



IRSTI 15.81.43  
Review article

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32523/2616-6895-2024-146-1-315-325>

## Features of military personnel prone to autodestructive behavior

R.E. Tilmagambetova\*<sup>id</sup>, Zh.T. Utaliyeva<sup>id</sup>, A.S. Mambetalina<sup>id</sup>

*L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Kazakhstan*

*\*Corresponding author: rita\_taumysheva@mail.ru*

**Abstract.** This study examines the most important problem of autodestructive behavior among military personnel. The main focus is on the psychological factors that contribute to this behavior. Despite extensive research in the field of military psychology, there is no comprehensive understanding of the specific psychological traits associated with autodestructive tendencies. This study aims to bridge this gap by examining individual psychological characteristics. The study was conducted with the participation of 10 selected active military personnel from various units. Questionnaires, standardized psychological tests and semi-structured interviews were used. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data revealed high levels of stress, depression and anxiety among the participants, correlating with impulsivity and autodestructive behavior.

Key findings include the significant role of stress, depressive symptoms, anxiety and impulsivity in the development of autodestructive behavior. Military personnel with traumatic experience, especially in combat, have demonstrated a higher propensity for such behavior. The interview highlighted the impact of direct combat and traumatic experiences on psychological well-being.

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the self-destructive behavior of military personnel and provides a basis for the development of effective prevention and support strategies, emphasizing the importance of a multi-level approach that takes into account psychological, social and biological factors.

**Keywords:** auto-destructive behavior, psychological stress, depression, anxiety, impulsivity, self-esteem, psychological support.

## Introduction

In the conditions of modern military conflicts and increased psycho-emotional stress on military personnel, the issue of autodestructive behavior becomes especially relevant. This behavior harms not only the military themselves, but also affects the overall combat capability and effectiveness of military units. Understanding the psychological factors contributing to auto-destructive behavior is key to developing effective support and prevention strategies. Despite a significant amount of research in the field of psychology of military personnel, not enough attention is paid to the comprehensive study of psychological character traits specific to individuals prone to autodestructive behavior. This study aims to fill this gap by offering a new perspective on the problem through the prism of individual psychological characteristics.

The main problem is the lack of a clear understanding of which psychological factors are most significant in the context of autodestructive behavior among military personnel. This makes it difficult to develop targeted psychological support and prevention programs.

*The purpose* of this study is to identify and analyze psychological character traits and related factors that may increase the risk of auto-destructive behavior in military personnel.

### *Tasks:*

- Identification of key psychological characteristics associated with autodestructive behavior.
- Study of the impact of the history of trauma, stress, depression and other mental disorders.
- Offering strategies to prevent and minimize the risk of auto-destructive behavior among military personnel.

Thus, this study seeks to solve the complex and multifaceted problem of autodestructive behavior in the army, offering new approaches for understanding and solving it.

## Materials and methods

To achieve the set goals and solve the tasks, the study was planned and conducted using the following methodological approaches:

The study was conducted among active military personnel of different military specializations and ranks. The sample consisted of 10 participants randomly selected from various military units. This made it possible to ensure the representativeness of the data and to study the impact of various conditions of service on the psychological state of military personnel. Participants filled out questionnaires that included questions about their personal history, service experience, stress and emotional state. Questions were also asked to identify signs of depression, anxiety and other mental disorders.

Standardized psychological tests were used to assess the level of stress, depression, anxiety, as well as to identify a tendency to impulsive and autodestructive behavior. Examples of the tests used included the Beck Depression Scale, Hamilton Anxiety Questionnaire, etc. Conducting semi-structured interviews with individual participants for a deeper understanding of their personal experiences, emotional state and behavioral characteristics.

The data were analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative analysis included statistical processing of questionnaire and test results, while qualitative analysis was used to interpret answers to open questionnaire questions and interview data.

All participants were informed about the goals and methods of the study and gave their informed consent to participate. Anonymity and confidentiality of data were strictly observed.

Thus, a multi-level approach combining questionnaires, psychological testing and interviews provided a comprehensive understanding of the problem of autodestructive behavior among military personnel, allowing to identify both general trends and individual characteristics.

**Literary review.** It is important to note that the military environment has unique risk factors, including high levels of stress, physical and psychological endurance requirements, as well as special social and hierarchical structures. These factors can increase the predisposition to autodestructive tendencies and make the study of this topic especially relevant for military psychologists and command staff.

