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# PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN UKRAINE AND EMIGRANTS ABROAD: CHALLENGES OF WARTIME

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# Psychological Support of Internally Displaced Persons in Ukraine and Emigrants Abroad: Challenges of Wartime

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#### **Abstract**

In the context of war, providing timely psychological support is crucial for internally displaced persons in Ukraine and emigrants abroad. This kind of assistance is considered a priority for individuals who have recently experienced traumatic events and are in a vulnerable psychological state. The article is focused on identifying mental health problems among individuals who have been temporarily displaced or emigrated abroad during the war. It aims to improve the toolkit for providing psychological support to these populations. The study analyses the specific challenges associated with providing psychological support to these

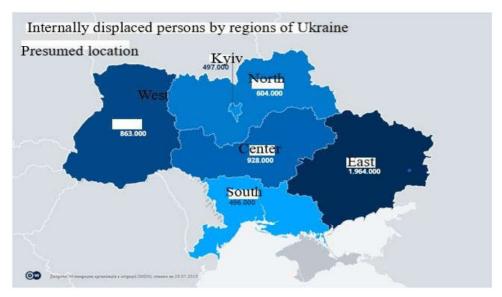
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individuals. Forced resettlement to another region or country, combined with the prolonged impact of information stress, air raids, and the loss of a normal way of life, has been shown to contribute to the development of psychological disorders at both emotional and behavioural levels. The article focuses on the specificity of manifestations of prolonged stress, which can take the form of severe anxiety and excessive worry, as well as unpredictable outbursts of anger. It is widely accepted that physical stress can cause symptoms such as muscle pain, chronic fatigue, rapid heartbeat, and increased irritability. The physical aspects of stress, when combined, can have a detrimental effect on a person's personality and negatively impact their psychological well-being. This paper defines the complexity levels of mental disorders and outlines their factoriality. Factors such as age, involvement in the emergency (as a witness, participant, or directly affected), personal life experience, psychological health, and interpersonal relationships are considered. A conceptual approach is proposed for providing first psychological aid to the studied population categories. This includes providing emotional, physical, and social support to the affected individual, enhancing their sense of security. The practical significance of the research results lies in their potential application in the development, improvement, and implementation of psychological support programs for internally displaced persons in Ukraine and emigrants abroad in wartime conditions.

Keywords: psychological assistance, psychological well-being, temporarily displaced persons, emigrants, wartime, stress, martial law.

#### Introduction

Presently, Ukraine is confronted with the grim reality of full-scale armed aggression initiated by the Russian Federation, a crisis that has profoundly impacted the lives of millions of Ukrainians. Consequently, the imposition of martial law has resulted in a significant exodus of citizens seeking to preserve their own lives and those of their families. The Ministry of Reintegration of Ukraine reports that over five million individuals have sought refuge within different regions of the country (Figure 1). The UN Refugee Agency has documented a total of 6,280,000 Ukrainian refugees globally, as of June 6, 2023.



Source: (Ajzele, 2023).

Figure 1. Displaced persons in Ukraine

Temporarily displaced individuals within their home country and emigrants residing abroad may experience feelings of rejection and isolation within the host community, which hinders their ability to form new relationships. The challenging circumstances contribute to a sense of discomfort, heightened anxiety, increased aggressiveness, reduced social engagement, diminished self-esteem, and negative attitudes toward others. Consequently, individuals are frequently compelled to reevaluate their perspectives and cultivate new professional and social skills to adapt to their new circumstances.

The impact of war on the mental health of affected individuals is notably detrimental. Common mental reactions to the military situation in the country include physical health complaints, sleep disturbances, attention and memory disorders, excessive anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Overall, researchers indicate that approximately half of those who have relocated from war zones develop post-traumatic disorders of varying severity. While a majority of individuals with psychological disorders experience a gradual recovery and the disappearance of symptoms over time, a portion of the affected population transitions into chronic conditions that necessitate qualified psychological assistance. Timely provision of initial psychological support, which can be administered by relatives or individuals close to the person, assumes significance. This support is specifically geared towards offering physical and emotional assistance and cultivating a sense of security in the individual's life.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified that the incidence of depression and anxiety significantly increases during humanitarian crises. Among individuals who have endured war or military conflict within the past decade, the prevalence of mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia stands at approximately 1 in 5. Furthermore, approximately 1 in 11 individuals in this population will experience a moderate or severe mental health disorder.

