
ISRAELI EXPERIENCE IN THE REHABILITATION OF MILITARY VETERANS FOR THE TRAINING SYSTEM OF MILITARY PSYCHOLOGISTS IN UKRAINE



Olha Luchaninova*, Dr. Sc., Prof.

Leading Scientific Officer, Department of Scientific Analytical and Information Support of Education, V. Sukhomlynskyi State Scientific and Educational Library of Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine

2017olgapetrovna@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-2205-547X>

Yaroslav Pylypchuk, Dr. Sc.

Senior Scientific Officer, Department of Scientific Analytical and Information Support of Education, V. Sukhomlynskyi State Scientific and Educational Library of Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine

pylypchuk.yaroslav@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9809-3166>

**Corresponding author*

To cite this article:

Luchaninova, O., & Pylypchuk, Y. (2024). Israeli experience in the rehabilitation of military veterans for the training system of military psychologists in Ukraine. *Education: Modern Discourses*, 7, 132–140. <https://doi.org/10.37472/2617-3107-2024-7-13>

Abstract. *The article is aimed at the exploring the Israeli experience of rehabilitation of war veterans and the possibilities of its extrapolation into the training system of military psychologists in Ukraine. The study is a component of the scientific research "Information and analytical support of psychological science in the war and post-war periods of Ukraine" (2024-2025), which is being implemented in the V. Sukhomlynskyi State Scientific and Educational Library of Ukraine. The authors use the extrapolation method, which consists in the broad transfer of evidence from one part of the phenomenon to another. An analysis of scientific works was conducted to reveal the topic of the study; confirmation of the relevance of the Israeli experience of rehabilitation of war veterans for the system of training military psychologists in Ukraine. The Israeli approach to people who survived hostilities and returned to civilian life after receiving injuries, disabilities, or psychological trauma is analyzed. It is stated that the Israeli experience occupies a leading place in the system of information and analytical support for the training of military psychologists, in the context of the development of the problem of rehabilitation of*

military veterans. It is noted that a group for the rehabilitation of military veterans (Combat Fitness Retraining Unit) has been created in Israel, which includes psychiatrists, social workers, clinical psychologists, and specialists in sports and combat training. It is emphasized that an important condition for the effectiveness of the work of military psychologists are such aspects as: the doctor or psychologist who provides assistance must have combat experience, which allows them to establish more trusting communications in the process of therapy. The authors characterize psychological techniques and methods, in particular, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), emotionally focused therapy (EFT), exposure therapy, group therapy, relaxation and meditation techniques, and self-regulation techniques. It is concluded that the Israeli experience of rehabilitation of military veterans is valuable for the formation of psychological readiness of Ukrainian psychologists for combat training of military personnel and – in war conditions – the performance of combat missions by providing psychological assistance to military personnel and their family members. The Israeli programme of rehabilitation of military personnel after demobilization deserves attention, aimed at those who are ready to fight, without being left alone to solve minor problems. This programme also provides for training of relatives of the demobilized person before his/her return home.

Keywords: Military Veterans; Israeli Evidence of Rehabilitation of Military Veterans; Information and Analytical Support for the Training of Military Psychologists; Rehabilitation of Military Veterans; Ukrainian System of Training Military Psychologists.

INTRODUCTION

The full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation into Ukraine on February 24, 2022, made it especially relevant to scientifically understand foreign experience in the rehabilitation of military veterans and the possibilities of its extrapolation into the system of military psychologists training in Ukraine. The experience of Israel is especially relevant, as it has important developments in the field of working with people who have survived the end of hostilities and returned to civilian life after receiving injuries, disabilities, or psychological trauma. The article is aimed at the scientific understanding of the Israeli experience of rehabilitation of war veterans and the possibilities of its extrapolation into the system of military psychologists training in Ukraine. The study is a component of the scientific research “Information and analytical support of psychological science in the war and post-war periods of Ukraine” (2024–2025), which is being implemented in the V. Sukhomlynskyi State Scientific and Educational Library of Ukraine.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The topic of the Israeli experience of rehabilitation of military veterans for the training system of military psychologists of Ukraine is quite new. Up to 2023, in Ukraine, modern rehabilitation centers were created in the shortest possible time, where they already provide services to military personnel and veterans. The Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine is developing a mechanism that will allow to collect the best practices developed in all departments and on the ground, as well as international experience, and turn them into a modern state system (Ministerstvo u spravakh veteraniv, 2022). In this context, the problem of improving the training of military psychologists, whose future professional activity is gaining moral weight in today’s force majeure circumstances, is actualized.

