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Recovery of Women Well-Being in Migration: Example of Ukraine

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Abstract

The present study is focused on women well-being in migration. The aim was to investigate well-being of Ukrainian women migrants and to present the results of psychological work aimed at correcting the shortcomings of the emotional, social and behavioral aspects of the personality of women migrants with the help of special means of psychological influence. At the first stage an empirical study was conducted in Northern Italy during 2018-2019. The empirical sample consisted of 200 Ukrainian women - labor migrants aged 31 to 79 years who worked as caregivers. The Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (MHC-SF) was applied. The study of psychological well-being in the group of women migrant workers revealed mostly an average level (81.5%). At the same time, the study showed a low level of both emotional and social well-being (43.5% and 72%, respectively). At the second stage of the study psycho-correctional work was carried out with the labor migrant women and women displaced from Eastern Ukraine, where hostilities were taking place. 80 women were involved in the group psycho correction in Klaipeda city, Lithuania (June 2018). 120 women took part in individual counseling (on-line mode). Classes were held at the Kostyuk Institute of Psychology (Kyiv, Ukraine), once a week for 3 hours (2019-2020). The psycho-correctional work included the method of self-report, actualization of emotional states, the method of debriefing, as well as the art therapy. The use of psycho-correctional work showed positive effect on the emotional sphere of women, in particular, changes were noted in the balance of negative and positive emotions. Participants of the program improved their relationships with close people, as well as new goals and strategies to achieve them appeared.

Keywords: well-being, migrant women, forced migrants, social integration, art therapy methods.

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Introduction

Over the last twenty years, a number of international migrants have grown, reaching 281 million people living beyond the borders of the native country in 2020. In the Report of International migration-2020 is indicating that currently international migrants represent about 3.6 per cent of the world's population.

Migration is an important and urgent issue for Ukraine. The growths of labor migration abroad, as well as internal forced migration are, first of all, among the main challenges posed by migration processes for Ukraine. Labor migration of citizens abroad is the most massive and significant migration flow for Ukraine. Modern external labor migration is the most numerous and characteristic in all regions of the country, which the most distinctive feature is feminization (Odynets, 2013). Italy is one of countries where Ukrainian women migrate. Working abroad has become a strategy for Ukrainian women in order to survive and remotely improve the well-being of their families. According to official data from Italian sources, more than 234,066 people have a residence permit in Italy (La Comunità Ucraina in Italia, 2017). One of the researchers (Solari, 2011) mention the figure twice as high which is about 500-600 thousand people, citing the fact that official Italian statistics do not include Ukrainians with unregulated status that live and work in the country.

Ukraine has also faced the problem of internal forced migration. Thousands of families, left without homes and livelihoods, traveled away from the zone of military conflict to protect themselves from the consequences of war. According to the UN Refugee Agency, as of September 1, 2014, the number of internally displaced persons (displaced persons) from the eastern regions of Ukraine and Crimea in Ukraine reached 259,471 thousand people. Events that force people to leave their homes are so beyond the normal life that are experienced as extremely stressful for everyone in such situations (whether they are leaving after feeling anxious or due to a real threat to life during the deployment of military actions) (Blynova, 2016).

Literature review

Migration greatly affects the fate of people, pulls them out of their familiar surroundings, and leads to change in their life path. Scientists consider the migration situation as one of the types of extreme impact on an individual. The extremity of this situation is determined, on the one hand, by the high level of stressogenic events that cause migration; on the other hand, by the peculiarity of the process of adaptation to new conditions that require mobilization of all adaptive resources of an individual.

K. Oberg said that adaptation to a new socio-cultural environment is related to migrants with great psychological discomfort. Collision with another culture, in other words, cultural shock causes migrants' identity confusion, rejection, feelings of inferiority. As a result, according to L.A. Shajgerova, their basic structures of personality are destroyed, in particular, general picture of the world and self-image; the boundaries are blurred between inner and outer world, between life and death; as well as value systems and attitudes towards other people change dramatically (*Soldatova, Shajgerova, Kalilenko & Kravtsova, 2002*).

