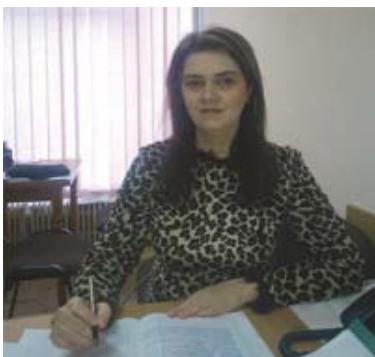


ADAPTING FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS TO HIGHER EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT



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Abstract. The paper discusses issues in the adaptation of first-year students to higher education environment. The author explores the category of adaptation. It is argued that the age of 17-23 is the most crucial in an individual's life.

The author analyzes the indicators of socio-pedagogic adaptation and maladaptation. The analysis is based on a study which was conducted in 2012-2016 and involved 5425 respondents.

Keywords: *analysis, results, adaptation, socio-pedagogic adaptation, maladaptation.*

Formulation of the problem

A student mentoring system in higher professional education is based on three important processes – adaptation, the development of academic motivation and professional identification of a future specialist, which is why this study will focus on issues in the adaptation of first-year students to higher education environment because the effectiveness of adaptation determines the personal and professional characteristics of a future specialist [14].

An analysis and study of first-year students' psychological adaptation to higher education environment involves specifying the concept of adaptation. The understanding and interpretation of adaptation in higher education environment can vary. Issues in adaptation have been studied extensively by international and Ukrainian researchers, namely by V. P. Kazimirenko, V. I. Medvedeva, A. A. Nalchadzhian, G. M. Shevandrin and others.

The term "adaptation" is used in numerous research areas; however, no single interpretation has been agreed upon so far. Thus some researchers regard adaptation as a process, result, adjustment; others, as an interplay between an individual and the object adapted to, or between an individual and environment.

Many researchers argue that the adaptation process depends on the agent's activeness, which involves exploring the conditions, norms, rules of a new living environment and a search for relevant venues and solutions. Adaptation is composed of complex, multifaceted interactions between a person and their environment [1].

Adaptation has recently been defined through the concept of interaction. Interaction per se involves interconnection, mutual impact, mutual action between agents. It is natural that in biological adaptation, when an individual is highly dependent on their environment, the term "adjustment" captures the essence of the process more accurately. However, there is growing interest in socio-pedagogic adaptation, which is why the concept of interaction is gaining topicality. As a rule, defining adaptation through interaction is based on the importance of the agent's activeness, on the increased significance of conscious creativity [1]. The concept of interaction is more accurate in terms of reflecting the specifics of socio-pedagogic adaptation.

Higher education years are marked by the most rapid intellectual and personal growth. K. D. Ushynskyi considered the age between 17 and 23 to be the most crucial period in an individual's life. He wrote, "It is at this age that beliefs get formed, and the majority of them, if not all, are grouped into a single network thus determining a person's mindset and character [3].

The period between 17 and 23 years of age is characterized by numerous changes determined by increased mental functions. Most young people reach physical maturity by the time they are admitted to higher education institutions. However, their psychological development still continues. New structures develop in the nervous system, which leads to the redevelopment of previously formed structures. Constant repetition of the same acts, patterns, and actions in the same order result in the development of certain relationships between conditioned responses, which have to be changed and adapted to new requirements and conditions when school leavers transfer to higher education [3]. This transition is possible due to the plasticity of the nervous system, but redevelopment varies from student to student – it can be fast or slow, easy or difficult depending on their individual characteristics, on how they are prepared to this transition by their school, family, higher education institution, as well as on other factors.

It is not rare that socio-psychological adaptation destroys first-year-students' positive views and relations. Maladaptation results in nervous strain and frustration, decreased academic activity, loss of interest in public life, negative behavior, poor academic performance during the first semester, and in some cases loss of belief in oneself, disappointment in life. This leads to psychic overload, which reduces adaptability and, as a result, damages an individual's psychic health [6].

