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## **SOCIAL PERCEPTION OF CORRUPTION IN UKRAINE: THE EXPERIENCE OF EMPIRICAL STUDY**

The article analyzes the development of social perception of corruption in Ukraine. Social perception of corruption was identified due to an empirical study which has applied the method of an in-depth interview. The author presents and analyzes the results of the study and reveals the specific features of the social perception of corruption in Ukraine. The article also describes the main problems, which hinder the elimination of corruption in Ukraine. As a result, the main problems and obstacles which hinder the elimination of corruption in Ukraine were revealed and hierarchized. The purpose of the research is to identify social perceptions, assessments, and needs of Ukrainian citizens in overcoming corruption and formulation of effective anti-corruption policies.

**Keywords:** corruption, empirical study, social perception, anti-corruption strategy, anti-corruption policy, anti-corruption activities, directions for overcoming corruption, research informants.

**Introduction.** Socio-economic and political changes taking place in Ukraine, together with somewhat chaotic reforms and introduction of new institutions, made the terms "corruption" and "anti-corruption policy" constantly used in public events, development programs, normative regulations, scientific research. However, it should be noted that the constant use of certain terms does not mean that society has a clear knowledge and understanding of what corruption really means and how anti-corruption policy is formed.

First of all, this happens because corruption as a socio-political phenomenon has not yet been comprehensively studied, so the conceptual apparatus related to the study of corruption as a social problem has not obtained systemic nature and needs further discussion and clarification. Secondly, legal, political and economic awareness regarding everyday and high-level corruption is absent in modern Ukrainian society, moreover, it has not been finally determined which areas of public life should be considered as the most or least corrupt.

The fight against corruption is one of the main priorities of the national policy in Ukraine. According to data received in a study "Ukraine Against Corruption: Economic Front" conducted by the Institute for Economic Research and Political Consulting in 2014-2018, due to the reforms implemented during these years Ukraine was ranked 130 in the Corruption Perceptions Index comparing to 144 in 2013<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, there are two main action plans which, if applied, should reduce the level of corruption:

- reforms in different fields with the aim to reduce corruption processes;
- institutionalization of the fight against corruption.

It is also necessary to emphasize that universal means of calculating the level of corruption in the country do not exist. Accordingly, to form a systematic and fundamental understanding, it is necessary to refer to qualitative sociological research and its specific technique of obtaining information – a focused group interview. This way of obtaining information is important because it gives an understanding of how people feel about this topic and its problematic aspects.

**The purpose of the research** is to identify social perceptions, assessments, and needs of Ukrainian citizens in overcoming corruption and formulation of effective anti-corruption policies.

The purpose of the research is specified in the next **research tasks**:

1. To identify key social perceptions of corruption in Ukraine.

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<sup>1</sup> Інститут економічних досліджень та політичних консультацій (2018). *Україна проти корупції: економічний фронт. Економічна оцінка антикорупційних заходів у 2014-2018 рр.* Дніпро: Середняк Т. К., 85.

2. To determine perceptions, assessments, and attitudes towards corruption in different fields of life of Ukrainian society.

3. To outline the main problems and obstacles which hinder the elimination of corruption in Ukraine.

**Presentation of the basic research materials.** To achieve the purpose and tasks of the research, an in-depth interview was conducted; a selected target audience consisted of representatives of the public authorities, the private sector, and different fields of activity, which in one way or another faced with the problem of corruption (10 persons in total). They were divided into 2 groups of 5 people.

**The first group consisted of professional informants** – officials of government and local self-government bodies, business representatives, lawyers, senior military (men or women between the ages of 18 and 65, aware of the corruption, contacting or collaborating with representatives involved in the processes of prevention and overcoming of corruption).

**The second group** consisted of representatives of other fields of activity: journalists, political scientists, economists, managers, educators and representatives of other branches of the public sector who have faced corruption either in their day-to-day or professional life (men or women between the ages of 18 and 65, indirectly aware of corruption but not contacting or collaborating with representatives involved in the processes of prevention and overcoming of corruption).

