

ANALYSIS OF THE PSYCHO-EMOTIONAL STATE OF UKRAINIANS AND ASPECTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSISTANCE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE CURRENT WAR

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Purpose. This study aims to characterize the psychoemotional states of Ukrainians and aspects of providing psychological assistance at the beginning of the current war, the first two months, based on the analysis of scientific sources, statistical data, and the results of empirical research.

Methods. To achieve this aim, we used the following research methods: generalized and comparative-systemic analysis of scientific sources, systematization and modelling of research results, comprehensive analysis of the experience of psychologists working within volunteer projects, concealed population surveys based on the Raven questionnaire (Raven, 1997), methods of mathematical statistics, statistical analysis of data from the Telegram channel «SvitloPodiia», analysis of private and publicly available posts in online event chats and social networks, the use of standardized questionnaires and narrative writing, as well as the design of a cross-sectional study. We used Statistica 12 software and the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC-2015) software for statistical analysis.

Results. The study revealed that factors influencing the deterioration of the psychoemotional state of Ukrainians included job loss or the inability to attend work

or school, increased free time due to inactivity, loneliness, insufficient information about behaviour rules during bombardments, alarm signals and shelter, a low culture of seeking help from psychologists, parents' inability to explain the war situation to children. Typical negative characteristics of the population's psychoemotional state at the beginning of the war in Ukraine were latent depression, mass anger, various types of fear, egoism, maximum self-concern, a demonstrative need for attention through hysterics and panic attacks, and more.

Conclusions. Improvements in the psychoemotional state of the population were facilitated by measures including structured and active work, especially volunteer work, positive messages and video recommendations via social media, positive text messages every morning, guidance on social media for self-regulation and emotional management, the efforts of volunteer Telegram channels and other programs for volunteer psychological support, as well as specially designed psycho-pedagogical sessions for children of different ages. Especially designed are online classes for students, daily supervision by educators and psychologists, the application of a psycho-pedagogical approach in education, the dissemination of psycho-pedagogical recommendations to educators, psychologists, and parents, and hosting accompanying webinars, online and in-person training sessions on identifying and addressing symptoms of anxiety disorders and panic attacks, and stabilising the psychoemotional state of individuals of all ages, among other initiatives. The importance of modernising and promoting the effectiveness of social and psychological services in Ukraine is emphasised. It is recommended that self-regulation skills for regulating psychoemotional states be taught from preschool age and introduced to compulsory classes in both general and higher education institutions.

Keywords: psychoemotional state, war, emotions, feelings, resilience, psychopedagogical assistance, psychological support, psychological assistance.

Осадченко Інна, Перепелюк Тетяна, Ольховецький Сергій. Аналіз психо-емоційного стану українців та аспектів психологічної допомоги на початку поточної війни.

Мета. Мета дослідження – на основі аналізу наукових джерел, статистичних даних та результатів емпіричних досліджень охарактеризувати психоемоційний стан українців та аспекти надання психологічної допомоги на початку нинішньої війни, перші два місяці.

Методи. Для досягнення поставленої мети ми використовували такі методи дослідження: узагальнений та порівняльно-системний аналіз наукових джерел, систематизація та моделювання результатів досліджень, комплексний аналіз досвіду роботи психологів у рамках волонтерських проєктів, опитування населення за анкетною Raven (Raven, 1997), методи математичної статистики, статистичний аналіз даних Telegram-каналу «СвітлоПодія», аналіз приватних і загальнодоступних дописів в онлайн-чатах подій і соціальних мережах, використання стандартизованих анкет і наративного написання, а також дизайн

поперечного дослідження. Для статистичного аналізу ми використовували програмне забезпечення Statistica 12 і програмне забезпечення Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC-2015).

