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PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMATIZATION OF PARENTS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN CONDITIONS OF PROLONGED WAR: FACTORS, CONSEQUENCES AND DIRECTIONS OF ASSISTANCE

The full-scale war in Ukraine, ongoing since February 2022, has generated an unprecedented level of psychosocial burden on the civilian population. Among the particularly vulnerable groups are parents of primary school-aged children, who simultaneously bear responsibility for their own safety and the psychological wellbeing of their children. The psychological state of parents is one of the key factors determining children's sense of security, stability, and emotional support. This is why studying the specific nature of traumatic experience among parents of primary school children in conditions of prolonged armed conflict is of particular scientific and practical significance.

The aim of the study is to assess the impact of life and potentially traumatic events on the psycho-emotional state of parents of primary school children under wartime conditions, using the Life Events Checklist for DSM-5 (LEC-5) [1]. The sample consisted of 105 parents of primary school students in Kyiv.

The study draws on several conceptual frameworks. First, the Conservation of Resources theory by S. Hobfoll, which conceptualizes stress as a consequence of the loss or threat of loss of important resources – material, social, or psychological [3]. War is an event that causes a massive depletion of such resources, including safety, stability, and social connections [6]. Second, the concept of "compassion fatigue" and secondary traumatic stress by C. Figley, which explains the mechanisms of psycho-emotional exhaustion in individuals who are in prolonged contact with others' traumatic experiences [2]. This is particularly

relevant for parents who must support their children amid chronic uncertainty.

Third, research by A. Masten and A. Narayan demonstrates that children's experiences of traumatic events are largely mediated by the psychological state of their parents, who serve as the key factor in supporting and stabilizing the family environment [5]. Children's levels of anxiety, behavioral difficulties, and overall adaptation are directly linked to the psycho-emotional condition of adults.

Analysis of responses using the LEC-5 showed that the most prevalent traumatic experiences among the surveyed parents are those directly related to armed hostilities and their consequences. The following key indicators were identified:

- experience of nearby shelling or witnessing it – nearly 60% of respondents;
- prolonged stays in shelters – 37.1% of parents;
- separation from family members due to evacuation or labor migration – approximately 34% of respondents;
- participation of close relatives in combat – 22.9% of parents;
- personal experience of a real threat to one's own life (thoughts of one's own death) – 20% of respondents;
- all 100% of respondents reported the presence in their lives of other significant stressful circumstances not covered by the standard checklist items.

Among classic (peacetime) traumatic events, road traffic accidents are the most prevalent (25.7% experienced personally), which is consistent with international statistical data [4]. By contrast, experiences of natural disasters, captivity, sexual violence, or armed assault remain atypical for this sample.

Based on the findings, five major factors of psychological traumatization of parents under prolonged war conditions were identified.

1. Direct experience of shelling and nearby hostilities. Exposure to combat events is the most widespread traumatization factor. Psychological consequences include: a persistent sense of danger, heightened anxiety, hypervigilance, and chronic sleep disturbances. For children, this factor generates a sense of world instability and undermines their basic sense of security.

2. Prolonged stays in shelters. A considerable share of parents have personal experience of extended shelter stays. Psychological consequences include: feelings of helplessness, accumulation of chronic stress, heightened irritability, and emotional exhaustion. For the family, this

creates an atmosphere of prolonged tension that is extremely sensitive to children's psyche.

3. *Separation from family members.* Prolonged separation resulting from evacuation or forced displacement carries the following psychological consequences: a sense of loss of support, fear for loved ones, increased emotional dependence of children on adults, and difficulties in maintaining family stability. Research confirms the negative impact of prolonged separation on the psychological state of both parents and children [5].

4. *Participation of family members in combat.* About a quarter of respondents have relatives serving on the front line. Psychological consequences include: constant anticipation of bad news, chronic anxiety, feelings of helplessness, and emotional tension within the family, creating a background of persistent fear and uncertainty.

5. *Experiencing a real threat to one's own life.* This is one of the most powerful traumatic factors and a key diagnostic criterion for PTSD [7]. Experiencing thoughts of one's own death generates a profound existential fear, may provoke post-traumatic stress symptoms, and fundamentally alters the subjective perception of the world's safety.

Of fundamental importance is the fact that parents' experiences of the described traumatic events directly affect children through mechanisms of secondary traumatization. The emotional state of parents is transmitted to children through daily communication, non-verbal signals, and the overall emotional climate in the family. Heightened anxiety, irritability, and emotional exhaustion of adults reduce their capacity for effective parenting and emotional support of children during difficult times.

It is important to emphasize that even indirect contact with traumatic events (receiving information about tragic incidents, witnessing the aftermath of hostilities, etc.) can substantially affect parents' anxiety levels and psychological resilience. All 100% of respondents confirmed the presence of their own significant stressful circumstances, indicating that the traumatic experience of parents is complex and multi-layered, extending well beyond standard traumatic event checklists. This is consistent with the transactional model of stress, according to which the individual's perception of threat and personal coping resources determines the intensity of the stress response.

Conclusions

The study findings confirm an extremely high level of overall stressfulness in the life context of parents of primary school children under conditions of prolonged war. The data obtained have direct practical relevance and can serve as the basis for:

- developing targeted psychosocial support programs for families with primary school-aged children in wartime conditions;
- organizing psychological support for parents and teachers in general secondary education institutions, taking into account the specific nature of chronic stress;
- developing educational programs on psychological hygiene and prevention of secondary traumatization for parents;
- training psychological service specialists to work with the traumatic experience of families in conditions of prolonged armed conflict.

Prospects for further research lie in studying the resources of psychological resilience among parents and the factors of family resilience, as well as in developing and piloting evidence-based psychological assistance programs for the target group of parents of primary school children under prolonged wartime conditions.

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