Therefore, first-year students have difficulty learning and adapting because they have not developed the following personality traits: preparedness to learning, ability to study independently, to control and evaluate themselves, to manage their independent study time effectively, etc.

S.I. Samyhin argues that students become fully adapted to higher education environment by the end of the second or the beginning of the third semester. He identifies three forms of adaptation to higher education: 1) formal adaptation, which refers to students' cognitive and informational adjustment to a new environment, to the structure of a new school, to new requirements and duties; 2) social adaptation, which is defined as a process of internal integration of first-year student groups and the integration of these groups in the student community as a whole; didactic adaptation, which involves students' preparation to new forms and methods of learning in higher education institutions.

An individual's socio-psychological adaptation in a group or community is possible due to a system of mechanisms: reflection, empathy, social feedback loops, etc.

The indicators of successful socio-psychological adaptation include the following: an individual's high social status in a certain environment, their psychological satisfaction with this environment, which refers to their job, working conditions, organization, etc. Poor socio-psychological adaptation manifests itself in an individual's transition to another social environment, breaches of discipline, poor academic performance, declining relationships with their group mates, which results in disillusionment, a sense of inferiority, frustration, loss of academic motivation.

Main material and research results. Proceeding from the importance of exploring adaptability in first-year students, we conducted an experimental study at Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University between 2012-2016. Our study involved 5425 respondents and was based on the multi-level personality questionnaire called "Adaptability", which was designed by A.G. Maklakov and S.V. Chermianin (1993); the questionnaire is aimed at studying an individual's adaptability on the basis of evaluating certain psycho-physiological and socio-psychological characteristics which serve as psychic and social development indicators. The questionnaire is regarded as a standardized method and is recommended to be used in psychological selection, psychological counseling in academic and professional settings [14].

The theoretical basis of the test is that adaptation is regarded as an individual's continuous adjustment to their social environment, which affects all levels of human activity. The success of adaptation largely depends both on the genetics of the nervous system and on an individual's upbringing conditions, their behavioral stereotypes, the adequacy of their self-esteem. Distorted or underdeveloped self-image leads to maladaptation, which can be associated with a growing potential for conflicts, loss of social identity, health deterioration. In severe cases, maladaptation can lead to diseases, academic or professional misconduct, antisocial behavior. The process of adaptation is extremely dynamic. Its success is largely determined by a number of objective and subjective factors, functional state, social experience, life philosophy, etc. Every person has a different perception of the same events; people can react differently to the same stimulus. It is possible to identify a certain interval of an individual's adequate reactions which will correspond to a psychic

norm; it is also possible to identify a certain "interval" of an individual's attitude to a phenomenon which refers to universal moral values. The level of correspondence to the "interval" of psychic and socio-moral normativity determines the effectiveness of socio-psychological adaptation and adaptability potential, which is regarded as the most significant indicator of psychic development. психічного розвитку (Table 5.2.1-5.2.10).

Table 5.2.1
Students' personal adaptability potential (2012)

No.	Scale	Low development level	Medium development level	High development level
1.	Neuropsychic stability	5 %	94. 2 %	0.8 %
2.	Communicative abilities	4 %	95. 2 %	0.8 %
3.	Moral normativity	3 %	96. 2 %	0.8 %

Number of students – 1 751; sample – 1 400 respondents

Table 5.2.2
Students' personal adaptability potential (2012)