Interviews were held individually with each informant, this has given the possibility to receive more detailed answers and to reveal certain features of the interviewee's professional activity. Moreover, on a number of questions, informants were able to provide more than one answer and give examples from their own lives.

The in-depth interview program consists of 4 content blocks: acquaintance with the nature of the informants' activities; identification of the areas of life where corruption is present; major obstacles for the elimination of corruption; identification of the competency needs. The choice of the named content blocks corresponds with the purpose and tasks of the study and will help to develop appropriate recommendations for overcoming problems and obstacles which hinder the elimination of corruption in Ukraine.

Analyzing **the first content block of the research "Acquaintance with the nature of the informants' activities"**, we should note that, regarding the age and nature of the positions they occupy, both groups of professional and typical informants are characterized by homogeneity. Both the first and the second group has individuals under and over 35 years old. Also, both groups have informants with senior positions. Absolutely all informants in both groups encountered corruption. Three of the typical informants have encountered corruption in the workplace, two in everyday life. All professional informants encountered corruption both in the professional and in the everyday environment. The positive moment is that everyone without exception is aware of the meaning of the term "corruption". The main definitions offered by informants have been grouped in several directions, as shown in Figure 1 "What is embedded in the concept of corruption?"

Analyzing the data shown in Figure 1, we should note that six definitions of corruption have been formed, two of which were proposed by most informants. Typical informants (3 people) have identified corruption as the obtaining of unlawful benefit by officials and bribery, the establishment of specific sums of monetary reward for the provision of services that officials are obliged to perform. Representatives of the group of professional informants (3 persons) characterized corruption as giving privileges using official powers in exchange for the obtaining of unlawful benefit by officials (cash or any other material goods). Consequently, most informants (6 people) identified corruption as a process of obtaining unlawful benefits through the use of official powers. This definition of corruption is normative and is used in legislation (Law of Ukraine "On the Prevention of Corruption").

**The second content block of the research – "Identification of the areas of life where corruption is present"**. During the interview, the informants were asked to rank from first to third place spheres of life in which, in their opinion, corruption is most common. For most of the respondents, the situation was obvious and all of them listed the same directions. Although there were some differences, both groups placed the state apparatus and politics in the first and second place. The only difference was that the group of typical informants ranked education and health care in the first and second place too. The informants emphasized the fact that in their daily life, they had had to "give bribes" for the health examination of family members or placing children in kindergarten, school, or university.

Such unanimity in the opinions of both groups of informants occurs again regarding the role of the state in providing anti-corruption measures. Three informants from the professional and three informants from the typical group of respondents said that the state should cooperate with public organizations and all willing citizens. The state should create a system of interaction for citizens and public organizations in this matter, develop a number of measures and not only declare but implement them. Success can be achieved only through interaction between citizens and government officials. And if the fight against corruption is organized exclusively by the state without involving the citizens, then it will not bring any tangible effect. On the contrary, other informants believe that the state should take full responsibility for combating and overcoming corruption, because joint efforts with NGOs and other partners provide an opportunity to shift responsibility in case of unsuccessful projects, poor results, etc.

During the research, the informants were also asked to identify the most urgent problems which provoke corruption existing in Ukraine. The answers are shown in Figure 2 "What are the most urgent problems which provoke existing corruption?"

As we see from Figure 2, the informants of both groups gave the first place to "social insecurity and low level of income of citizens" (typical informants – 5 interviewees, professional informants – 3 interviewees), specifying that if a person receives a decent salary or has no obstacles for entrepreneurial activity, there will be no corruption at this scale. At the same time, the informants of the typical group noted that "imperfect legislation", "bureaucracy" and "absence of real mechanisms for combating corruption" are among obstacles that hinder the anti-corruption process. Among the professional informants, only two interviewees consider so. The rest names "mentality" and "low level of citizens' self-consciousness" as major problems hindering overcoming corruption in Ukraine. Thus, the citizens of Ukraine identify a wide range of problems preventing the elimination of corruption and maintaining the existing scale of the problem.