The psychological consequences of deprivation and isolation play an important role in the complex of problems inherent in migrants. Empirical studies show that migrants have a high level of frustration as basic and higher-level needs, as well as even high level of discrepancy between expectations and the real situation. Migrants have a variety of mental health disorders, including depression and distress, increased anxiety and agitation, as well as drastic changes in mood, phobic reactions, and sleep disorders (Fenta, Hyman & Noh, 2004; Marin & Mancini, 2017).

In the study of mental health, researchers are increasingly shifting focus from the absence of diseases to presence of well-being in its various forms (Keyes, 2006). Researchers (Delle Fave, Brdar, Freire, Vella-Brodrick & Wissing, 2011) indicate that people feel happy when they not only correct deficiency of satisfaction and comfort for self-regulation (hedonistic approach), but also when they try to spread their wings to fully enjoy life (eudemonic approach). The tripartite model of well-being (Keyes, 2006), which includes hedonic, psychological, and social components of personality functioning, is the best model compared to alternative models.

Empirical evidence (Baron-Epel & Kaplan, 2009; García-Gómez & Oliva, 2009) indicate that immigrant status is associated with lower level of emotional health and life satisfaction. Researchers (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) indicate that sense of control over the environment (mastery), autonomy and personal status, as well as satisfactory level of integration and social support are elements of the psychological well-being.

Such aspect of the well-being as positive relationships with other people (especially with members of a host society) is an essential element of success of the migration process. In this context, G.V. Soldatova (*Soldatova et al., 2002*), notes that relations between local residents and migrants are often tense, especially in the case of forced migrants.

Migrants characterize the local population as cold, lazy, jealous, and indifferent. In turn, from the point of view of local residents, forced migrants look aggressive, unfriendly, suspicious, insecure, opportunists and arrogant. Such perceptions reflect a high degree of mutual rejection and exacerbate relations between migrants and local residents.

Few studies have focused on welfare of migrants (Keyes, 2006). The social well-being is an assessment of one's own circumstances and functioning in a society. The social well-being covers, in particular, social integration, sense of belonging and acceptance, social contribution and social actualization. These aspects of a person's functioning are crucial for surveying the immigrant population, as they relate to those social challenges that may be particularly difficult for an immigrant in the new community.

The problem of studying the mental well-being of Ukrainian migrant women and their psychological support is completely new to national experts.

Methodology

Aims and purpose of the research

The aim of this study was to investigate well-being of Ukrainian women migrants and to present the results of psychological work aimed at correcting the shortcomings of the emotional, social and behavioral aspects of the personality of women migrants with the help of special means of psychological influence.

Methods

Mental Health Continuum Short Form (MHC-SF; Keyes, 2005). MHC-SF measures emotional, psychological and social well-being. Participants were required to respond to items on a 6-point Likert-type scale based on the experiences they had had over the last month (never, once or twice, about once a week, 2 or 3 times a week, almost every day, or every day).

The goals of the psycho-correctional stage were realized by using a set of specific exercises and techniques that created necessary conditions for client's psychological changes. The psycho-correctional work included the method of self-report with description of experiences, emotions; methods of Gestalt therapy: actualization of emotional states, assimilation of experience obtained in the course of the group and individual therapy; the method of debriefing, which confirmed situations of positive and negative experiences; as well as the art therapy (drawing of home and common territory).

The study participants included 200 labor migrant women working as caregivers or in cleaning service. The survey was conducted during 2018-2019 in Northern Italy. The average age of women surveyed was 58 years old, with the age range being between 31 and 79.

Psycho-correctional work was carried out with the labor migrant women and women displaced from Eastern Ukraine, where hostilities were taking place. 80 women were involved in the group psycho correction in Klaipeda city, Lithuania (June 2018). 120 women took part in individual counseling

(on-line mode). Classes were held at the Kostyuk Institute of Psychology (Kyiv, Ukraine), once a week for 3 hours. One hundred twenty women 120 aged from 35 to 56 years. Sessions were held for an hour, in complex cases (post-traumatic disorders) – up to two hours. More time could only be taken in critical cases. The psychotherapy was conducted in the form of “shuttle” – resource, work – resource.