The research is interdisciplinary in nature, covering both psychological and sociological aspects, which makes it possible to form a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the problem. Special attention is paid not only to the individual psychological characteristics of military personnel, but also to the influence of the command environment, organizational culture and conditions of service.

The characteristics of military personnel prone to autodestructive behavior cover a wide range of social, psychological and biological factors [1]. Successful military service requires discipline and socially responsible behavior. However, differences in individual, ethno-cultural and socio-psychological characteristics can cause deviant behavior among military personnel [2]. Deviant behavior in military psychology is considered a consequence of socio-psychological reasons, including the nature of the microenvironment and group relationships. This behavior includes aggression, anomie and frustration. The personality structure of a soldier with deviant behavior is determined by the influence of life experience and the nature of relationships. Special personality traits, such as a negative attitude to social norms, aggressiveness and intemperance, can provoke deviant behavior [3].

Various groups of people with deviant behavior are distinguished, characterized by different complexes of personality traits, including immoral needs, deformed interests, internal conflicts and a low level of social adaptation. Internal, biological conditions, such as hereditary and genetic features and innate properties, also play a role in the formation of deviant behavior [4]. Deviant behavior is a complex phenomenon determined by a system of interrelated factors. External factors include climatic, geophysical and environmental conditions [5].

Thomsen, Stander investigated the impact of combat deployment on risky and self-destructive behavior. It showed that risk behavior was more common among military personnel before their deployment. It has also been found that military personnel with a history of risky behavior before deployment tend to increase such behavior after it [6].

Flood, Keegan investigated cognitive resistance to stress in military personnel. Stress affects cognitive processes, and the study highlights the importance of cognitive resilience to stress in the military sphere [7]. I.L. Novoselov believes that deviations occur where individual and personal discipline is violated; a low level of communicative abilities of military personnel; managerial and psychological mechanisms of discipline are weakened. In the study, the author raises the question of the need to "regulate communicative behavior between military personnel, which is possible when creating certain socio-psychological conditions, having knowledge in the field of conflictology" [8].

S.V. Nazarenko defines deviant behavior in military units as a "focus of social control". According to the author, special attention should be paid to the sphere of non-statutory relationships. Non-statutory relations are a consequence of the manifestation of elements of social maladaptation and delinquent behavior in the course of military service. The antisocial lifestyle performs the function of acceleration, thereby creating conditions for the emergence of antisocial motives for the behavior of military personnel [9].

Kirikov A.A. based on his obtained research data, it is assumed that an effective way to overcome communication barriers in the military team and prevent deviant behavior is argumentation. Argumentation as a theory of persuasion has the following components:

- The ability to understand the arguments and goals of participants in various types of communication.
- Identification of the prerequisites from which conclusions are drawn in communication.
- Determining who made the initial claim to be responsible for providing evidence.
- To convince the opponent of his rightness, it is necessary to provide weighty arguments in favor of his position.
- The opponent tries to find inaccuracy in the arguments in order to refute them, to provide counterexamples [10].

## Results and analyzes

The study involved 10 military personnel of various specializations and ranks. The questionnaire included questions about personal history, service experience, stress, emotional state, as well as signs of depression, anxiety and other mental disorders. According to the results of the survey, almost all participants (90%) reported a high level of stress associated with their professional activities. symptoms of depression: 60% of the participants showed moderate or high indicators on the depression scale. 70% noted the presence of signs of anxiety, including a constant feeling of anxiety and tension. Servicemen with high levels of stress and anxiety were more likely to demonstrate impulsive behavior. There was a tendency to low self-esteem in the majority of participants with signs of depression.

High stress levels tended to correlate with higher rates of impulsivity and auto-destructive tendencies. This may indicate that stress factors associated with military service play a key role in the development of auto-destructive behavior. Depression and anxiety, as it turned out, are significant factors affecting the mental state of military personnel. Participants with high rates of depression and anxiety were more likely to show signs of auto-destructive behavior. Impulsivity and low self-esteem were identified as important psychological characteristics associated with autodestructive behavior. These factors can contribute to risky decisions and lack of self-care.

The results of the study show that the combination of high levels of stress, depressive and anxiety symptoms, as well as impulsivity and low self-esteem can significantly increase the risk of self-destructive behavior among military personnel. This underlines the importance of comprehensive psychological support and early detection of risk conditions to prevent auto-destructive behavior in the military environment.