#### Literature review

Several targeted programs, methodological resources, and practical guides have been formulated and endorsed at the national level (Mulska, Vasyltsiv, Shushkova, Kloba & Parfenyuk, 2022). The Ukrainian Scientific and Medical Center, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), has produced two compilations of methodological recommendations as well as a practical guide containing recommendations for assisting individuals in emergencies. Printed copies of these resources have been disseminated to relevant centers, while electronic versions are readily accessible on the websites of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Scientific and Medical Center, and various other NGOs.

In the current Program of Medical Guarantees for 2025, psychological assistance to patients is included in several service packages, as well as requirements for the presence of psychologists on the staff of healthcare institutions. In addition, the existing packages of psychological assistance in medical guarantee programs were analyzed, providing recommendations for improving the provision of relevant services (Klymchuk, 2023).

The studies of Ukrainian scientists related to the provision of mental health and human well-being in conditions of war are significant (Karamushka, Kredencer, Tereshhenko & Laghodzinsjka, 2023; Sanko, 2016); coverage of theoretical-methodological, normative-legal and technological aspects of psychological and social work with internally displaced persons in the modern realities of Ukraine (Nikonenko, Shtets, Kalinin, Dorosh & Sokolik, 2022; Ustinov, 2023; Kamenshchuk, 2022; Tytarenko & Dvornyk, 2022), with emigrants abroad (Slyusarevskyi & Blynova, 2013; Pedorenko, 2023); experience in assisting victims of military conflict, in particular, children and families (Kornijenko, Lisovecjka, Lucenko & Romanovsjka, 2017); analysis of psychological features of personal changes of immigrants in war conditions (Maksymenko & Morozova-Jokhannessen, 2022); review of the components of psychological care in the program of medical guarantees 2023, 2025 (Klymchuk, 2023).

American MDs and psychologists examined risk factors and approaches to mental health assessment, prevention, and treatment of common immigrant mental health problems in primary care settings (Laurence, Kirmayer, Munoz, Rashid & Ryder, 2011). Emigrants during resettlement carry out three main groups of transitions: changes in personal relationships and reconstruction of social relations, transition from one socio-economic system to another, and transition from one cultural system to another.

## Methodology

#### Study aims

The study aims to analyze the current theoretical and practical framework concerning the provision of psychological support to temporarily displaced individuals and emigrants. In pursuit of this aim, the following tasks have been identified: (1) to delineate the fundamental essence of the concept of "psychological support," (2) to evaluate the existing system of psychological support, encompassing state programs, centers, and internet technologies, and (3) to examine the various types and specific characteristics of psychological support.

#### Research objectives

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the distinctive features and indicators of the psychological impact of adverse events resulting from the war on temporarily displaced individuals and emigrants residing abroad. Furthermore, this research aims to specify the particularities of psychological support, including its constituent elements and various types. Additionally, the study will explore the extent of state support, such as programs and strategies, provided for the delivery of psychological services aimed at the rehabilitation of individuals affected by military conflicts. Furthermore, the role played by existing public and volunteer centers, as well as information technologies, in offering free psychological counseling services in Ukraine and abroad will be examined.

## Methodology

The study employed a systematic approach to examine the intricacies of the psychological support concept The conceptual structure (Figure 2) is drafted by authors for study to discuss the interrelationships and interactions among its components and stages. Additionally, the research utilized the method of analyzing normative and instructional-methodological documents relevant to the research topic. The method of systematization and synthesis was applied to consolidate theoretical and practical materials with selection the primary types and main areas (Figure 3) of psychological support, to discuss the main problems of psychological work and existing ways of solving these problems presented in normative and instructional-methodological documents materials.