**The third content block of the research "Major obstacles for the elimination of corruption"** the informants were asked to define the obstacles which, in their opinion, existed in the way of overcoming corruption. Analyzing the responses of the typical group, we could notice the shift of responsibility and accusations of power – "the ability of officials to create legislation convenient to them" and "seeming struggle of anti-corruption bodies with the problem of corruption". These answers were given by all five interviewees. Only three of them added that people developed a habit to solve matters with mutual benefit and, according to the respondents, this justifies people because they only adjust to the existing situation. Unlike typical informants, professionals have pointed out that imperfect systems of power and legislative gaps exist in most European countries, which does not prevent those countries from reducing corruption. This can be explained by the willingness of people to change, to be responsible for their own actions, and not to hide behind amorphous statements. Two representatives of the professional group of informants noted that the elimination of corruption is, first of all, hindered by passive civil position. Because it is much easier to wait until someone will come, overcome corruption and make life much easier than to start acting single-handedly.

One of the key tasks of the research was to identify the causes of corruption among business representatives and government officials, as shown in Figure 3 "Why do business representatives and government officials encounter corruption?"

Based on the data in Figure 3, it should be noted that the state of corruption in business and government is most widely criticized. Representatives of state authorities received negative assessments from two groups of informants. Entrepreneurs depend on the decisions of public authorities and this dependency creates opportunities to use job responsibilities in favor of the enrichment. The absence of harsh sanctions in the case of exposing corrupt actions, according to the informants, only facilitates the unpunished violation of the legal norms for public servants. Two professional informants are convinced that it is impossible to blame the entire state apparatus. Everyone knows the ordinary law of economics: if there is demand, then there is supply. Therefore, entrepreneurs do not have to shift all responsibility to public authorities.

The fourth content block of the research "Identification of the competency needs" – is the final part of the in-depth interview. One of the most important tasks in this block was to determine what actions should be taken for the elimination of corruption in Ukraine. The informants' suggestions were summarized and shown in Figure 4 "What should be done to reduce the level of corruption in Ukraine?"