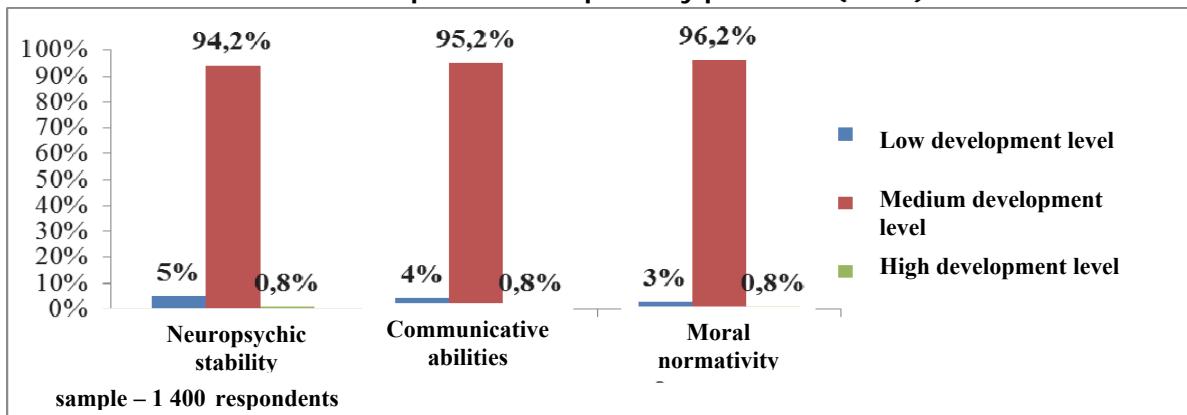
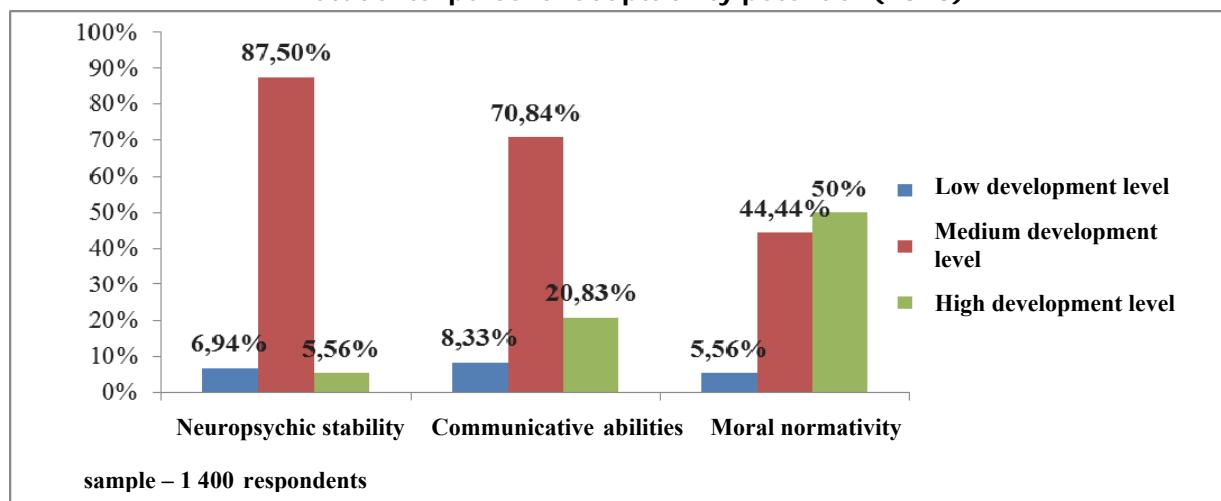


Table 5.2.3
Students' personal adaptability potential (2013)

No.	Scale	Low development level	Medium development level	High development level
1.	Neuropsychic stability	6.94 %	87.5 %	5.56 %
2.	Communicative abilities	8.33 %	70.84 %	20.83 %
3.	Moral normativity	5.56 %	44.44 %	50 %

Number of students – 1 771; sample – 1 040 respondents

Table 5.2.4**Students' personal adaptability potential (2013)****Table 5.2.5****Students' personal adaptability potential (2014)**

No.	Scale	Low development level	Medium development level	High development level
1.	Neuropsychic stability	4.4 %	95.6 %	-
2.	Communicative abilities	1.1 %	85.5 %	13.4 %
3.	Moral normativity	-	66.7 %	33.3 %