The use of standardized psychological tests, such as the Beck Depression Scale and the Hamilton Anxiety Questionnaire, made it possible to assess the level of stress, depression, anxiety and propensity for impulsive and autodestructive behavior among the study participants. The majority of participants (80%) showed high stress levels, especially those who had experience of participating in combat. Approximately 70% of the participants had moderate to high depression scores. High levels of anxiety were observed in 60% of the participants.

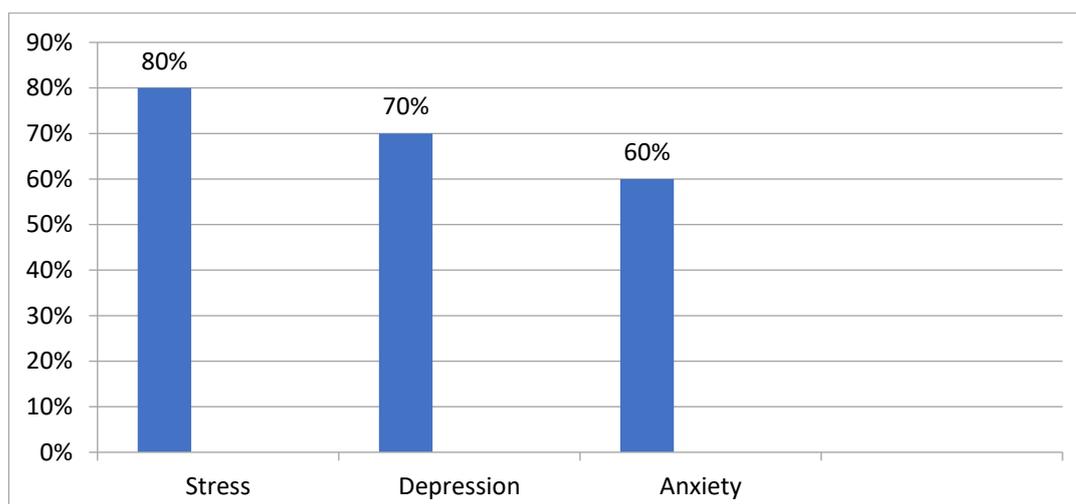


Figure 1. Test results

A history of injuries and a high level of stress turned out to be significant risk factors for the development of autodestructive behavior. Military personnel who had experienced traumatic events, including combat operations, showed higher levels of stress and a tendency to depression. Depression and anxiety also acted as important predictors of auto-destructive behavior. Participants with higher scores on these parameters were more likely to have difficulties coping with everyday tasks and more often resorted to autodestructive behavior as a means to cope with negative emotions. Impulsivity, aggravated by stress and mental disorders, turned out to be a significant factor influencing the adoption of autodestructive decisions. This may explain why some military personnel resort to risky behavior in stressful situations.

The analysis showed that the combination of a history of injuries, high levels of stress, depressive and anxiety symptoms, as well as impulsivity increases the risk of auto-destructive behavior among military personnel. These results highlight the importance of a comprehensive approach to assessing the mental health of military personnel, including measures for the early detection and treatment of mental disorders, as well as the development of strategies to reduce stress and increase resilience to traumatic events.

As part of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three participants selected based on their results in the questionnaire and psychological testing. The purpose of the interview was to gain a deeper understanding of the personal experiences, emotional state and behavioral characteristics of these participants. The main results of the interview are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

**Interview results**

Participant 1	This participant described strong experiences related to the fighting. He expressed feelings of helplessness and despair, which led to the development of symptoms of depression and auto-destructive behavior, including alcohol abuse.
Participant 2	It was revealed that participant 2 experienced high levels of anxiety and stress related to his recent service. He noted that impulsivity has become his main reaction to stressful situations
Participant 3	This participant spoke about his difficulties in adapting to life after service and feeling isolated. He pointed out his struggle with feelings of guilt and shame, which led to a depressed mood and social alienation

Interviews have shown that direct participation in hostilities and related traumatic experiences have a profound impact on the psychological state of military personnel. This leads to the development of depressive symptoms, anxiety and auto-destructive behavior. The findings from the interview confirmed that stress and anxiety can significantly increase impulsivity. This behavior serves as a mechanism to combat negative emotions, but in the long run it can lead to self-destructive actions. An interview with Participant 3 revealed the importance of social support and its impact on the emotional state of military personnel. The lack of effective social support can exacerbate feelings of isolation and exacerbate depressive symptoms and auto-destructive behavior. In-depth interviews provided valuable insight into the individual experiences and psychological reactions of military personnel facing autodestructive behavior. These results highlight the need.