Результати. Дослідження показало, що факторами, що впливають на погіршення психоемоційного стану українців, є втрата роботи або неможливість відвідувати роботу чи навчання, збільшення вільного часу через бездіяльність, самотність, недостатня інформація про правила поведінки під час бомбардувань, сигнали тривоги та укриття, низька культура звернення за допомогою до психологів, невміння батьків пояснити дітям ситуацію війни. Типовими негативними характеристиками психоемоційного стану населення на початку війни в Україні були прихована депресія, масовий гнів, різні види страху, егоїзм, максимальна заклопотаність собою, демонстративна потреба уваги через істерики та панічні атаки тощо.

Висновки. Поліпшенню психоемоційного стану населення сприяли такі заходи, як структурована та активна робота, особливо волонтерська, позитивні повідомлення та відеорекомендації через соціальні мережі, позитивні текстові повідомлення щоранку, настанови в соціальних мережах для саморегуляції та управління емоціями, зусиллями волонтерських Telegram-каналів та інших програм психологічної підтримки волонтерів, а також спеціально розроблених психолого-педагогічних сесій для дітей різного віку. Особливо розроблені онлайн-заняття для учнів, щоденна супервізія педагогів і психологів, застосування психолого-педагогічного підходу в навчанні, розповсюдження психолого-педагогічних рекомендацій педагогам, психологам і батькам, проведення супутніх вебінарів, онлайн і вдома; тренінги з виявлення та усунення симптомів тривожних розладів і панічних атак, стабілізації психоемоційного стану осіб різного віку. Наголошено на важливості модернізації та сприяння ефективності соціально-психологічних служб в Україні. Навички регуляції психоемоційних станів рекомендується формувати з дошкільного віку та вводити в обов'язкові заняття як у загальноосвітніх, так і у вищих навчальних закладах.

Ключові слова: психоемоційний стан, війна, емоції, почуття, стійкість, психопедагогічна допомога, психологічний супровід, психологічна допомога.

Introduction. War in any time and country associates itself with death and destruction (architectural, economic, political, social, psychological, etc.). Both sides of a military conflict will endure the consequences of psychological trauma not only during but also after the war. For the civilian population, these consequences will be even more severe, as civilians and internally/externally displaced persons face unknown and unexpected mental trauma and risks. These risks can not only worsen but also be transmitted to future generations. Moreover, studies have not yet produced clear results regarding the intergenerational

transmission of trauma and the possible role of epigenetic mechanisms in this transmission (Clarke & Vieux, 2015; Yehuda & Lehrner, 2018).

The international community is beginning to realize the human cost of the Russian war in Ukraine, but it remains to determine the level of psychological trauma Ukrainians suffer and the damage it will cause to their mental health (Shevlin, Hyland & Karatzias, 2022). It is well-documented that war harms civilians who are not involved in hostilities, both physically and psychologically (Anjum, Aziz & Hamid, 2023). Such negative psycho-emotional states and problems, especially in the first days of the war, include depression, anxiety, panic attacks, fears, suicidal behaviour, various addictions and phobias, dissociation, etc. The international psychiatric community has "officially" recognized a disorder in the classification of diseases that may be of particular importance to the people of Ukraine: post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). There is evidence that PTSD is a persistent disorder with long-term consequences (Shevlin, Hyland & Karatzias, 2022).

Back in 2019, when the current war had the status of a "hybrid" war, researchers studied its impact on the mental health of individuals. The authors outlined information and psychological warfare in the media and social networks, with the main tasks being, in particular: provoking an asthenic mental state (anxiety, depression, apathy, fear, panic, etc.), stimulating aggressive emotional states, intrapersonal, interpersonal, interethnic conflicts, etc., which generally destabilise society in the country. In this context, the method of suggestion, particularly nonspecific suggestions, which aimed to cause negative mental effects in the object of influence (asthenic, aggressive emotional states; cognitive dissonance, etc.), became important. Negative emotional information methods most effectively achieved this: intimidation, creating a climate of fear, imposing catastrophic expectations of events (threat/fictitious threat) – creating a state of anxiety, fear of real or imaginary danger, fear of the unknown; anxiety, depression, apathy, fear, panic, etc.; deliberate dramatisation of events and phenomena; and actualization of the necessary stereotype, etc.