Number of students – 2 249; sample – 1 442 respondents

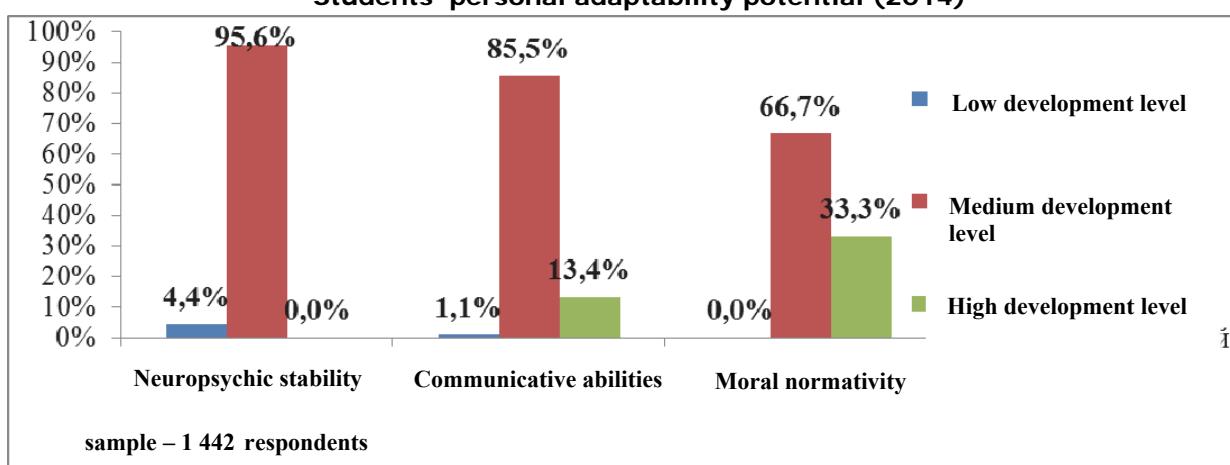
Table 5.2.6**Students' personal adaptability potential (2014)**

Table 5.2.7**Students' personal adaptability potential (2015)**

No.	Scale	Low development level	Medium development level	High development level
1.	Neuropsychic stability	-	100 %	-
2.	Communicative abilities	4.1 %	71.1 %	24.8 %
3.	Moral normativity	3.1 %	36.1 %	60.8 %