Figure 2. The main components of psychological support

#### Results

The concept of "psychological support" is defined by psychology experts as a structured intervention conducted by psychologists to establish a comprehensive framework comprising clinical, counseling, and psychotherapeutic elements (Kredencer, Karamushka, Valjdshmidt & Klimov, 2022). The overarching objective is to facilitate successful adaptation to the environment, promote rehabilitation, support personal recovery, and foster the establishment of meaningful relationships conducive to self-realization (Kotukh, 2023).

Psychological support exhibits several key characteristics, namely individuality, procedural nature, time duration, vagueness, immersion in the individual's daily life, and the establishment of unique relationships among the participants engaged in the process (Shcherban, Chernousov & Prashko, 2022).

The structure of psychological support comprises three primary components:

- 1) Diagnosis (tracking) serves as the foundation for setting goals (Lemak, Petryshhe & Ju, 2012).
  - 2) Selection and implementation of methodological measures.
- 3) Intermediate and final analysis of the outcomes to make necessary adjustments to the workflow (see Figure 2).

In the broader context, the process of psychological support follows a sequential progression. The initial phase involves the psychologist's efforts to stabilize the affected individual, gradually guiding them out of a state of shock or denial and enabling them to acknowledge and accept their traumatic experience. Consequently, the psychologist's primary objective is to alleviate tension and alleviate symptoms of stress. Following the stabilization phase, the subsequent critical step entails identifying and reestablishing the person's psychological resources. This involves fostering the activation of the individual's inherent internal psychological reservoirs, enabling them to draw upon their inner strength to confront and overcome the effects of stress (Chervonna, 2015). Subsequently, it becomes essential to establish conducive conditions for comprehending and facilitating the direct or symbolic expression of negative experiences. This paves the way for activating the innate self-healing mechanisms within the individual, while simultaneously providing support for positive transformations in their

perception of new circumstances. Engaging in activities such as participating in stimulating clubs, creative endeavors, social interactions, and engaging in leisure pursuits are instrumental in facilitating these positive changes (Ali, Allan, Amer, Baca & Baron, 2017; Fassil & Burnett, 2015).

The primary types of psychological support encompass the following approaches:

- 1. Individual counseling, which involves engaging in dialogue and discussions to address specific situations experienced by the individual.
- 2. Self-help groups, which foster a sense of unity among community members, enhance self-confidence and develop positive coping skills.
- 3. Family counseling, which centers on exploring an individual's traumatic experiences and identifying personal resources within the family context.
  - 4. Psycho-correctional groups, which focus on comprehending trauma, identifying strategies to overcome and mitigate the negative impacts of stress, addressing psychological disorders, and enhancing the overall quality of life (Ali et al., 2017; Andrieienkova, Bandurka, Bochkor, Vykhodtseva & Voitsiakh, 2015).

These methods of psychological support serve to assist temporarily displaced individuals and emigrants abroad in managing stress, restoring inner equilibrium, strengthening both moral and physical well-being, and tapping into additional psychological resources to navigate challenging life circumstances (Kotukh, 2023).

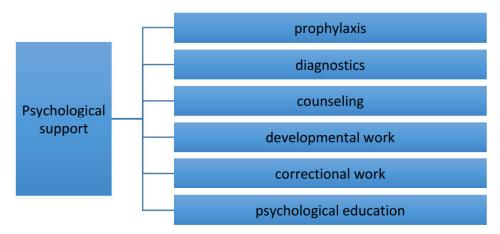


Figure 3. Areas (types) of psychological support

Primarily, government authorities were assigned the responsibility of facilitating the accommodation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and ensuring the provision of fundamental necessities such as food, temporary housing, hygiene products, clothing, and so forth. Simultaneously, there was a pressing need for psychological support and assistance among the affected population. As the year progressed, the demand for psychological help noticeably escalated. Once

individuals had managed to address their basic needs to some extent, they could then begin to prioritize their psychological well-being (Kamenshchuk, 2022; Kotukh, 2023).