Studies have highlighted high rates of mental disorders and significant challenges in treating PTSD among internally displaced persons in Ukraine since 2014. The findings have confirmed the necessity for expanded, comprehensive assistance to internally displaced persons within the broader context of health system improvements (Roberts, Makhshvili & Javakhishvili, 2019).

Thus, the population of Ukraine "met" the war with a critical psycho-emotional state, primarily because of panic attacks caused during the "hybrid war" in the east of the country since 2014. A significant deterioration in the psycho-emotional state of the population also occurred due to the COVID-19 quarantine and post-quarantine, as detailed in a separate article (Osadchenko, Perepeliuk, Baldyniuk, Masliuk, Semenov, 2020). The above prompts us to reconsider the effectiveness of social and psychological services of the last 8 years in the direction of forming the population's stress resistance, self-control, and self-regulation of psycho-emotional states in extreme situations, as well as providing competent psychological assistance during crises.

The purpose of this article is to characterise the psycho-emotional states of Ukrainians and aspects of psychological assistance at the beginning of the current war based on the analysis of scientific sources, statistical data, and the results of empirical research.

Methods. To achieve this goal, we employed the following research methods: generalized and comparative-systematic analysis of scientific sources; systematization and modeling of research results; comprehensive analysis of psychologists' experiences in volunteer projects such as "Lesson for Children of Ukraine (during and after the war)" and "Bezpłatna Szkoła Online dla dzieci z Ukrainy," including the experiences of the authors of this article; conducting a concealed population survey based on the Raven questionnaire (Raven, 1997); employing mathematical statistical methods; analyzing data from the publicly available Telegram channel "Psychological Assistance to Ukrainians during the War" (now known as "SvitloPodia"), considering the authors' experiences on this platform; examining private and public posts in online event chats, social media, and gadget applications (Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, Viber, Messenger, WhatsApp, etc.) resulting from surveys of participants in webinars, supervision, individual psychological counseling, etc. The research was carried out using standardised questionnaires and narrative writing. The study focused on the first two months of the war, from February 24 to April 24, 2022. The sample included 66 young volunteers, with an average age of 18.85 years ($SD = 1.94$), comprising 8 men and 58 women. For statistical analysis, we utilised Statistica 12 software and Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count software (LIWC-2015). A cross-sectional study design was employed.

According to our survey, the most significant factor contributing to the rise in negative psycho-emotional states at the beginning of the current war was the lack of publicly available information regarding a) rules of behaviour during bombings, alarms, in shelters, and panic attacks; b) the ability to provide psychological self-help/assistance in extreme psychological situations. In the initial days of the war, the Ukrainian population, unlike, for example, the American population, was not oriented towards seeking help from psychologists. Citizens were preoccupied with fleeing, internal displacement, taking shelter without access to communication, and packing their belongings; they were in a state of shock and confusion, experiencing panic, and disbelief in the unfolding events, and were busy making phone calls to family and friends, asking, "Where are you? How are you? What's going on?"

It should be noted that a significant number of Ukrainians, even with deteriorating mental conditions, did not realise it and did not seek help from psychologists. This underscores the importance of popularising and enhancing the effectiveness of social and psychological services in Ukraine during peacetime.

Among the methods that proved effective in supporting and improving the psycho-emotional states of the Ukrainian population during the first week of the war were optimistic posts and video tips shared on social media. These included advice on self-regulation of emotional states and prevention of panic attacks. For example, on Facebook: #let's talk about; #self-regulation techniques (particularly developed from the standpoint of linguistic psychology); and positive SMS messages sent every morning with similar content: "Hi! We are home! We are alive and well! We are holding on, and we wish you the same! We pray for peace and life in Ukraine! It will be so! Let's help and support each other, let's unite. Let's send each other this message every morning to let each other know about ourselves. I love you!"

During the first week of the war, a volunteer Telegram channel named "Psychological Assistance to Ukrainians During the War" successfully provided round-the-clock, free psychological assistance, including assistance from the authors of this article. Publicly available requests from Ukrainians for psychological assistance during the first two months of the war also formed the empirical basis of our study. Today, this channel continues to operate under the name SvitloPodiia.