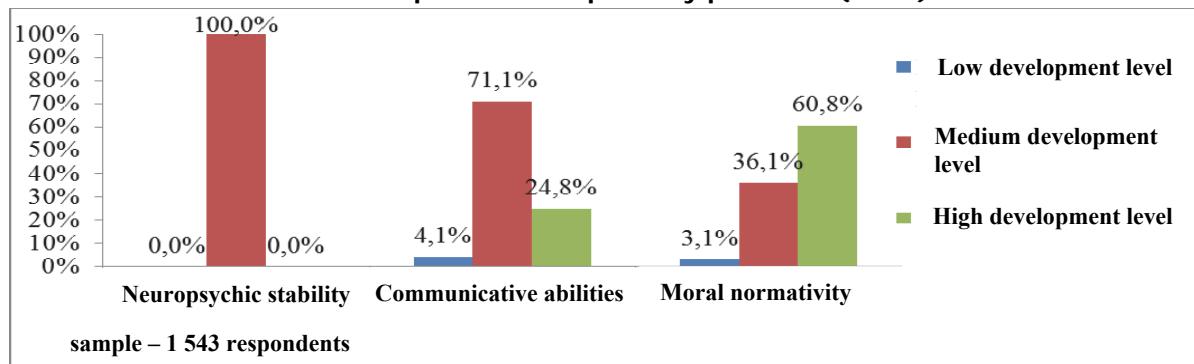
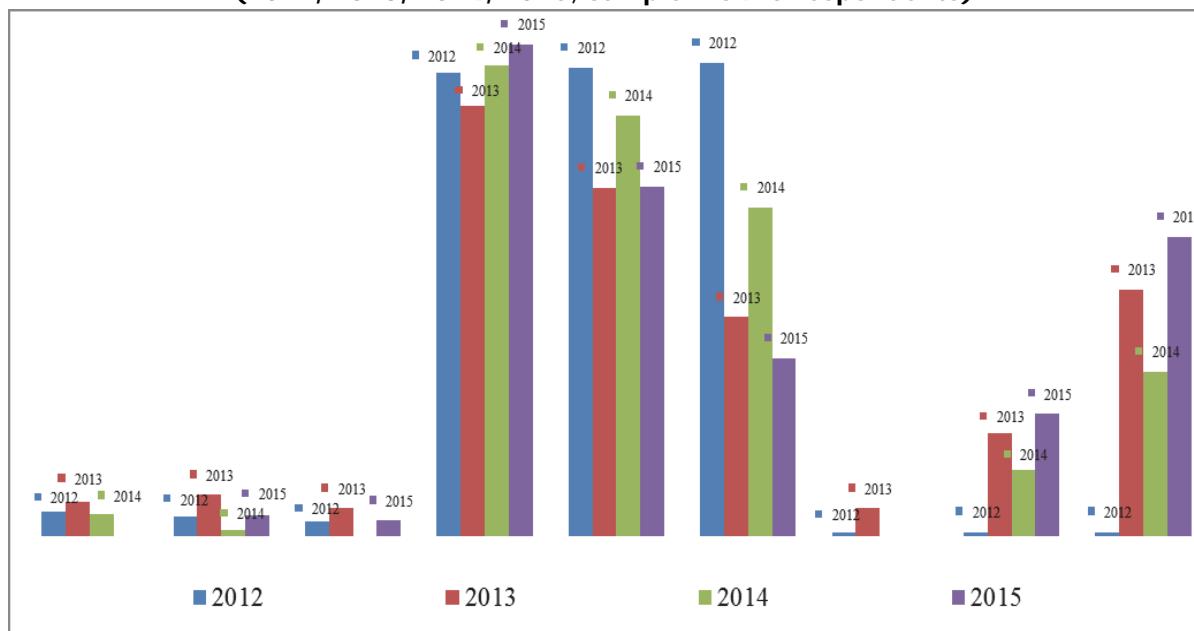
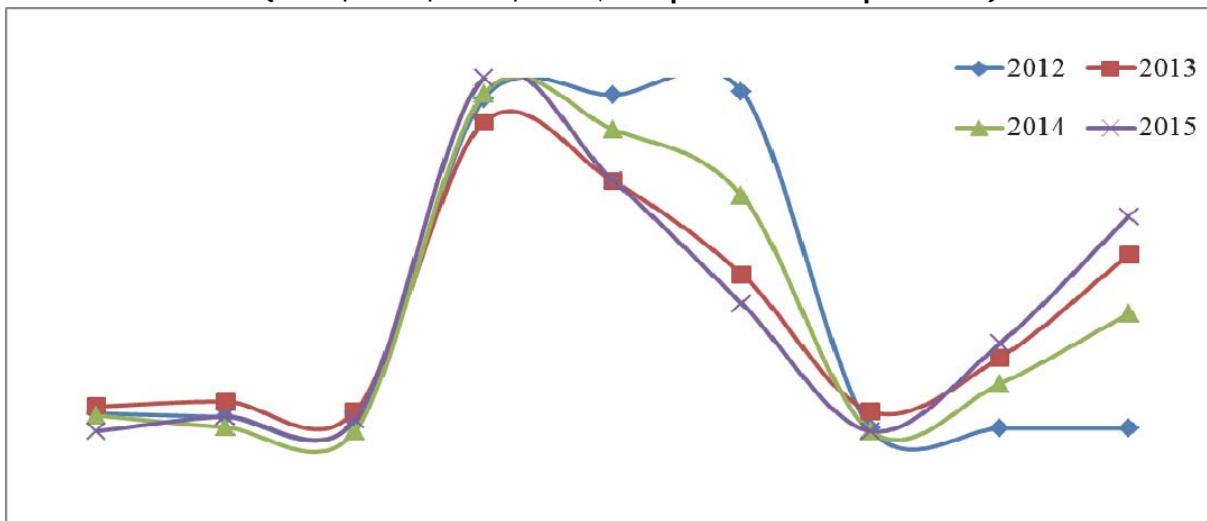
Number of students – 2 266 ; sample – 1 543 respondents**Table 5.2.8****Students' personal adaptability potential (2015)****Table 5.2.9****Students' personal adaptability potential: total results (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015; sample – 5425 respondents)**

Table 5.2.10
Students' personal adaptability potential: the dynamics of change
(2012, 2013, 2014, 2015; sample – 5425 respondents)



Let us analyze the research results which we obtained over the period of 2012-2015. Tables 5.2.1-5.2.9 illustrate the personal adaptability potential in the first-year students surveyed in terms of their neuropsychic stability, communicative abilities and moral normativity [14].