One of the initial challenges encountered was the lack of information regarding the availability of free psychological services for temporarily displaced persons and emigrants. These individuals faced difficulties in identifying where to seek assistance, whom to contact, and how to navigate the process effectively. In response to this issue, the Ministry of Reintegration of Ukraine gradually compiled a comprehensive list of contacts in the central and western regions of Ukraine. This resource enables IDPs to access qualified psychological support, catering to both adults and children, without any financial burden. Furthermore, the International Organization for Migration offers a free and confidential psychological hotline, ensuring individuals have access to anonymous counseling services. The hotline accommodates various languages, including Ukrainian, to facilitate communication. Additionally, the National Psychological Association has established a toll-free psychological hotline to aid Ukrainians affected by the ongoing hostilities. The website provides a comprehensive list of phone numbers for different regions within the country and even abroad. It is worth noting that all participating psychologists undergo proper training and adhere to international and ethical standards when providing counseling services. Psychological support is available through various online portals and platforms, ensuring accessibility and convenience for those in need. These include portals such as "Help24" and several charity centers, including "Rozkazhy meni" (*Tell me*), the Psychological support center ObiyMy, and Open Doors Psychological Counseling Center. Free online platforms specifically designed for psychological counseling, such as "Rozkazhy meni" (Tell me), "UkrEdnist," "Resilience Hub," and "UA Mental Help," offer additional avenues for support. To further extend assistance, chatbots on Telegram have been developed to provide psychological support to Ukrainians. Notable examples include "Druh. Persha dopomoha" (Friend. First aid), "Slova dopomahaiut" (Words help), "PsyHelpUA," and "Open Doors Center". Additionally, a mobile application called "Teplo" is available for accessing support services. Moreover, foreign organizations such as the Refugee Council, Freedom from Torture, Helen Bamber Foundation, Rethink, and The Chinese Mental Health Association also play a significant role in supporting the psychological well-being of emigrants. These organizations work diligently to provide necessary assistance and care.

Currently, the government is actively working towards ensuring comprehensive medical and rehabilitation assistance to individuals affected by the war. As part of this effort, rehabilitation services are provided free of charge and are guaranteed by the state through contracted medical institutions affiliated with the National Health Service of Ukraine. These services fall under the "Rehabilitation care for adults and children in inpatient settings" package. Psychological assistance is an integral component of the rehabilitation process, addressing the unique needs of each individual. Rehabilitation plans are customized and developed by

a multidisciplinary team based on the outcomes of thorough assessments and examinations (Klymchuk, 2023).

The obligatory psychological rehabilitation services offered by registered institutions such as National Health Service of Ukraine and National Psychological Association with state support encompass various aspects, including:

- 1. Initial diagnostic assessment: A comprehensive evaluation of the individual's mental state to identify specific needs and challenges.
- 2. Clarification of psychological needs: Thoroughly understanding the psychological requirements of the person to determine appropriate interventions.
- 3. Development of an individualized psychological support plan: Creating a customized plan that addresses the unique needs and goals of the individual.
- 4. Provision of psychological assistance: Delivering psychological support through remote or inpatient settings based on the individual's condition and requirements.
- 5. Guaranteeing psychiatric examination: Ensuring access to psychiatric evaluations for clients who may require specialized mental health assessments.
- 6. Support for family members: Offering assistance and guidance to the family members of the service recipient, recognizing the importance of their support network.
- 7. Psychodiagnostic testing and therapy: Conducting relevant psychodiagnostic tests and delivering appropriate therapeutic interventions as part of the rehabilitation process.
- 8. Timely provision of emergency medical care: Ensuring prompt medical attention in situations where the individual's life is at risk.

The existing Medical Guarantees Program for the period of 2023-2025 incorporates provisions for psychological assistance to individuals affected by the war, alongside the stipulation of psychologist presence within healthcare institutions. This inclusion of measures aims to facilitate easier access to psychological support for the Ukrainian population. As part of this initiative, individuals can seek psychological assistance directly from their primary care physician by expressing their concerns and needs (Shcherban et al., 2022). Furthermore, primary care doctors are undergoing appropriate training to enhance their capabilities in providing psychological support.

