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## REHABILITATION ENVIRONMENT AS A FACTOR IN PREVENTING THE CONSEQUENCES OF TRAUMATIC EVENTS AND PROMOTING POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH OF CHILDREN AFFECTED BY WARFARE

**Abstract.** *The article is dedicated to the most pressing topic in the psychological space of Ukraine today – psychological assistance to children affected by military actions. This problem is urgent and requires a combination of theoretical and practical knowledge in terms of creating a rehabilitation environment that would not only work to overcome the consequences of psychotraumatic events related to the war, but also be aimed at post-traumatic personality development.*

*The article analyzes the theoretical substantiation of the problem of creating a rehabilitation environment for children affected by military operations. The criteria of the rehabilitation environment, signs, types, features, functions that it should perform, what tasks it is aimed at, and what characteristics should be defined.*

*The purpose of this article is to familiarise the psychological community with the programme “Creating a rehabilitation environment to prevent the consequences of psychotraumatic events and promote post-traumatic growth in children affected by military actions”, which was created for the relevant target group, practically tested and showed positive results in providing psychosocial assistance to children affected by military actions.*

*The article outlines the purpose and objectives of the proposed programme for creating a rehabilitation environment for children affected by military operations. It also presents its structure, semantic load, principles of construction, elements of saturation of its practical component, the order and system of content components.*

*The proposed programme is based on a systematic approach, group dynamics, the unity of personality and activity, as well as on the principles of psycho-corrective influence of creativity and ecological communication.*

*The article also shows the initial results of the implementation of the programme, which have already been recorded during its testing in a summer recreation facility for children of this target group, and identifies ways to further improve this programme for active use in the context of military operations that are still ongoing in our country.*

**Key words:** *rehabilitation environment, psychotraumatic events, post-traumatic growth, psychosocial assistance, psychological exercises, psychocorrective influence, psychological development.*

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## РЕАБІЛІТАЦІЙНЕ СЕРЕДОВИЩЕ ЯК ФАКТОР ЗАПОБІГАННЯ НАСЛІДКАМ ТРАВМАТИЧНИХ ПОДІЙ ТА СПРИЯННЯ ПОСТТРАВМАТИЧНОМУ РОСТУ ДІТЕЙ, ЯКІ ПОСТРАЖДАЛИ ВНАСЛІДОК ВОЄННИХ ДІЙ

**Анотація.** *Стаття присвячена найактуальнішій темі сьогодення у психологічному просторі України – психологічній допомозі дітям, які постраждали внаслідок воєнних дій.*

Ця проблема є більш актуальною і потребує поєднання теоретичних і практичних знань у сфері створення реабілітаційного середовища, яке б не лише працювало на подолання наслідків психотравматичних подій, пов'язаних із війною, а й було б спрямоване на посттравматичний розвиток особистості.

У статті досліджено теоретичне обґрунтування проблеми створення реабілітаційного середовища для дітей, які постраждали внаслідок бойових дій. Визначено критерії реабілітаційного середовища, ознаки, види, особливості, функції, які воно має виконувати, на які завдання спрямоване, які характеристики.

Метою статті є ознайомлення психологічної громадськості із програмою «Створення реабілітаційного середовища для запобігання наслідкам травматичних подій та сприяння посттравматичному розвитку дітей, які постраждали внаслідок бойових дій», яка створена для відповідної цільової групи, практично апробована та показала позитивні результати в наданні психосоціальної допомоги дітям, які постраждали внаслідок бойових дій.

У статті визначено мету та завдання запропонованої програми – створення реабілітаційного середовища для дітей, які постраждали внаслідок бойових дій. Також подано його структуру, смислове навантаження, принципи побудови, елементи насичення його практичної складової частини, зазначено порядок і систему змістових компонентів.

Пропонована програма базується на системному підході, груповій динаміці, єдності особистості та діяльності, а також на принципах корекційного впливу творчості й екологічного спілкування.