The neuropsychic stability scale shows the risk of first-year students' maladaptation under stress, i.e. when the emotional reflection system operates under critical conditions caused by external and internal factors. 95 percent of the respondents show medium or high levels of neuropsychic stability, and only 5 percent face maladaptation risk.

Communicative abilities or communicative potential is another component of personal adaptability potential. The research findings show a significantly high level of communicative potential in students (in approximately 90 percent of the respondents) because they socialize most of the time, their activity is connected with building relationships with other students and teachers. Communicative abilities (or the ability to establish contact and gain understanding) vary from student to student depending on their experience, their need for communication and proneness to conflict. Throughout the experimental period, 10 percent of the students showed low levels of communicative abilities.

The moral normativity scale indicates a student's ability to adequately perceive a certain social role assigned to them. Moral normativity levels reflect two major components of socialization: the perception of moral and ethical norms and the attitude to the requirements in one's immediate social surroundings. The survey results show medium and high levels of moral normativity in first-year students and a small percentage of students with low levels of this characteristic (up to 5 percent of the respondents).

Neuropsychic stability, communicative abilities and moral normativity constitute a scale of personal adaptability potential, which measures personal adaptability in general (Tables 5.2.11-5.2.12).

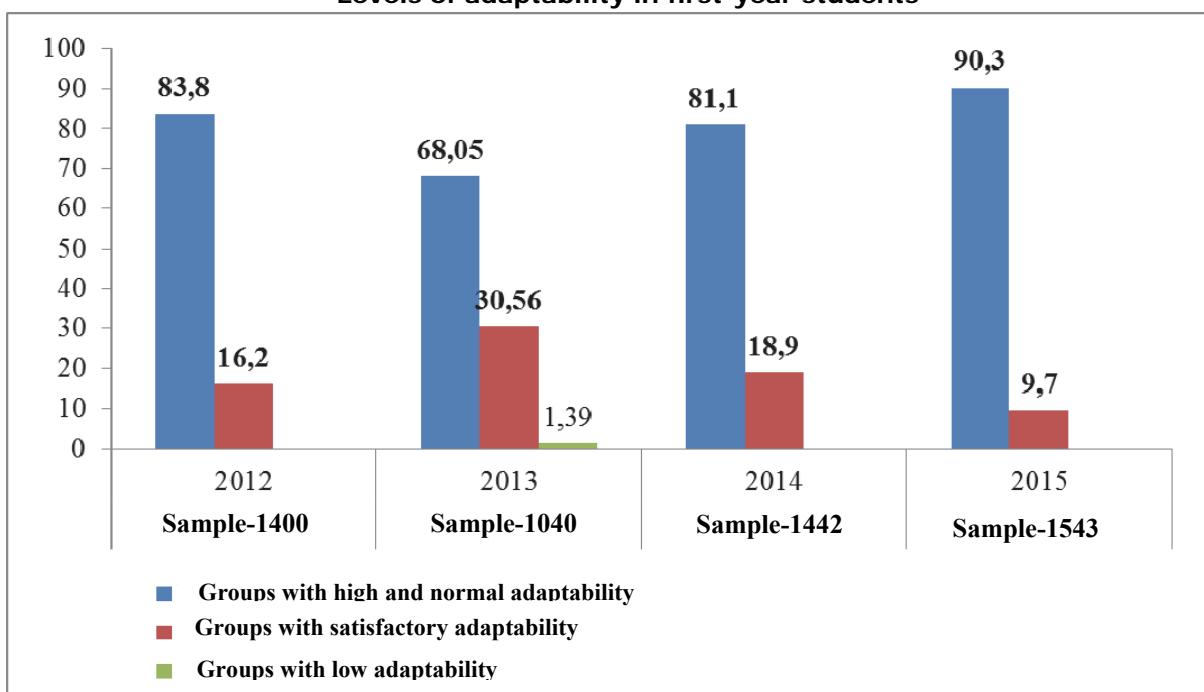
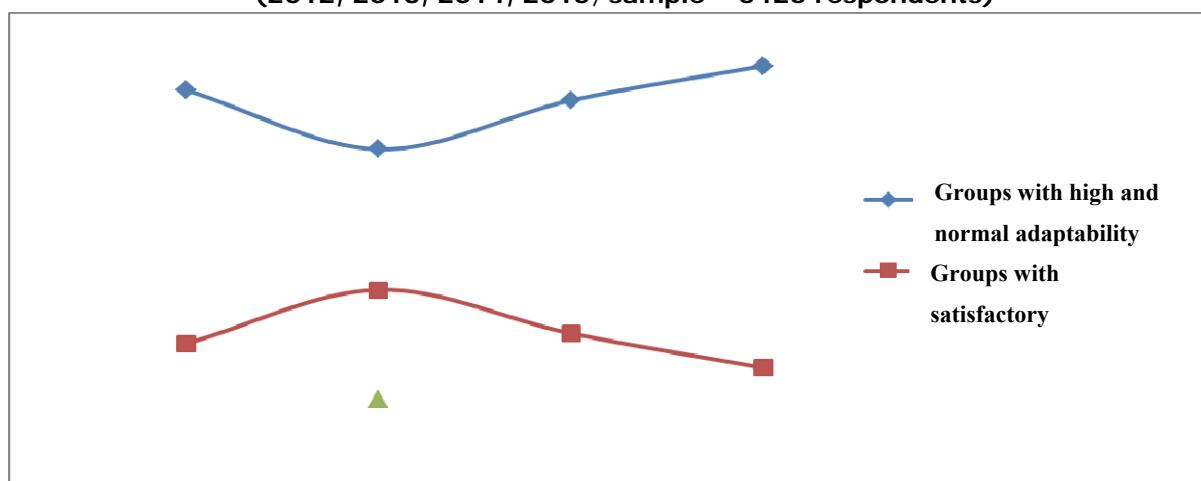
Table 5.2.11**Levels of adaptability in first-year students****Table 5.2.12****The dynamics of change in the adaptability of first-year students
(2012, 2013, 2014, 2015; sample – 5425 respondents)**