The analysis of the modern psychological and pedagogical sources indicates the relevance of such works for the topic of our research:

- approaches to the organization and programmes of psychological assistance and rehabilitation of military personnel of the USA, Israel, Georgia, Canada, the Baltic countries, etc. (Liebiedieva et al., 2023);
- Israeli experience in psychological rehabilitation and support of war veterans who have experienced combat stress, the main methodological principles (“VISED”) of providing support by Israeli military psychologists to servicemen, war veterans (Vdovichenko et al., 2023);

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- military psychological, psychological assistance to servicemen: the experience of the Israeli army (Osodlo & Khmiliar, 2016);
 - peculiarities of the organization of medical and psychological rehabilitation of military personnel in partner countries and NATO members (Shvets et al., 2021);
 - Ukrainian training system of military psychologists: periodization through the prism of historiography (Pylypchuk et al., 2024), etc.

In Ukraine, they began to adopt Israel's experience in both physical and psychological rehabilitation. Thus, a summit was held in Lviv, where two new rehabilitation complexes, Superhumans and Unbroken, have already been created. In 2023, a summit was held, the key issue of which was the experience of rehabilitating Ukrainians injured in hostilities using Israeli methods. Advanced training courses were organized for several hundred Ukrainian specialists — teachers, social workers, psychologists in the form of online trainings with Israeli specialists (Mochulska & Yanko, 2023). Indeed, Israel's experience is considered one of the best in the world. There are more than 2,500 professional military psychologists in Israel, and during hostilities their number increases thanks to reservist psychologists. During hostilities, the commander is assigned the role of primary diagnosis and, if necessary, directs the soldier to the right specialist.

For example, Ukrainian researchers point to the problem of both servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the Israeli military, who are in no hurry to seek specialized psychological and psychiatric help due to overestimated self-esteem, fear that every appeal to a psychologist will be considered a personal matter, etc. (Vdovichenko et al., 2023). Scientists also claim that the training of military psychologists has a certain history, so during the war it is easier to establish international relations and look for a practical solution to this issue (Pylypchuk et al., 2024).

In order to extend the problem of extrapolating the Israeli experience of rehabilitation of military veterans to the system of training military psychologists in Ukraine, we turned to the scientific research of foreign authors:

- L. McCracken (2004) investigated the issue of psychological flexibility and chronic pain;
- J. Bonanno, S. Chen, R. Bagrodia, & I. Galatzer-Levi (2024) discussed the issue of psychological stability;
- U. Schneider searched the issue of post-traumatic stress disorder (2024);
- R. Grinsill, M. Kolandaisamy, & K. Kerr (2024) investigated the complexities of clinical treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder;
- G. Zerach (2024) studied the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder among Israeli women soldiers.

In the system of information and analytical support for the training of Ukrainian military psychologists, it is important to take into account scientific approaches to solving the problem of rehabilitation of military veterans. After all, military psychologists are to have a deep understanding of both the nature of mental processes and apply modern methods and technologies for treating post-traumatic stress disorder, etc.

METHODOLOGY

The authors use the extrapolation method, which consists in the broad transfer of evidence from one part of the phenomenon to another. An analysis of scientific works was conducted to reveal the topic of the study; confirmation of the relevance of the Israeli experience of rehabilitation of war veterans for the system of training military psychologists in Ukraine. The Israeli approach to people who survived hostilities and returned to civilian life after receiving injuries, disabilities, or psychological trauma is analyzed.

MAIN RESULTS

Even during the war with Lebanon in 1982, the military applied the principles of providing assistance to victims (VISERS). For this, so-called combat fitness retraining units (Combat Fitness Retraining Units) were created, which included psychiatrists, social workers, clinical psychologists, sports and combat training instructors. Today, an important condition is that the doctor or psychologist who provides assistance must necessarily have combat experience, which makes it possible to establish a more trusting relationship in the course of therapy.