Також наведено первинні результати реалізації зазначеної програми, які вже були зафіксовані за період її затвердження в закладі літнього відпочинку дітей даної цільової групи, а також шляхи подальшого вдосконалення цієї програми для активного застосування в умовах бойових дій, які ще тривають на території нашої країни.

**Ключові слова:** реабілітаційне середовище, травматичні події, посттравматичний ріст, психосоціальна допомога, психологічні вправи, корекційний вплив, психологічний розвиток.

**Statement of the problem.** In the context of Russia's full-scale military aggression against Ukraine, under the influence of its negative consequences, in the difficult circumstances of today, we see an exponential increase in the number of children who find themselves in difficult life circumstances, have experienced psychotraumatic experiences, and have become victims of violence. This situation poses a crucial task for the scientific psychological community to develop and implement a set of effective methods, tools and techniques for working with such children, to create effective methods and tools for such work. This whole complex is aimed primarily at improving the psychological state of children affected by war, preventing and preventing post-traumatic consequences, and promoting their post-traumatic growth.

**Research analysis.** Today, the world psychological practice has already accumulated some experience in providing psychological assistance to children in past military conflicts during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The experience of Israeli psychologists in the context of permanent military conflict, psychologists of the former Yugoslavia in the acute phase of hostilities and interethnic local conflicts, the experience of the International Red Cross Mission in Syria and other African countries is significant and powerful, but it cannot be directly implemented in Ukraine because of the scale and duration of hostilities, the area of the territories under occupation and subjected to massive rocket attacks and bombardment with heavy, long-range weapons cannot be compared with any of these conflicts and even with all military conflicts over the past 100 years except for the Second World War. All of this forces practical psychologists in Ukraine and around the world to find ways to respond adequately and quickly to this situation and to develop effective tools for providing psychological assistance to children, taking into account the peculiarities and specifics of the real situation in Ukraine, as well as to be proactive in order to be ready to work with acute children's problems not only before, but also in the post-war period.

One of the most effective tools in dealing with psychological trauma is a rehabilitation environment, as described in the works of many researchers and practitioners in the field of psychology, especially since 2014, in particular, V. Gorbunova, Y. Udovenko. Many works pay special attention to the problem of promoting post-traumatic growth, for example, V. Klymchuk, G. Lazos, S. Levine, A. Laufer, Y. Hamama-Raz, E. Stein, Z. Solomon. This idea is the basis of the programme "Creating a rehabilitation environment to prevent the consequences of traumatic events and promote post-traumatic growth in

children affected by military actions” for practical implementation in recreation facilities for children of this target group.

**The purpose of the article.** The article describes the programme “Creating a rehabilitation environment to prevent the consequences of psychotraumatic events and promote post-traumatic growth in children affected by military operations”.

**Summary of the main material.** This programme of psychological assistance was created as a result of the practical work of psychologists with children who were exposed to psychotraumatic events during the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, including physical, sexual, psychological violence, and who witnessed military operations directly (shelling, mine explosions, etc.), resulting in symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. The programme was tested at the Lesnaya Zastava Out-of-City Children’s Health and Recreation Centre in the village of Dymer, Kyiv Oblast, in the format of psychological rehabilitation in 2015–2019.

The main goal of the programme is to prevent the onset and overcome the consequences of post-traumatic stress, and to promote the process of post-traumatic personal development in children with traumatic experiences.

The objectives of the programme include the following:

- 1) to create conditions for stabilising the child’s psycho-emotional state and post-traumatic development with the help of a specially created rehabilitation environment;
- 2) provide the child with the opportunity to work through his or her own traumatic experience,
- 3) to help the child restore his or her damaged psychological integrity and, in the social aspect, to feel an integral part of the whole;
- 4) help the child to acquire mental skills to rethink their life scenario, restore a sense of psychological stability, security, balance and actualise their own personal resources;
- 5) to activate the child’s ability to receive support from others, as well as to develop the ability to support others in traumatic experiences in a peer-to-peer interaction model;
- 6) to strengthen constructive coping reactions and develop a new cognitive scheme of world perception and self-perception in the changed conditions of reality.