Ethical approval

The study protocol received ethical approval from the Ethical Committee of Bologna University (Feb 2019, protocol n. 17685). Women provided written consent prior to their participation in the study.

Results and discussion

The study showed that almost similar part of women had an average level of emotional well-being (42.5%), others (14%) represented high level. At the same time, almost half of women (43.5%) have a low level of emotional well-being. It is obvious that women are not satisfied with the circumstances of their lives, in particular, with family relationships. Marital and family relationships are an important factor influencing feelings of happiness (Zimmermann & Easterlin, 2006).

Family members, such as spouses and children beneficially affect the well-being of migrants, providing social support (Shor, Roelfs & Yogev, 2013). However, with emigration of Ukrainian women, their families are exposed to a long-term threat (Marchetti & Venturini, 2013; Malynowska, 2010).

In the most cases, labor migrants themselves assess consequences of labor migration as “negative,” noting that although due to the work abroad they really have an opportunity to earn money, the family collapse becomes probable. It is necessary to pay attention to existence of an acute contradiction: a labor migrant travels abroad for the sake of family and, at the same time, runs the risk of losing the family due to the break of family ties (Blynova, 2016).

A. Toltokostorova thus argues that, despite sometimes being represented as a “gift of destiny” against economic hardships, labor emigration turns out to be a “poisoned chalice” (Marchetti & Venturini, 2013: 121).

The study of psychological well-being in the group of women migrant workers revealed mostly an average level (81.5%). Other women are divided in those with low (7.5%) and high level (11%). This result is rather an indication of satisfactory level of social support. Recent empirical studies show that social support received by a migrant can serve as a kind of buffer (Shor, Roelfs & Yogev, 2013).

Directly affecting the individual, it can improve the psychological well-being by reducing threats. Its effects can also be indirect and lead to increased self-esteem, thus mobilizing adaptive reactions in response to exposure to the stressor. Social support can be obtained from family, friends and acquaintances, representatives of their culture living abroad, as well as representatives of the host culture.

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) is one of the most influential organizations in Italy, which ensures unity for Ukrainian migrant women. It provides a wide range of practical support to migrants in the areas of religious guidance, nutrition, asylum and cultural programs (Fedyuk, 2011: 33).

Scientists note that a strong identification with their culture expects improvement in mental well-being that positively affects the psychological adaptation. While the inability to identify oneself with representatives of host country declines socio-cultural adaptation and then the social well-being (Orban-Lembryk, 2008), studies show that immigrants reported lower levels of well-being in terms of positive relationships with other persons (Bobowik, Basabe & Páez, 2015).

In terms of social well-being, most women presented a low level (72%). Only 28% had an average level. Migration to a wealthier country often implies a lower social status - migrants face alienation and marginalization, which is manifested by restricting implementation of social roles and lack of proper access to basic institutions of public life (health, education, inability to participate in elections, etc.) (Marin & Mancini, 2017; Rozhnovski & Bryk, 2008: 125).

In Italy most Ukrainian women work in the field of care, and therefore find themselves at the bottom of the social pyramid, despite most of them are well educated and were skilled workers prior to emigration (Vianello, 2014; Vianello, 2016: 171). Although, in general, employment in the host country is associated with reduced distress and higher levels of life satisfaction (Walther *et al.*, 2019), such difficulties as job security, poor wages, long working hours, poor working conditions can affect the social well-being of migrants (Islam, Cojocar, Rahman, Siti Hajar, Arnakim, 2016; Reza, Subramaniam & Islam, 2019).

Normalization of the psycho-emotional state of migrants, overcoming stress disorders by identifying and attracting all personal resources is an important element in restoring the psychological well-being. In this case, a person is able to more productive actions to adjust own life in new conditions of resettlement, in order to find work, arrange household activities, establish new social connections, thanks to which he/she receives informational, emotional, social, instrumental and other support (Blynova, 2016).