The use of VISERS principles when providing assistance to victims with manifestations of stress disorders makes it possible to return to service almost 85 % of personnel, of which about 7 % may have repeated reactions. In the Israeli army during the war in Lebanon, three principles out of six (proximity, speed, anticipation) were used. A comparison of units that followed these principles showed that about 60 % of soldiers were able to return to professional duties, compared to 22 % where these principles were not followed. In addition, part of the development of PTSD turned out to be lower by 30 %. Comparative data on the prevalence of PTSD in veterans of the Vietnam War (15.2 % after 15 years) and operations in the Persian Gulf (5 % after 2 years) are indicative of this.

The Israeli system of psychological support consists of five major divisions:

- unit of diagnostics, profiling and career guidance;
- psychological support service for servicemen;
- unit for rehabilitation and work with the demobilized;
- civilian population support service in crisis situations;
- service for working with victims' families (Osodlo & Khmiliar, 2016).

The department of diagnostics, profiling and career guidance is the largest. Its representatives are responsible for a comprehensive medical examination of young people, starting from the age of 15 (including psychological testing) and form a military medical card (profile) that accompanies him throughout his life. Changes to the card can be made only within the next three years after testing.

Primary psychological assessment determines the intellectual level of personality development, psychological and social status, motivational characteristics and leadership qualities. All indicators are recorded in the personal card, and on their basis, the career guidance of a potential serviceman is carried out in one or another branch of the military. Considering the fact that the motivation to serve in the army in Israel is quite high, even conscripts with disabilities and psychiatric diagnoses, such as autism, mild mental retardation, schizophrenia in long remission, Down syndrome, affective disorders, can enter military service. disorders, etc. Special methods of rehabilitation and socialization in the army environment have been developed for such servicemen.

However, and this is important to understand that the army is not a clinic, and such servicemen do not receive medical support, but they sometimes adapt very successfully, and the period of remission in them is noticeably extended. In this case, army psychologists and social workers are entrusted with the function of monitoring, accompanying and developing programs for the adaptation and soft rehabilitation of such servicemen.

Israeli military psychologists deal with post-crisis testing, which all combatants undergo, and diagnosis of combat mental trauma and PTSD. The unit of psychological support for servicemen is engaged in current psychological assistance, which is aimed at developing the stress resistance of personnel, at forming their psychological readiness to perform service and combat tasks, and at providing psychological assistance to servicemen and members of their families who have been affected by extreme factors of official activity.

Of particular note is Israel's rehabilitation program for military personnel after demobilization, which aims to ensure that no combatant is left alone with even a minor problem. This program provides for the preparation of relatives and friends of the demobilized before his return home. The activities of the unit for rehabilitation and work with the demobilized are aimed at developing rehabilitation programs, creating and/or supporting special centers of anonymous assistance, accompanying servicemen with disabilities, accompanying soldiers with combat mental trauma, providing social assistance (Liebiedieva et al., 2023).

In the work with veterans, various methods and techniques of psychological rehabilitation and support are used, aimed at improving their psychological state and ensuring well-being. For example, the organization of disabled people of Israel has at its disposal a network of sports and rehabilitation centers called "Warrior's House". These centers are located in all major cities in Israel and include special inclusive pools, gyms, game rooms and lounges, etc. (Levin, 2024).

We will give examples of psychological techniques and methods that really help military psychologists in the rehabilitation of veterans.

1. *Cognitive behavioral therapy* (CBT) (Vdovichenko et al., 2023) is a psychotherapeutic approach aimed at changing negative thought patterns and behavior. CBT helps veterans cope with stress, anxiety, depression, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) by identifying and changing unproductive thoughts, beliefs, and behavior patterns. This technique focuses on identifying and changing the negative thoughts and behavior patterns that support the stress response.

For example, a veteran may have a belief that there is constant danger, and the world around him is perceived as a constant threat to life. Thanks to CBT, veterans can learn to recognize and expose such distortions of thinking, and replace them with more realistic and optimistic ones.

Here are some examples of exercises that can be used in CBT: recognition and analysis of distorted thoughts. The client and psychologist jointly determine typical distortions of thinking, in particular, "black and white" way of thinking (tendency to perceive situations exclusively as absolutely negative or absolutely positive). Such thinking leads to underestimation of self-esteem, exaggeration of danger. Using this exercise helps the veteran become aware of and examine their negative thoughts. A record of thoughts, intentions and beliefs. The veteran writes down his negative or distorted thoughts on paper. He then analyzes these records with a psychologist, looks for arguments that support or refute his beliefs, and develops more optimistic alternatives. Replacing distorted thoughts and beliefs. The psychologist helps the veteran replace distorted or negative thoughts with more positive and helpful ones.