The target group of the proposed programme is children and adolescents who have experienced traumatic experiences as a result of difficult life circumstances, traumatic events, and acute stressful situations. These are children from families of internally displaced persons, children who lived in the combat zone, or in the frontline or occupied territories, children of military personnel and children who have experienced traumatic impact from various circumstances (orphans and “social orphans”, children from foster families and family-type children’s homes, children with special needs and children with disabilities).

The programme is designed to run for two weeks, with each day having its own content load, target orientation, practical saturation and predicted results. Therefore, in the structural sense, this programme can be called a 14-step programme, as each day is a certain step in achieving the results defined by the purpose and objectives of this programme.

The architecture of the programme consists of structured thematic blocks of interconnected sessions, which are built in accordance with the cycle of group dynamics and the specifics of working with traumatic experiences.

The programme uses a whole range of practical methods and therapeutic techniques that are interconnected and complement each other in the system of this programme. These include coaching, elements and exercises of cognitive-behavioural psychotherapy, play psychotherapy, body-oriented therapy, dance-movement therapy, fairy tale therapy, art therapy, creativity therapy techniques, psychodrama, as well as canister therapy, hippotherapy, the method of associations using metaphorical cards, and the BASICPh Integrative Model of Stress Resilience. Phytotherapy, rhythm and movement plasticity, fly yoga, classes in various types of decorative and applied arts, music lessons, reading, themed film and cartoon evenings, movement games, diary keeping, and the socio-economic game “Forest Country” were actively used as accompanying and auxiliary methods of rehabilitation and recovery.

The main principle of the proposed programme is the creation of a special rehabilitation environment in which the child is immersed in a specially organised space and time, where he or she receives psychological assistance, social support, comprehensive support from the staff, and individual psychological counselling. Each participant of the programme is given an individual trajectory of the rehabilitation process, where, at the child’s request, interests and individual dynamics, a set

of different activities and events is implemented by a psychologist, which is specially selected for the child and best contributes to the recovery and personal development of the child. The creation and development of a positive self-image plays an important role in the proposed programme. Therefore, many of the programme's content components are aimed at the formation and development of a value-based attitude towards oneself, a positive self-image and the desire to find the place of one's own self in the world, the ability to build a harmonious balance between personal boundaries and openness to new things, strengthening one's own personal stability and sensitivity to others.

As a result of the programme, positive results were obtained, which were recorded using psychodiagnostic methods at the beginning and end of the programme, observation of participants during the programme and questionnaires. For example, to test the impact of the proposed programme on improving participants' self-esteem, the participants were measured using the Self-Esteem Scale (S.V. Kovalev), which allowed us to record positive changes in the development of self-attitude factors. Differences in the level of self-esteem were calculated using Fisher's statistical criterion, which showed that the changes in the results that occurred with a high level of self-esteem ( $\varphi_{\text{emII}} = 3,54$  at  $p \leq 0,01$ ), medium ( $\varphi_{\text{emII}} = 2,04$  at  $p = 0,033$ ) and low level of self-esteem ( $\varphi_{\text{emII}} = 3,26$  at  $p \leq 0,01$ ) entered the zone of significance and are statistically significant. These changes are illustrated in Figure 1.