The researchers observed that in April 2022 (the second month, the seventh week of the war), positive reactions and likes predominated on social media. These included "pride," "admiration," "gratitude," "humour," "sarcastic laughter at the enemy," and "irony." Ukrainians exhibited restrained positive emotional reactions during the initial phase of the war, intensifying them in April 2022 before the battle for Donbas (emotional reactions-preferences included "pride" and "strength"; gratitude towards the defenders of Ukraine and joy from their actions). Subsequently, positive emotions began to decrease. Among the negative emotions, "anger" or "irritation" were frequently reported, while "horror," "fear," and "sadness" were observed in isolated cases during this period (Steblyna, 2022: 43). Similarly, a survey conducted on April 12-19, 2022, revealed that the emotion of "pride" was the most prevalent (45.8%), followed by "anger" (39.7%). The third most common emotion was "hope" (34.6%). The survey asked 214 respondents to select the five emotions they had experienced most frequently since the beginning of the war using a Google form. These emotions included joy, admiration, hope, pride, tenderness, gratitude, love, serenity, excitement, compassion, anger, passion, energy, inspiration, elation, irritation, indignation, dissatisfaction, disgust, etc. We summarized the statistical data of this study in the diagram (Fig. 1).

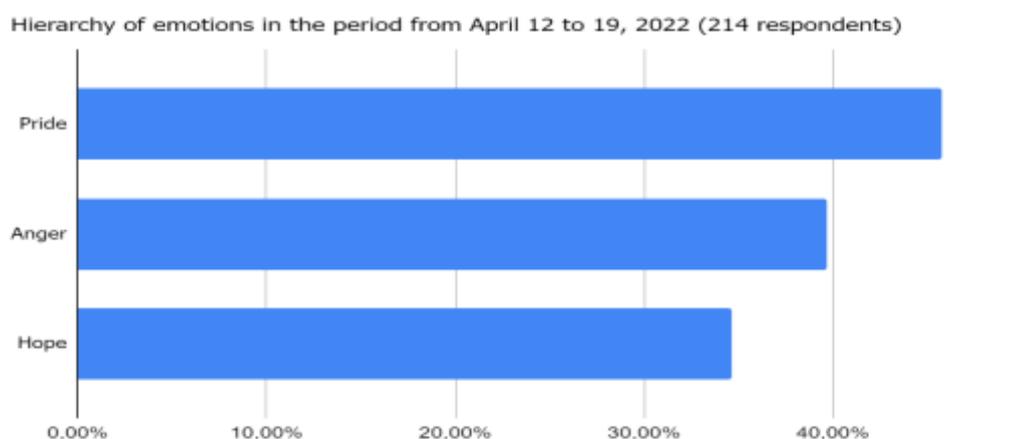


Fig. 1. Emotions of Ukrainians revealed by reactions and likes on social networks in April 2022 (based on the study by I. Yevchenko)*

***created by the authors**

It is worth noting that scientists compare the situation of researchers collecting huge amounts of data from social networks to that of systems biologists at the beginning of genome sequencing (entry in PsycINFO (c) 2018 APA) (Jost, Barberá, Bonneau, Langer, Metzger, Nagler & Tucker, 2018).

One of the surveys was conducted among the population in April 2022. The questionnaire contained four questions with multiple-choice answers: "What feelings do you have when you think about your future / the future of Ukraine?"; "Do you plan or do not plan to go abroad soon? (gradation of data depending on the presence and number of children)"; "Are you involved in volunteer assistance to the army / territorial defence / other temporarily displaced persons? (by age distribution)"; "How has the war affected your family's life?". An interesting fact was the increase in Ukrainians' hope for the future of the state from 43% to 61.1%, which was not recorded even in peacetime. At the same time, 40.7% of respondents, speaking about their future, named fear as the main emotion that prevailed during the war; 4.6% of respondents said they felt a lack of psychological support services; the vast majority assessed their mental state as generally normal and not requiring professional correction; more than 50% of Ukrainians participated in volunteer or charitable activities, including 80% of 18-29-year-olds; 50% of respondents had hope and anxiety; only 4.5% of respondents felt completely safe, although the survey was conducted only in conditionally safe regions, as it was impossible to do so in the occupied or frontline regions. 13% did not feel safe at all; 24% of respondents felt hopeless, 67.5% of respondents did not feel hopeless; 20% of respondents lost their jobs or earnings; 21.5% of respondents in the western and central regions of Ukraine said they were not affected by the war (a rather significant figure, but it should be understood that this is a survey in conditionally safe regions) (Samopochuttya ukrayintsiv pid chas viyny, 2022). The statistical data of the survey conducted by the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation are summarized in the diagram below (Fig. 2).