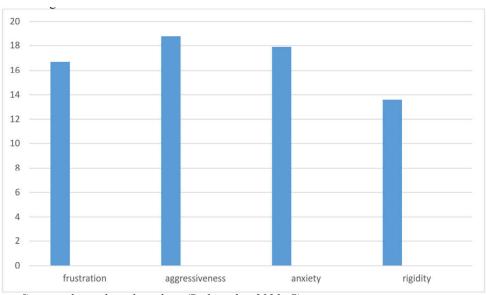
The Eastern Europe branch of the David Lynch Foundation has successfully implemented a mental rehabilitation program in Ukraine targeting individuals

affected by military aggression. This program specifically caters to temporarily displaced persons, with a particular emphasis on women and children. It also extends its support to individuals who have been released from captivity and those who actively engage in volunteer work, including military psychologists, doctors, emergency workers, and professionals employed in other rehabilitation programs. These professions bear significant psychological burdens and are therefore recognized as priority beneficiaries of the program (Shcherban et al., 2022; Fassil & Burnett, 2015).

Furthermore, there has been a notable increase in the provision of training sessions, seminars, webinars, and forums, bringing together professionals from Ukraine and various parts of the world. These events serve as platforms for doctors, experts, and representatives of international institutions, foundations, and European countries to engage in discussions, analysis, and the development of effective approaches to deliver high-quality psychological assistance to individuals impacted by the war. Additionally, the utilization of social media platforms and the establishment of online communities have played a crucial role in enhancing the quality of professional psychological support (Kredencer et al., 2022).

To facilitate personal growth and self-development, individuals have the opportunity to engage in online courses specifically designed to enhance their understanding and application of psychological assistance within the context of war. Examples of such courses include "Basic Psychological Assistance in War Conditions" and "Knowledge and Skills for Providing Support." Additionally, individuals can benefit from following the exercises and recommendations outlined in the World Health Organization's illustrated guide, which focuses on acquiring essential skills to effectively manage stress during challenging times.

The average indicators of self-assessment of mental states of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and Ukrainian emigrants abroad who left in wartime were obtained through the analysis of empirical studies conducted by individual researchers (Pedorenko, 2023: 7). The scientists conducted a study of self-assessment of mental states of a person based on the H. Eysenck test. The results are shown in Figure 4.

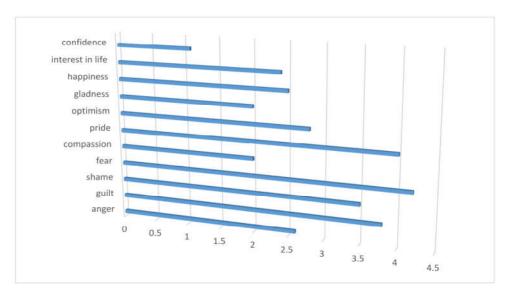


Source: the authors based on (Pedorenko, 2023: 7)

Figure 4. Indicators of self-assessment of mental states of internally displaced persons (based on the H. Eysenck's test "Self-assessment of mental states of a person")

Upon analysing Figure 4, it can be concluded that the respondents have high scores on the anxiety, rigidity, aggression, and frustration scales. The highest scores were identified on the aggressiveness scale, which indicates significant difficulties in interacting with the social environment. The anxiety scale yielded a high score, indicating high emotional tension, irritability, negative premonitions, and physical symptoms such as heart palpitations, excessive sweating, and respiratory distress. Internally displaced persons also exhibit low self-esteem, avoidance of difficulties, and strongly held rigid beliefs.

Researchers Pedorenko analysed the psychological and emotional state of Ukrainian IDPs who received temporary protection in Germany (Figure 5).



Source: the authors based on (Pedorenko, 2023: 7)

Figure 5. Indicators of emotional states of Ukrainian emigrants (based on the example of IDPs in Germany)

Figure 5 analysis indicates that respondents are uncertain about their families' future in Ukraine but demonstrate average levels of optimism. The 'pride' and 'shame' scale received a relatively high score. The research suggests that Ukrainian forced migrants associate feelings of pride with their belonging to the Ukrainian nation, while feelings of shame are linked to specific personal problems and difficulties encountered in a foreign country.

The results also indicate that forced migrants experience significant emotional discomfort. Low scores on the 'compassion' scale may indicate an exacerbation of forced migrants' selfish orientation, as well as a decrease in emotional sensitivity and empathy.

