹². Lasting disturbances in this process result from gene-environment interplay in the earlier development stages. An example of such interplay is the interaction of the gene coding monoamine oxidase with experiences of violence or neglect in early childhood. Personality disorders develop in persons with the mentioned experiences, but the form of these disorders results from the qualities of the genotype. Alleles of the MAO-A gene causing an increase in the availability of serotonin in the synapses in the interaction with child abuse increase the probability of the antisocial disorder, and the alleles of this gene that cause a drop in the availability of serotonin lead to an increased risk of depressive and anxiety disorders. Regardless of the aforementioned factors, childhood trauma leads to permanent changes in the limbic system and the prefrontal cortex, the symptom of which is a lowered self-control, that is, the control over the experienced emotions and the behaviour. The main cause here is stress and the resulting secretion of cortisol by the adrenal cortex. Cortisol activates certain receptors in the brain, which triggers a cascade of changes leading to negative structural changes in the brain which, in turn, lead to permanent

¹¹ Kwiatkowski, P. (2012). Profilaktyka zachowań narkotykowych młodzieży w kontekście koncepcji resilience. In W. Z. B. Gaś (Ed.). *Człowiek w obliczu zniewolenia. Od zagrożenia do nadziei* (pp. 169–194). Lublin: Innovatio Press.

¹² Steinberg, L. (2007). Risk taking in adolescence new perspectives from brain and behavioral science. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 16(2), 55–59. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-8721.2007.00475.x

decrease in the ability to successfully regulate emotional processes.

It can be stated that the above scientific observations justify the perception of the ability of positive adaptation as an individual trait. It is assumed that the trait is a certain type of an adaptive resource: one's ability to use other resources depends on it. In this way, the aforementioned *sense of coherence* or *ego-strength* can be very generally defined. I believe that the most universal formula for the definition of the above quality is formed by the psychological concepts of *wisdom*. Due to a lack of space they are not discussed here. I will limit myself to stating that wisdom is often perceived as the ability of an individual to manage their behaviour in a way that allows for the realisation of personal qualities with consideration for the good of the society and nurturing personal relationships. Self-control is one of the fundamentals of this ability.

Trait resilience as a quality facilitating effective use of the resources available to an individual facilitates (1) undertaking optimal coping activities in difficult situations, (2) keeping up the activities in spite of problems as well as (3) modifying the activities when the situation calls for it. The result of such functioning is the preservation of psychological integrity and a positive self-image.

The Aim of the Research and the Method

The aim of the research presented below was to define the relations between the ability of positive adaptation and readiness for economic emigration and its indicators. The research pertains to the people who, being students of the last semester, have no secured stable income and declare discomfort connected with this fact. Married individuals and those in stable informal relationships have been eliminated from the sample. To put it simply – only singles were studied. That is how the influence of many variables connected with social relations was eliminated. The statistical control of these variables would require a much larger sample. 120 students were studied. However, the final research only included 92 students of various higher schools in Wrocław: 43 male and 49 female. This year all the students will complete their studies (full time or extramural) and they have no intention of taking up doctoral studies. Initial analyses have shown no differences between the genders in relation to trait resilience and emigrational plans. That is why the respondents' gender is not taken into account in the statistics.

The first step in the analyses was to define two groups forming opposite extremes in *trait resilience*. The measurement of the discussed

trait was conducted with the use of the RESIL-17 Scale.¹³ It is a tool of documented reliability and accuracy. Trait resilience consists of three source traits: positive attitude to oneself, ability to confront others, and self-control. That is why an overarching indicator of the three traits was used. After ranking, 30 respondent with the lowest score were selected and 30 with the highest score. Thus, two extreme comparative groups were formed.

Further analyses consisted in comparisons between the groups, in which the dependent variables were set as the indicators of readiness for economic emigration. The table below contains information about the dependent variables and the methods of their operationalization. Except for one of the variables, bipolar scales (type: semantic differential) were used, two scales for each variable. The one exception are the previous emigrational behaviours, which were measured by a single question about the number of months spent abroad over the last 2 years (for economic or educational reasons). Because of the conciseness of the measurement tool for dependent variables, it was not possible to establish the internal reliability of any of the subscales. Let us only note, therefore, that the particular pairs of items were significantly correlated.

The results of the particular subscales (except for one) could fall in the range between 2 and 12 points. All the variables used in the calculations were given in a standardised form. The measurement of previous emigrational experiences brought a range of results between 0 and 6 months. The results were also recorded in the form of *Z-score*.

Research results

The general hypothesis stating that persons with a high indicator of trait resilience show a higher readiness for emigrational behaviours than with a lower level of this trait has been verified. I believed that the above assumption was justified in the context of the criteria of the selection of respondents. The population consisted of young people without a stable source of income and experiencing discomfort because of this fact. Majority of the respondent expected great difficulties in finding satisfying employment where they lived. Consequently, it is highly probable that many respondents are undergoing a crisis connected with having to take up responsibility for their own adult lives. In such situation it can be

¹³ Kwiatkowski, P. (2012). Profilaktyka zachowań narkotykowych młodzieży w kontekście koncepcji resilience. In Gaś, Z. B. (Ed.). *Człowiek w obliczu zniewolenia. Od zagrożeni do nadziei* (pp. 169–194). Lublin: Innovatio Press.