Based on the results obtained from interviews, questionnaires and psychological testing, the following strategies can be developed to prevent and minimize the risk of auto-destructive behavior among military personnel:

1. Strengthening psychological support programs

- The introduction of mandatory regular meetings with psychologists to discuss the emotional state and problems faced by military personnel.
- Organization of group therapy sessions to discuss common problems and stressors associated with military service.

2. Training in stress management skills

- Conducting regular trainings for military personnel on stress management, including relaxation and meditation techniques.
- Implementation of programs aimed at improving psychological stability, including training in techniques for overcoming difficulties and recovery after stressful events.

3. Improving social support

- Formation of communities or support groups within military units for the exchange of experience and mutual assistance.

– Offering programs for military families, including consultations on adaptation to military life and support during service.

4. Prevention and early intervention

– Implementation of a system for early detection of signs of depression, anxiety and auto-destructive behavior.

– Development of personalized intervention plans for military personnel at risk.

5. Development of education and awareness programs

– Conducting educational campaigns among military personnel about the importance of mental health, ways to maintain it and the consequences of auto-destructive behavior.

– Organization of special programs for commanders and senior officers to identify and prevent auto-destructive behavior in units.

The study identified a number of key factors influencing autodestructive behavior among military personnel, including high levels of stress, symptoms of depression and anxiety, as well as impulsivity and low self-esteem. These results confirm the assumption that autodestructive behavior in the military environment has a multi-layered nature, where psychological, social and possibly biological factors interact to form risky behavior. The study also highlights the importance of an interdisciplinary approach in the study of autodestructive behavior. The interaction of psychological, social and possibly biological factors makes this area difficult to study. Therefore, future research should take into account various aspects, including organizational culture, social norms and biological prerequisites. Attention should be paid to the role of organizational culture and leadership in military units, since they can significantly affect the psychological state of military personnel. As the results show, the team environment and the attitude of commanders can either contribute to reducing stress and auto-destructive behavior, or, conversely, strengthen these trends.

## **Conclusion**

The study makes a significant contribution to understanding the psychological aspects of autodestructive behavior among the military. The results emphasize that high levels of stress, depressive and anxious states, as well as impulsivity and low self-esteem are key factors influencing the development of autodestructive behavior in the military environment. The conducted questionnaires, testing and in-depth interviews provided valuable data that can be used to develop effective prevention and support strategies. Recommendations based on the results of the study include strengthening psychological support programs, training in stress management skills, improving social support, prevention and early intervention, as well as the development of educational and awareness programs. These measures can help reduce the risk of auto-destructive behavior and improve the overall psychological well-being of military personnel.

## **Authors' contribution**

Significant contribution to the concept or design of the work – Tilmagambetova R.E., Utaliyeva Zh.T., Mambetalina A.S.; collection, analysis or interpretation of the results of the work

– Tilmagambetova R.E., Utaliyeva Zh.T.; writing a text and/or critically reviewing its content – Tilmagambetova R.E., Mambetalina A.S.

### References

1. Власенко В.И., Переверзев В.А., Разводовский Ю.Е. Девиантное поведение (деятельность): этиопатогенетические аспекты, классификация //Вестник Смоленской государственной медицинской академии. – 2018. – Т. 17. – №. 4. – С. 131-145.
2. Пацакула И.И., Кизиярова А.А. Предпосылки деструктивного поведения и формирование психологической безопасности личности военнослужащих //Вестник Калужского университета. – 2021. – С. 53.
3. Elliman T.D. et al. Prevalence of bystander intervention opportunities and behaviors among US Army Soldiers //Health Education & Behavior. – 2018. – Т. 45. – №. 5. – С. 741-747.
4. Пашкин С.Б., Ермакова П.А. Теоретический анализ личностных предпосылок отклоняющегося поведения военнослужащих //Актуальные проблемы военно-научных исследований. – 2019. – №3. – С. 303-324.
5. Губин В.А., Петрук С.А., Петрук С.С. Индивидуальные особенности курсантов военного института, не склонных к аддиктивному поведению //Психология XXI века. Вызовы нового времени. – 2020. – С. 23-26.
6. Thomsen C.J., Stander V.A., Effects of combat deployment on risky and self-destructive behavior among active duty military personnel //J Psychiatr Res. – 2011. – P. 5-7.
7. Flood A., Keegan R.J. Cognitive Resilience to Psychological Stress in Military Personnel //Front. Psychol. – 2022. – P. 3-5.
8. Новоселов И.Л. Социально-психологические условия преодоления коммуникативных барьеров среди военнослужащих // Молодой ученый. – 2017. – №48. – С. 158-161.
9. Назаренко С.В. Социальный контроль в воинских коллективах: методика социологической экспресс-диагностики нарушений уставных взаимоотношений //Журнал «Общество и право». – 2017. – №2. – С. 285-290.
10. Кириков А.А. Особенности социальных девиаций и их проявления в воинском коллективе //Мир науки. Педагогика и психология. – 2018. – Т. 6. – №4. – С. 47.