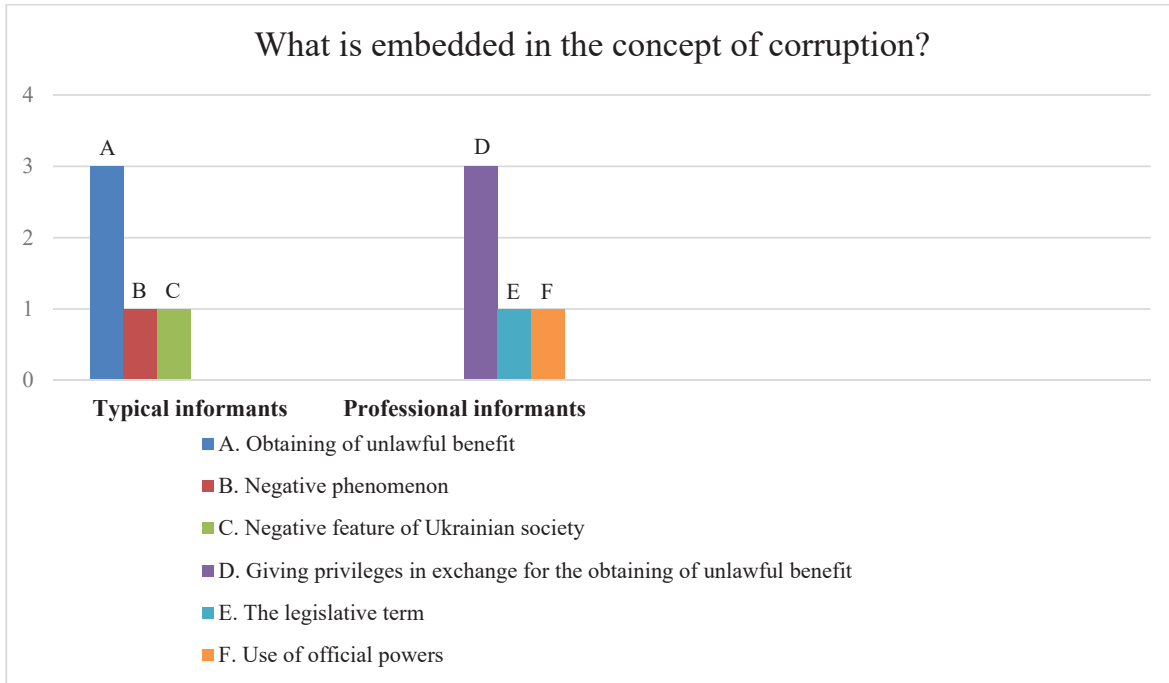


Figure 1

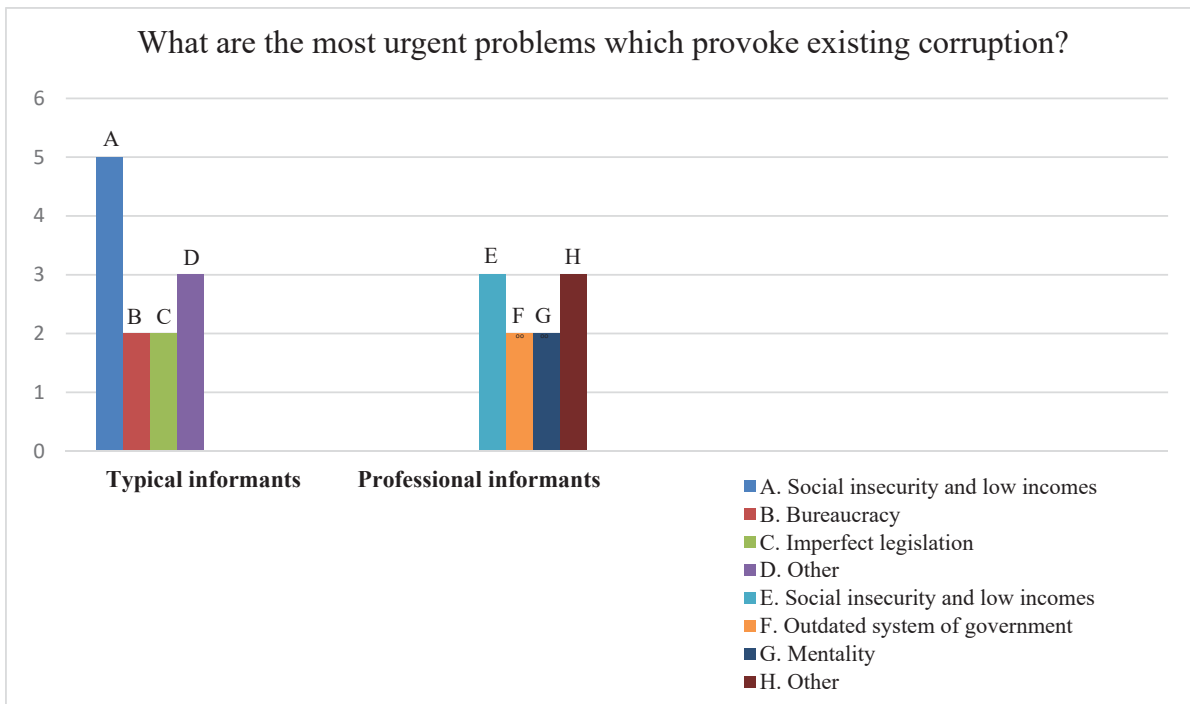


Figure 2

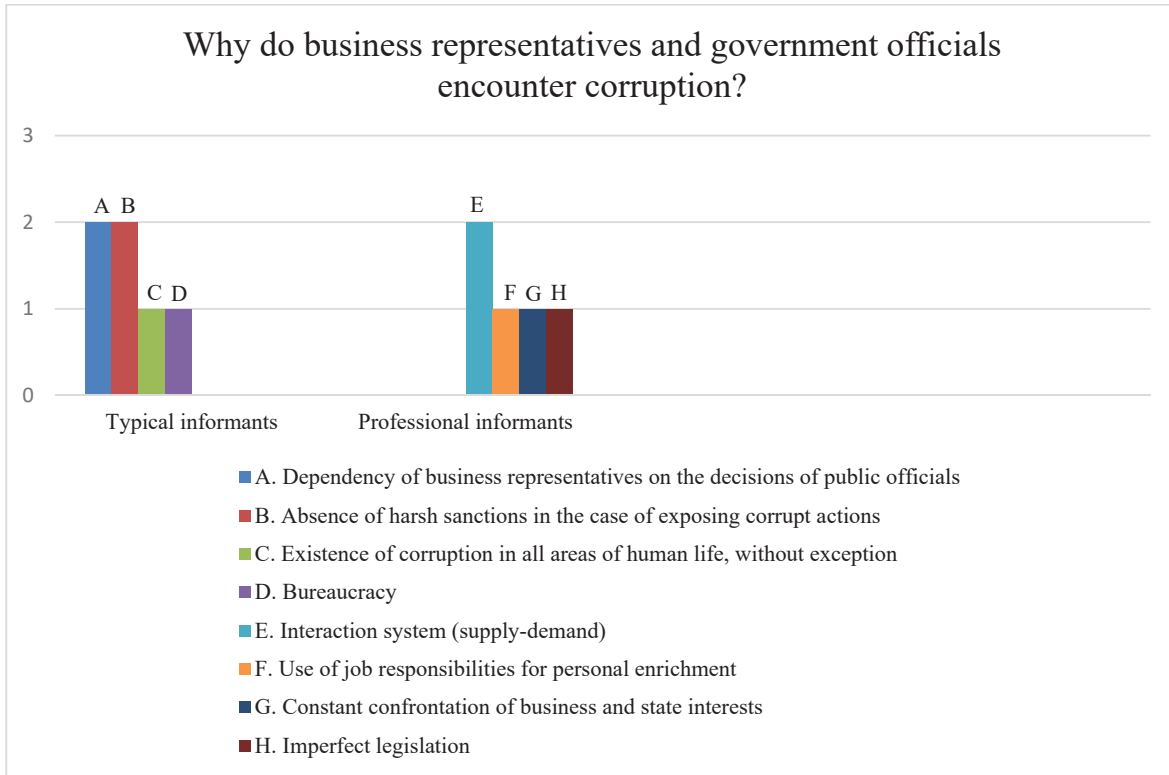


Figure 3

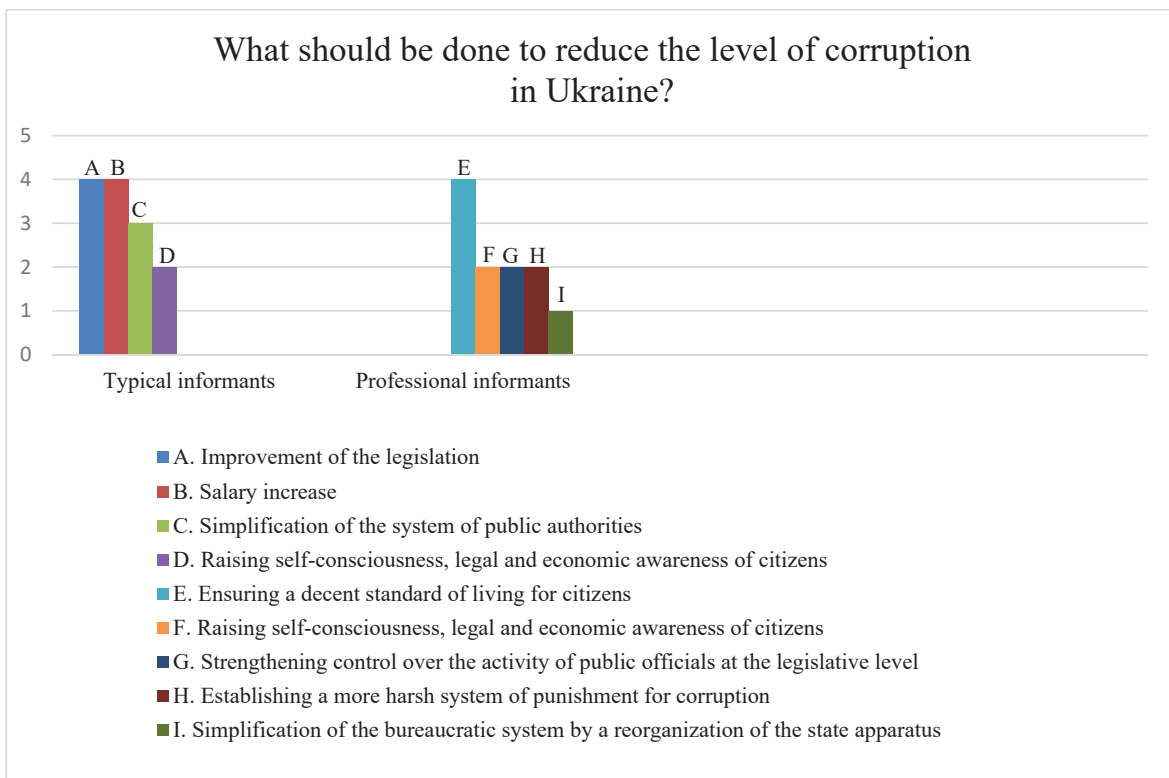


Figure 4

Analyzing the data presented in Figure 4, we should note that informants did not reach a unanimous conclusion. However, all the proposals have been formulated in several major areas pertaining to specific spheres of life in Ukraine which, if improved, may reduce/eliminate corruption in Ukraine. The majority of informants have stated that the most important was to improve the economic situation in the country, which eventually will affect the standard of people's living. Also, the legislative framework should be improved and the system of public authorities simplified. Gradual and precise implementation of the proposed initiatives will only improve the country's situation with corruption. Both groups of informants also stressed the need for large-scale work on raising the level of self-consciousness, legal, and economic awareness of citizens. Absolutely predictable unity of interviewees is explained by the interest of representatives of different social groups to improve the situation in Ukraine. In this case, the informants only supplemented each other's answers, noting that all options and suggestions are quite possible, but the main thing is – to wage a real struggle, not fake.