For example, a veteran may transform a negative belief, "I will never be able to adjust to civilian life", to a more optimistic one, "I can find the resources and support to successfully adjust". Experimental exercises. A veteran can conduct an experiment to test the validity of his negative thoughts. For example, if he is feeling anxious about a situation, a psychologist may suggest that he conduct self-observation and record factual data about what is happening so that the veteran can gain more objective information about his own experiences.

2. *Emotionally focused therapy* (EFT) (Vdovichenko et al., 2023, p. 113) is a psychotherapeutic approach aimed at understanding and regulating the emotional experience of veterans. The main purpose of EFT is to support veterans in expressing and understanding their emotions, facilitating connection with their needs to improve psychological well-being. Here are some examples of using EFT with veterans:

- 2.1. Work on expanding awareness of emotions and experiences. The therapist helps veterans recognize, express, and name their emotions. This process may include the use of emotional scales and forms to identify and describe emotional states.

- 2.2. Regulation of emotions. The therapist teaches veterans emotion regulation strategies, such as deep breathing, meditation, or gentle physical activity. These methods help to reduce anxiety, stress, and thus improve well-being.

- 2.3. Awareness of emotional safety. The therapist works with veterans to create an emotionally safe environment where they can feel comfortable, express their emotions, and share their thoughts without fear or judgment.

- 2.4. Emotional expression. The therapist uses EFT to understand and help veterans express their emotions, especially those that may be related to traumatic events or war experiences. This may include developing an understanding of emotions, their causes and effects.

- 2.5. Dialogue with emotions. The therapist encourages the veteran to interact with his emotions, dialoguing with them. This can involve questioning emotions, understanding their origins and meaning. Working with Traumatic Memories: EFT can be used to help veterans process traumatic memories and reduce their emotional power. This may include techniques for acceptance, regulation, and reinterpretation of the significance of traumatic events, etc. (Vdovichenko et al., 2023, p. 113).

3. *Exposure therapy* (Vdovichenko et al., 2023, p. 113–114) is one of the methods of psychotherapy that is widely used to treat post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other anxiety disorders. This approach is based on the principle of systematic and controlled introduction of the patient into contact with traumatic memories, situations or objects that cause stress and fear. The exposure therapy procedure requires the patient to recall, describe, or relive a traumatic experience in a safe and controlled environment. This may include recounting the events, writing a detailed account of the traumatic experience, viewing photos or videos related to the trauma, etc. The patient repeats exposure to the traumatic material until the fear and stress associated with these memories subsides.

Exposure therapy is based on the theory that repeatedly confronting traumatic memories helps the patient deal with the fear and anxiety associated with those events. Gradually, through systematic exposure, the patient can learn to respond to traumatic stimuli with less stress and reduce the psychological impact of the traumatic experience on his life.

An example of exposure therapy is the use of imaginary exposures in the treatment of PTSD. A veteran suffering from post-war PTSD may work with a therapist on imaginary scenarios related to his traumatic memories, such as a race to survive, an explosion, etc. During these sessions, the veteran is actively involved in the process of re-enacting the events in his imagination in order to gradually reduce anxiety and stress reactions. It is important to emphasize that exposure therapy should be carried out under the supervision of an experienced psychotherapist who will provide the necessary support and assistance to the patient during the process of exposure to traumatic memories, providing a safe and controlled environment for developing coping strategies and overcoming fear.

4. *Group therapy* (Vdovichenko et al., 2023) is an effective psychotherapeutic approach that can be widely used in working with veterans suffering from PTSD and other psychological disorders. This method involves conducting therapeutic sessions in a group format, where veterans have the opportunity to share their stories, experiences, emotions and provide support to each other.

Group therapy has special advantages because it creates an atmosphere of mutual understanding and empathy.