Dependent variables	Quantity of items	Examples of items
Willingness to emigrate	2	It's my intention to go to work abroad for at least a few months during the next year vs. I'm definitely not going to work abroad over the next few years.
Attitude toward emigration	2	I think that in my situation economic emigration would be a very reasonable choice. vs. Starting to work abroad brings more problems than benefits.
Subjective norm	2	My close ones encourage me to go to work abroad. vs. My close ones would definitely oppose my going to work abroad.
Emigrant's prototype	2	Poles are liked and respected abroad (they are welcome). vs. You often have to be ashamed of other Polish people, nobody respects them
Perceived behavioural control	2	I would certainly be able to cope with all the problems connected with living abroad. vs. If I went abroad I would be afraid that I wouldn't be able to cope with the problems there.
Past behaviour	1	How many months have you spent working or studying abroad over the last two years?
Patriotic attitude	2	Nowadays Poles should take particular care of national issues. vs. I think patriotism is stupid.

Table 1. *Operationalization of dependent variables – measures.*

expected that the *trait resilience* that determines effective use of resources might facilitate the tendency to perceive economic emigration as an interesting perspective for the future. Resilient individuals are less prone to anxiety and less emotionally labile, and they are more socially competent, autonomous, and able to take care of themselves. These traits may influence the readiness to emigrate through perceived behavioural control as well as a more positive attitude towards emigration (balance of profits and costs). It is more difficult to find relations between trait resilience and the remaining indicators of readiness to emigrate.

Results of the analyses are presented in the table below. Significance of the differences between the compared groups has been measured with the use of the *t-Student test*. All the dependent variables in the analyses have been standardised (*Z-score*) in the entire sample of 92 persons. This means that the results above 0 are higher than the average

Dependent variables	Comparative groups	Statistics	
		Mean (standard deviation)	Test t (p-level)
Willingness to emigrate	RESIL	+0,23 (1,17)	1,36
	resil	-0,14 (0,92)	(ns)
Attitude toward emigration	RESIL	+0,38 (1,03)	2,697
	resil	-0,31 (0,95)	(0,012)
Subjective norm	RESIL	+0,12 (1,09)	0,726
	resil	-0,07 (0,93)	(ns)
Emigrant's prototype	RESIL	+0,29 (1,32)	1,371
	resil	-0,11 (0,90)	(ns)
Perceived behavioural control	RESIL	+0,47 (1,06)	3,172
	resil	-0,37 (0,99)	(0,004)
Past behaviour	RESIL	+0,42 (1,24)	2,266
	resil	-0,49 (0,89)	(0,031)
Patriotic attitude	RESIL	-0,22 (1,02)	1,593
	resil	+0,21 (1,07)	(ns)

ns = not significant, RESIL = high scale result, resil = low scale result

Table 2. *Trait resilience and dependent variables – a statistical analysis.*

in the entire sample, and the results below 0 are lower than average. Standard deviation in the entire sample is 1. In the comparative groups the standard deviations may vary.

On the basis of the conducted analyses it can be stated that there are relations between trait resilience and attitude towards emigration ($p=0.012$), sense of behavioural control in this area ($p=0.004$) and previous experience of temporary work abroad ($p=0.031$). Resilience is not significantly correlated with subjective norm, emigrant's prototype, or patriotic attitude, although in all the cases one can notice a pattern of averages concurrent with the assumed tendency. Particular indicators of readiness and the very indicator of behavioural willingness are always higher in the group of resilient persons. A reverse tendency can be seen in relation to patriotic attitude, but it is not statistically significant. Taking into account the above findings and the existence of relations between behavioural willingness indicators, aggregation of all of the above indicators is justified. Sum of the standardised values made it possible to arrive at a general measure of readiness for economic emigration. It was standardised and correlated with the standardised general result in the RESIL-17 scale. The correlation between the two variables is 0.34 and it is statistically significant ($p=0.001$). This means that with the increase of the level of resilience students' readiness for economic emigration increases (for students who are completing their studies, who are in a difficult financial situation, and who see little chance to find a job where they live).

Conclusions

The above results appear to be concurrent with the assumption about the existence of a personal factor conditioning the ability of positive adaptation. However, the presented relations are weak and they have been found in a small sample. Consequently, one ought to be careful when drawing conclusions on their basis. There are probably also other factors conditioning readiness for economic emigration. It is conceivable that trait resilience can modify the relations between this readiness and living conditions or other causative factors. Testing them, nonetheless, requires a much bigger sample and the use of more refined statistical methods.

The results presented above allow for the assumption that by developing the traits forming the ability of positive adaptation (*trait resilience*) in the upbringing process we are raising individuals who can take matters in their own hands, and who are ready to engage in emotionally difficult actions that, at the same time, provide the chance to become independent. The above trait can, therefore, be a significant factor in activity and mobility on the labour market. In a broader perspective trait resilience can be treated as an important element in independence competences of a young person. From this perspective, what is advisable in upbringing is to provide the chance for the three fundamentals of positive adaptation to develop: *positive identity* (perceiving oneself as a value, constructing the sense of a meaningful life), *social competence* in confronting the environment (assertive attitude and skills), and *self-control* (in the behavioural and emotional area).