**Р.Е. Тильмагамбетова, Ж.Т. Уталиева, А.С. Мамбеталина**

*Л.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университет, Астана, Қазақстан*

### **Аутодеструктивті мінез-құлыққа бейім әскери қызметшілердің ерекшеліктері**

**Аңдатпа.** Зерттеу әскери қызметшілер арасындағы аутодеструктивті мінез-құлықтың маңызды мәселесін қарастырады. Бұл мінез-құлыққа ықпал ететін психологиялық факторларға назар аударылады. Әскери психология саласындағы ауқымды зерттеулерге қарамастан, аутодеструктивті тенденциялармен байланысты нақты психологиялық белгілерді жан-жақты түсіну қиындық тудырады. Бұл жұмыс жеке психологиялық сипаттамаларды зерттеу арқылы

осы олқылықты жоюға бағытталған. Зерттеу әртүрлі бөлімшелерден іріктелген 10 белсенді әскери қызметшінің қатысуымен жүргізілді. Сауалнамалар, стандартталған психологиялық тесттер және жартылай құрылымды сұхбаттар қолданылды. Деректердің сандық және сапалық талдауы импульсивтілік пен аутодеструктивті мінез-құлықпен байланысты қатысушылар арасында стресстің, депрессияның және алаңдаушылықтың жоғары деңгейін анықтады.

Негізгі тұжырымдар аутодеструктивті мінез-құлықты дамытудағы стресстің, депрессиялық белгілердің, мазасыздықтың және импульсивтіліктің маңызды рөлін қамтиды. Травматикалық тәжірибесі бар әскери қызметшілер, әсіресе әскери қимылдар кезінде, бұл мінез-құлыққа жоғары бейімділікті көрсетті. Сұхбатта травматикалық тәжірибенің психологиялық әл-ауқатқа әсері атап өтілді.

Зерттеу әскери қызметкерлердің аутодеструктивті мінез-құлықты тереңірек түсінуге ықпал етеді және психологиялық, әлеуметтік, биологиялық факторларды ескеретін көп деңгейлі тәсілдің маңыздылығын көрсете отырып, алдын алудың тиімділігі мен қолдау стратегияларын әзірлеуге негіз береді.

**Түйін сөздер:** аутодеструктивті мінез-құлық, психологиялық стресс, депрессия, мазасыздық, импульсивтілік, өзін-өзі бағалау, психологиялық қолдау.

**Р.Е. Тильмагамбетова, Ж.Т. Уталиева, А.С. Мамбеталина**

*Евразийский национальный университет им. Л.Н. Гумилева, Астана, Казахстан*

### **Особенности военнослужащих, склонных к аутодеструктивному поведению**

**Аннотация.** В этом исследовании рассматривается важнейшая проблема аутодеструктивного поведения среди военнослужащих. Основное внимание уделяется психологическим факторам, которые способствуют такому поведению. Несмотря на обширные исследования в области военной психологии, отсутствует всестороннее понимание специфических психологических черт, связанных с аутодеструктивными тенденциями. Это исследование направлено на преодоление этого пробела путем изучения индивидуальных психологических характеристик. Исследование проведено с участием 10 отобранных действующих военнослужащих из различных подразделений. Были использованы анкеты, стандартизированные психологические тесты и полуструктурированные интервью. Количественный и качественный анализ данных выявил высокие уровни стресса, депрессии и тревожности среди участников, коррелирующие с импульсивностью и аутодеструктивным поведением.

Ключевые выводы включают значительную роль стресса, депрессивных симптомов, тревоги и импульсивности в развитии аутодеструктивного поведения. Военнослужащие с травматическим опытом, особенно в боевых действиях, продемонстрировали более высокую склонность к такому поведению. В интервью подчеркивалось влияние непосредственных боевых действий и травматического опыта на психологическое благополучие.