Table 5.2.10 illustrates the positive dynamics of students' personal adaptability potential according to the basic scales (neuropsychic stability, communicative abilities and moral normativity).

Table 5.2.11 illustrates the scale of students' personal adaptability potential which consists of three groups: 1) high and normal adaptability (the students belonging to this group can easily adapt to new conditions, are quick to come in contact with new people, are able to quickly understand new situations, are good at developing behavioral strategies. As a rule, such people are not prone to conflicts and show high emotional stability); 2) satisfactory adaptability (most of the students in this group have various accentuations of character which are partially compensated under normal conditions and can show when there is a change of activity. Thus the success of adaptation depends on external environment factors. As a rule, such students are characterized by low emotional stability; they can be prone to conflicts, show antisocial behavior, aggression. The students belonging to this group need an individual approach, constant monitoring and corrective measures); 3) low adaptability (the students in this group have obvious accentuations of character with some

signs of psychopathy, borderline personality disorder; they are prone to having psychotic nervous breakdowns. The students belonging to this group are characterized by low neuropsychic stability, are prone to conflicts, can be antisocial; they need psychological counseling and medical treatment (neuropathological, psychiatric examination).

Table 5.2.12 illustrates the positive dynamics of change in the students' personal adaptability potential

To conclude, it should be stressed that psychological and pedagogical research makes it possible to model a university teacher's activity in terms of identifying concrete goals, content and methods of student mentoring programs; predicting results; and improving student mentoring services with a view to developing professional qualities in future specialists [20].

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