A significant role in this process is played by the possibility of influence of life prospects on activation of self-determination of personality development in crisis situations (Volodarska, 2018). At the same time, the psychotherapy can have a dominant effect on restoration of mental health of people, from patients with severe psychopathology to people experiencing problems, as well as to the normal population (Ruini & Marques, 2019).

Based on the results of empirical research, several main stages of psychotherapy of individual well-being have been identified. The first stage includes actualization of experiences, feelings, understanding of cultural features of experience of the psychological well-being in changing living conditions of women and their professional self-realization.

The method of psycho-education helps to explain to a person what is happening to him/her, his/her state, processes, by actualizing the causes of their occurrence. Description of phenomenology helps a person to stabilize his/her state. The smallest details are determined of life situations, wherein negative emotions are experienced (guilt, shame and others). Just the appeal to various details of color, smells, sounds helps to prevent aggravation, re-traumatization.

Restoration of women's psychological well-being was not so fast, but restoration of balance of positive and negative emotions, personal experiences was powerful impetus to this. The debriefing was used, which is a method for confirmation of the situation of negative emotions and experiences; it is a tool that enables making more structured narrative of individual.

It is impossible to invalidate negative feelings and experiences, deny them. Only actualization of causes of their occurrence and search for opportunities help to reduce the level of anxiety and fear. Activities that give pleasure and positive emotions (books, movies, dances, etc.) help as well.

Positive emotions separate feelings of confusion, insecurity. Recognition and acceptance of negative feelings transform them into a state of equality with other emotions (as full-fledged), providing power to sustain their burden without feeling of own inferiority, inability to be changed.

If negative feelings turn into guilt, anger and feeling of helplessness, it seems to a person that the whole world is hostile to him/her, surrounding persons are hostile, they have a superior attitude and they are uncomfortable to communicate. This causes unwillingness to interact and communicate with them, making a person deconditioned.

That is why there is a need of his/her re-socialization. In the process of re-socialization, women observed manifestations of feelings of desperation, dissatisfaction with themselves, insecurity, self-doubt, feeling of guilt toward all family members, fear of punishment for doing something wrong, unexpected.

At the next stage of the search for resource (an extent of opportunity to work with negative experiences), questions are asked about the resources for psychological well-being restoration, time to experience traumatic experiences caused by relocation. Retraumatization is possible due to recurrence of a crisis situation; therefore, clarification and detailing of situations (smells, sounds, etc.) are required.

The method is used for scrolling in details the situation of event in order to process traumatic experiences. The person must present this situation and scroll it very quickly and then slowly with purpose to distance the situation and look at

it from different angles. This is possible if the individual is ready to return to a crisis situation. Aggression and auto aggression may increase. In such case, the technology can be productive of this desire playback onto imaginary originator of situation. Questions are asked about the safe resource location. E.g., it is suggested to imagine a place where a person feels good, describing smells, colors and sounds.

At the final stage of stabilization, the process takes place of the emotional state normalization. Use of the “grounding” method helps to reduce the level of anxiety in negative experiences. Carrying out breathing exercises, physical therapy helps to restore control over manifestation of emotions. The technique for restoration of feeling of the body (feel own hands, back, legs, feet, toes, muscles, thighs; listen to own breathing, slowing down own breathing). The technique for tapping the body (starting from the head – crown, above eyes, on the side of eyes, under nose, under lower lip, chest and ending with fingers).

During the session, questions were summarized that help to actualize the feeling of psychological well-being: “How do you feel in a state of psychological well-being? What situations evoke feelings of psychological well-being? How do you get out of a situation where you feel unhappy, negative emotions? How does a sense of psychological well-being affect your behavior? What would help to overcome negative experiences that create obstacles in the psychological well-being restoration? ” Answers to the questions were summarized and ranked by importance, which helped in selection of art therapy methods.

Results of the formative experiment showed importance of the balance of negative and positive experiences in spiritual, physical and material components of psychological well-being. Yes, most women associated their well-being with family well-being (meeting a future husband, marriage, joy of having children, grandchildren). These events were determined as positive in the past, what had already happened before the resettlement (42%).