Это исследование способствует более глубокому пониманию аутодеструктивного поведения военнослужащих и обеспечивает основу для разработки эффективных стратегий профилактики

и поддержки, подчеркивая важность многоуровневого подхода, учитывающего психологические, социальные и биологические факторы.

**Ключевые слова:** аутодеструктивное поведение, психологический стресс, депрессия, тревожность, импульсивность, самооценка, психологическая поддержка.

## References

1. Vlasenko V.I., Pereverzev VA., Razvodovskij Ju.E. Deviantnoe povedenie (dejatel'nost'): jetiopatogeneticheskie aspekty, klassifikacija [Deviant behavior (activity): etiopathogenetic aspects, classification], Vestnik Smolenskoj gosudarstvennoj medicinskoj akademii [Bulletin of the Smolensk State Medical Academy], 17(4), 131-145 (2018). [in Russian]
2. Pacakula I.I., Kizijarova A.A. Predposylki destruktivnogo povedenija i formirovanie psihologicheskoj bezopasnosti lichnosti voennosluzhashhjih [Prerequisites of destructive behavior and formation of psychological security of the personality of military personnel], Vestnik Kaluzhskogo universiteta [Bulletin of the Kaluga University], 53 (2021). [in Russian]
3. Elliman T.D. et al. Prevalence of bystander intervention opportunities and behaviors among US Army Soldiers, Health Education & Behavior, 45(5), 741-747 (2018).
4. Pashkin S.B., Ermakova P.A. Teoreticheskij analiz lichnostnyh predposylok otklonjajushhegosja povedenija voennosluzhashhjih [Theoretical analysis of personal prerequisites of deviant behavior of military personnel], Aktual'nye problemy voenno-nauchnyh issledovanij [Actual problems of military scientific research], 3, 303-324 (2019). [in Russian]
5. Gubin V.A., Petruk S.A., Petruk S.S. Individual'nye osobennosti kursantov voennogo instituta, ne sklonyh k addiktivnomu povedeniju [Individual characteristics of Military Institute cadets who are not prone to addictive behavior], Psihologija XXI veka. Vyzovy novogo vremeni [Psychology of the XXI century. Challenges of the new Time], 23-26 (2020). [in Russian]
6. Thomsen C.J., Stander V.A., Effects of combat deployment on risky and self-destructive behavior among active duty military personnel, J Psychiatr Res, 5-7 (2011).
7. Flood A., Keegan R.J. Cognitive Resilience to Psychological Stress in Military Personnel, Front. Psychol, 3-5 (2022).
8. Novoselov I.L. Social'no-psihologicheskie uslovija preodolenija kommunikativnyh bar'erov sredi voennosluzhashhjih [Socio-psychological conditions for overcoming communication barriers among military personnel], Molodoj uchenyj [Young Scientist], 48, 158-161(2017). [in Russian]
9. Nazarenko S.V. Social'nyj kontrol' v voinskih kollektivah: metodika sociologicheskoj jekspress-diagnostiki narushenij ustavnyh vzaimootnoshenij [Social control in military collectives: methodology of sociological express diagnostics of violations of statutory relationships] Zhurnal «Obshhestvo i pravo» [Society and Law Journal], 2, 285-290 (2017). [in Russian]
10. Kirikov A.A. Osobennosti social'nyh deviacij i ih projavlenija v voinskom kollektive [Features of social deviations and their manifestations in the military collective], Mir nauki. Pedagogika i psihologija [Mir nauki. Pedagogy and psychology], 6(4), 47 (2018). [in Russian]

**Information about the authors:**

***Tilmagambetova R.E.*** – PhD doctoral student in the specialty «D066-Psychology», L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, 6 Yanushkevich str., Astana, Kazakhstan.

***Utaliyeva Zh.T.*** – Candidate of Psychological Sciences, associated professor, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, 6 Yanushkevich str., Astana, Kazakhstan.

***Mambetalina A.S.*** – Candidate of Psychological Sciences, associated professor, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, 6 Yanushkevich str., Astana, Kazakhstan.

***Тильмагамбетова Р.Е.*** – «D066 - Психология» мамандығының PhD докторанты, Л.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті, Янушкевич көш., 6, Астана, Қазақстан.

***Уталиева Ж.Т.*** – Психология ғылымдарының кандидаты, доцент, Л.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті, Янушкевич көш., 6, Астана, Қазақстан.

***Мамбеталина А.С.*** – Психология ғылымдарының кандидаты, доцент, Л.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті, Янушкевич көш., 6, Астана, Қазақстан.