High values on the 'feeling of guilt' scale may have prolonged negative consequences in the future, potentially leading to the development of a 'refugee syndrome.' Additionally, forced migrants may be conflictual and demonstrate inflexibility in their behaviour and beliefs, which can be attributed to high levels of fear. Respondents showed low scores for positive emotions such as joy and happiness, as well as for the 'interest in life' scale.

Therefore, these current sociological-psychological studies strongly suggest the need to develop and implement new strategic concepts for psychological support for internally displaced persons in Ukraine and emigrants abroad. These concepts could help to restore psychological stability in vulnerable segments of society that have experienced the traumatic effects of wartime. Additionally, they could implement a system of preventive protection against negative consequences for the mental health of the population.

#### Discussion

After conducting a comprehensive analysis of the available sources and the current infrastructure of organizations offering psychological support to temporarily displaced individuals and emigrants, it becomes evident that public and charitable institutions have made a substantial contribution (Hubanova, Shchokin, Hubanov, Antonov & Slobodianiuk *et al.*, 2022; Popovych, Semenov, Hrys, Aleksieieva & Pavliuk *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, the utilization of information technology has played a pivotal role in this endeavor (Akimov, Karpa, Parkhomenko-Kutsevil, Kupriichuk & Omarov, 2021). Nevertheless, it is crucial to enhance the operations of state medical establishments and provide further clarification in state programs to ensure their effectiveness and efficiency (Levytska, Mulska, Ivaniuk, Kunytska-Iliash & Vasyltsiv, 2022; Nikonenko *et al.*, 2022).

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the significance of mental health at various levels, including community, state, and global spheres (Koliadenko, Zhyvago & Bursa, 2022). While the responsibility for establishing a comprehensive mental health system primarily rests with legislators and central authorities, it should also be prioritized by local communities, authorities, services, and organizations (Nikonenko *et al.*, 2022). It is of utmost importance that relevant services within local authorities and communities, regardless of urban or rural settings, place emphasis on the value of mental health in the lives of individuals and acknowledge the significance of providing support not only to individuals with mental disorders but also to the broader population and those at risk. Equally essential are preventive measures aimed at averting mental illnesses and promoting the mental well-being of all citizens (Mulska *et al.*, 2022). Consequently, it is imperative to develop educational initiatives that ensure the long-term psychological health of the population.

The topic of emotional burnout among practical psychologists who assist a significant number of individuals affected by war is worthy of attention. Given the nature of their work involving direct interactions with individuals, psychologists are expected to possess advanced interpersonal communication skills. Burnout becomes apparent through feelings of exhaustion and emotional strain, personal detachment from the subject matter, a sense of depleted emotional resources, and

a decline in motivation to fulfill professional responsibilities. Consequently, there is a need to enhance the existing system and establish mechanisms that engage and motivate professionals in the field of psychology.

#### Conclusion

Psychological support plays a crucial role as a facilitator of personal development and an integral part of the process of maintaining and restoring individuals' psychological well-being. This study explores the various forms of support provided by the state, as well as public and charitable organizations and centers in Ukraine and abroad. Two distinct types of psychological work with temporarily displaced persons can be identified: 1) individualized psychological assistance, involving targeted interventions for individuals or specific groups with shared rehabilitation needs, and 2) organizational work, which entails organizing the operations of psychological centers or services and selecting appropriate support programs based on the psychological needs identified through assessment.

Psychological interventions for temporarily displaced persons are implemented by trained professionals in community centers, state institutions, and in collaboration with educational and healthcare authorities, as well as charitable centers. These interventions encompass a range of services, including psychological counseling, corrective measures, and support for social adaptation. Additionally, professionals provide psychological assistance during acute crises and in the aftermath of traumatic stress. They also engage in psychological prevention efforts aimed at mitigating stress. Other activities involve conducting psychological pieces of training, delivering training in self-regulation and self-care techniques, and performing psychological assessments to evaluate the developmental progress of children and adolescents from internally displaced families.

Enhancing the psychological well-being of individuals and society at large is not only crucial for restoring healthy psychological dynamics and improving quality of life but also serves as a prerequisite for overall national development.

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