As an example, it is worth referring to the work of the “Support Group for Veterans with PTSD”. In this group, military veterans with PTSD come together under the guidance of an experienced therapist to share their stories, emotions, and interact with others who understand their experiences. During group sessions, veterans can learn coping strategies for stress, develop social support skills, identify positive aspects of their experiences, and learn

to interact with others in constructive ways. Veterans may also experience support and emotional closeness with those who have experienced similar traumatic events, which promotes healing and improved quality of life. Thus, group therapy provides an opportunity for veterans to feel that they are not alone in their experiences. This helps them find resources and strengthen their hope for recovery and effective socialization.

5. *Relaxation and meditation techniques* (Vdovichenko et al., 2023, p. 114–115). Using techniques such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and meditation can help veterans reduce stress, anxiety, and improve their psychological well-being.

For example: the “deep breathing” technique, which is based on conscious and deep breath control, helps calm the nervous system and reduce stress. Veterans are encouraged to focus on their breathing, starting with a slow, deep breath, holding the breath for a while, and then slowly exhaling. This technique can be repeated for several minutes or longer, focusing on the rhythm and depth of the breath.

Another useful technique is “progressive muscle relaxation”. This technique involves gradual relaxation of different muscle groups of the body, starting from the upper body and gradually moving to the lower body. Veterans are advised to focus on specific muscle groups, tense them for a few seconds, and then slowly relax. This allows you to experience physical and psychological relaxation, reduce tension and stress in the body.

Meditation can also be quite helpful for veterans. It is a practice that involves focusing attention on the presence of the moment and being aware of thoughts, emotions and bodily sensations. Veterans can use various meditation techniques, such as mindfulness or transcendental meditation, to calm the mind, focus, and reduce anxiety. This allows veterans to focus on the moment and let go of negative thoughts and emotions. Using these and other techniques helps veterans reduce stress, anxiety, and improve overall psychological well-being. They can be used as independent practices or in combination with other methods of psychotherapy and support.

6. *Techniques of self-regulation* (Vdovichenko et al., 2023, p. 115). Veterans are taught self-regulation techniques such as breathing techniques, positive thinking, and the use of supportive phrases or affirmations that help them maintain emotional stability and improve their overall well-being. We have already described the features of using breathing exercises above.

Another self-regulation technique is positive thinking. Veterans learn to shift their focus to the positive aspects of life, and can actively seek out and focus on pleasant memories, accomplishments, or moments of joy.

Also, veterans can use supportive phrases or affirmations that have a positive effect on their condition and well-being. For example, a veteran may repeat the phrase “I am confident, I am strong and can overcome any difficulty” to strengthen his inner belief and confidence. These self-regulation techniques allow veterans to maintain emotional stability, reduce anxiety and stress, and improve overall well-being. They can be used any time a veteran feels stressed or needs support.

The social welfare of veterans and the payment of military psychologists require significant funds from the state. It is important to understand that war in any country creates not only large groups of people with disabilities, post-traumatic syndromes and contusions, but also people with adrenaline addiction, who then cannot find themselves in civilian life (Levin, 2024). For such people, the door to the army should always be open, and a daily friend and professional assistant should be a military psychologist, whose arsenal during the rehabilitation of military veterans includes cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), emotionally focused therapy (EFT), exposure therapy, group therapy, relaxation and meditation techniques, self-regulation techniques, etc.

CONCLUSIONS

Having conducted research on the Israeli experience of rehabilitation of military veterans and possibilities of its extrapolation into the training system of military psychologists of Ukraine, we came to the following conclusions.

The Israeli experience is useful for the rehabilitation of military veterans. Combat Fitness Retraining Units that have been created in Israel, which include psychiatrists, social workers, clinical psychologists, sports and combat training instructors, are of special interest for Ukraine.

An important condition is that the doctor or psychologist who provides assistance must necessarily have combat experience, which will make it possible to establish a more trusting relationship in the course of therapy.

Having extrapolated the Israeli experience of rehabilitation of military veterans into the training system of military psychologists of Ukraine, we link it to the formation of the psychological readiness of Ukrainian psychologists to perform official and — in the conditions of wars — combat tasks, to their ability to provide psychological assistance to servicemen and members of their families who have been affected extreme factors of service and combat activity. At the same time, psychologists are to skillfully use the methods of group and individual work.

Israel's post-demobilization rehabilitation programme, which aims to ensure that no combatant is left alone with even a minor problem, deserves further attention and study. This programme also provides preparation of relatives and friends of the demobilized before his/her return home.

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