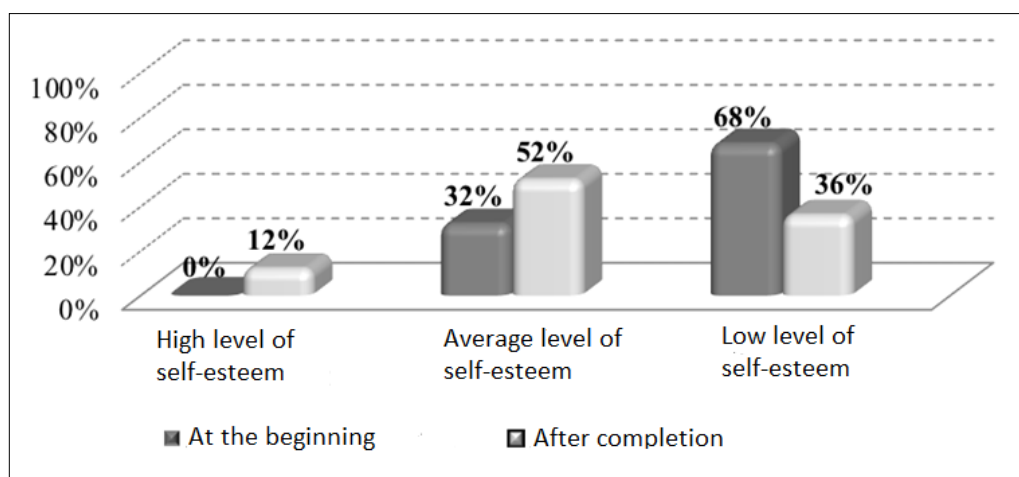


Fig. 1. Self-assessment before and after the programme implementation

Self-regulation indicators according to the Test of Volitional Self-Regulation (A.V. Zverkov and E.V. Eidman) also underwent a statistically significant improvement. The number of participants with a high level of self-regulation increased, while the percentage of respondents with a low level decreased. Calculations of shifts using Fisher's statistical criterion showed that the changes in the results for high ( $\varphi_{\text{emII}} = 2,8$  at  $p \leq 0,01$ ) and low levels of self-regulation ( $\varphi_{\text{emII}} = 1,91$  at  $p \leq 0,01$ ) entered the zone of significance and are statistically significant, as illustrated in Figure 2.

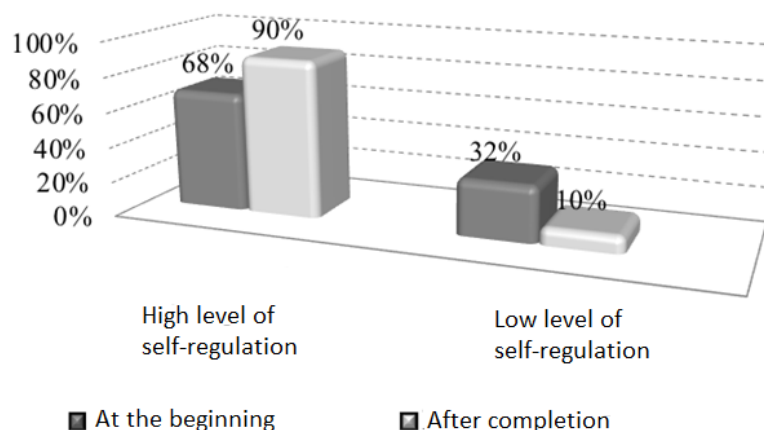


Fig. 2. Self-regulation indicators before and after the programme implementation

**Conclusions and prospects for further research.** As a result of the programme implementation, the mental state of children was stabilised and they got rid of negative automatic thoughts, which are self-recriminations, recognition of their own helplessness, incapacity, etc. The programme participants have mastered the skills of self-help and self-regulation of their emotional state, restoring and strengthening their active subjective position, as evidenced by their ability to defend their own boundaries and interests.

The corrective and restorative impact of the programme on the child's mental state has also helped to intensify the process of integrating the child's traumatic experience, and its prolonged effect on the child's further functioning has been established, which allows the child to use the skills, strategies and experience acquired in the future, in particular in setting immediate goals and ways to achieve them. In the future, it is planned to implement this programme in other health facilities, as well as to use its components in the work of psychologists of humanitarian projects that are currently active in Ukraine.

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