Recalling positive moments, it was said that “now is not as joyful as before”, “who knows, if those good times will return? » From the moment of resettlement, the feeling of well-being is lost; there is confusion, feelings of loneliness, guilt to children “for what happened.” Feelings were discussed of disbelief in restoration of positive emotions of joy, satisfaction and confidence.

Positive feelings about current professional activity (changes in place of work, type of work, profession) were in second place (35%). Working conditions in the past and present were compared (positive and negative emotions). New working conditions, material well-being (in Kyiv, in a big city, promising work, with more opportunities) were noted as positive. The aggressive-negative personal attitude towards oneself and others was noted as opposition (“nothing has changed since we moved”, “nobody helps”, “I feel lonely”).

Expectation of positive changes in the future, motivation for success and self-realization (social approval of achievements in life) were in third place (20%). In contrast, negative emotions were noted “I don’t want to do anything, so I don’t

do anything.” These are mostly statements that reflect socially discouraged views and attitudes.

Positive emotions in relationships with other persons (relatives, friends, and colleagues, new and former neighbors) were in fourth place (3%).

An interesting result of the study arose from comparison of characteristics of the psychological well-being in groups of internally displaced women and women workers. In both groups of women, similarities were noted in determination of material component of the psychological well-being (material support to children’s education, improvement of quality of life and family well-being).

Common characteristics of women in two groups are: isolation from homes, habitual living conditions, crisis life situations (material deprivation, illness, loss of relatives, military actions in Eastern Ukraine, annexation of Crimea). The difference between these groups of women was manifested in the greater cohesion of female workers, which was enhanced by their common religious affiliation (they meet in the church every Sunday, on holidays, weekends), one professional orientation (caregivers of foreigners). In the group of women migrants, they belonged to different religious denominations, had different professions and different material support.

Similarity of the emotional state of women in two groups was manifested in the experience of anxiety for the future of children, family relationships with husbands (quarrels over living in changed conditions, divorce). They were united with feelings of shame, guilt for their own inability to change crisis life situations. In such cases, social status, personal acquaintance, similarity of opinions, style in clothes of these people was of no importance; it is important that they feel the same feeling of shame, guilt.

Values that form psychological well-being and system of accompanying feelings are important: guilt, fear, kind of transition between emotions according to their stimulus. Polarity of the relationship between positive and negative emotions, similarity of some common characteristics of emotions determined the psychological well-being of individual (universality and plasticity of this mental phenomenon).

In groups of mixed type (by profession, nationality, religion) (Catholics, Orthodox, Jews), by age (from 35 to 55 years) conflict situations were noted in communication, priorities, values, views on psychological well-being, life strategies. Understanding appeared in the issue of self-realization through profession, work, obtaining benefits for migrants, preferences in vocational retraining, gaining new knowledge, professional skills.

Results of the formative experiment showed changes in the balance of negative and positive emotions, which had positive effect on restoring the psychological well-being of migrant women. The biggest changes were in relationships with relatives, family members, neighbors. Gradually, women considered alternative

strategies to achieve their goals (changes in professional activities, new housing, children's education, etc.).

Limitations

Little work has been done for a thorough assess the impact of psycho-correctional programs, and such work faces challenges. The most difficult problem that had to face was the resistance of women to adopt the psychological techniques in the process of psycho-correctional work – women remained emotionally closed. Another problem is the lack of quantitative and comparative analysis of the results of psycho-correctional effects with labor and forced migrants. Psycho-correctional measures to restore the psychological well-being of vulnerable populations, including labor and forced migrants, should further continue.

Conclusion

Migration, whether forced or labor, is accompanied by a range of experiences that are associated with the need for complete reorganization of life, which is reflected in the psychological well-being of migrants. The empirical research revealed low levels of emotional and social well-being of migrant women and showed the need for psychological support. The results of psycho-correctional work demonstrated the effectiveness of methods for psychological well-being restoration of women in migration. The use of psycho-correctional work showed positive effect on the emotional sphere of women, in particular, changes were noted in the balance of negative and positive emotions. Participants of the program improved their relationships with close people, as well as new goals and strategies to achieve them appeared.

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