However, while interviewees gave enough options on how to reduce the level of corruption in Ukraine, on the question of whether there are places in Ukraine where the necessary knowledge to counteract corruption is available, none of the 10 respondents named a specific place/institution/body/organization. The answers were limited only to the fact that "yes, I am sure that such places exist, but I do not know which ones exactly", "perhaps it is necessary to contact the police or the hotlines of state authorities", "never interested, I do not know".

Thus, summarizing the results of the research, it is important to note that the problem of the elimination of corruption remains one of the most important for our country (supported by 100% of informants).

In particular, informants' social perceptions of corruption were identified and it was established that representatives of both groups of informants define corruption in the same way as the legislation of Ukraine, understanding it as obtaining unlawful benefits through the use of official powers.

Describing personal attitudes of the informants regarding existing corruption in different spheres of life of society in Ukraine, we would like to point out that 100% of the respondents identified four of the most problematic areas, from which an intensified fight against corruption should begin:

- the state apparatus;
- politics;
- health care;
- education.

It has also been established that corruption affects all areas of activity in one way or another, but not to the extent of the four mentioned above.

A hierarchy of major problems and obstacles which, according to the interviews, hinder the elimination of corruption in Ukraine has been created. Among these problems and obstacles are:

- bureaucracy and an outdated system of power;
- mentality and passive civil position;
- social insecurity and low incomes of citizens;
- imperfect legislation and the absence of real mechanisms to combat corruption.

Finally, we should emphasize that the current state of the world economy and politics requires Ukraine to keep up with the times and pay attention to emerging problems, promptly resolving them. The fight against corruption should remain one of the top priorities of the state, despite government changes and policies of newly-elected presidents. According to the results of the study, society is informed about the state of corruption in Ukraine, its main causes and prerequisites for overcoming. And most importantly, considering the informants' answers, Ukrainians are ready to participate in the fight against corruption not only declaratively.

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