The results of the research conducted by our Polish colleagues are valid for temporal comparison. They conducted it in April-May 2022, working with a psycho-emotionally problematic category – refugees from Ukraine. Since a significant part of the respondents arrived at the beginning of the war or during its course from the most problematic territories of Ukraine (occupied, frontline, actively bombed), their psycho-emotional state partly corresponded to the first week of the war. Among the most important mental problems that accompanied Ukrainians while fleeing the war in Ukraine, respondents most often mentioned fear (of shelling and bombing (62%) and for the lives of friends and family who remained in Ukraine (62%)); anxiety, worry (about not knowing Polish

(43%) and leaving all property in Ukraine (41%); lack of adequate financial resources for living (41%) and many things and clothes (38%), clear plans for where to live in Poland (34%), etc.) (Długosz, Krywaczuko & Izbebska-Długosz, 2022).

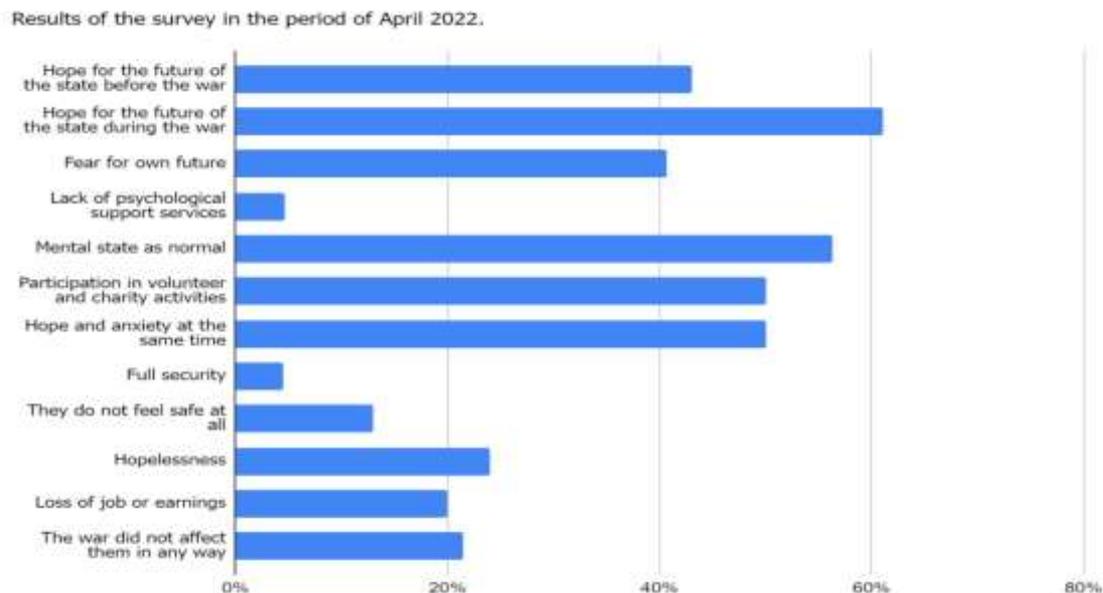


Fig. 2. Results of the study of the patriotic mood and psycho-emotional state of Ukrainians in April 2022 according to the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation*

*created by the authors

The data from this study are presented in the diagram (Fig. 3).

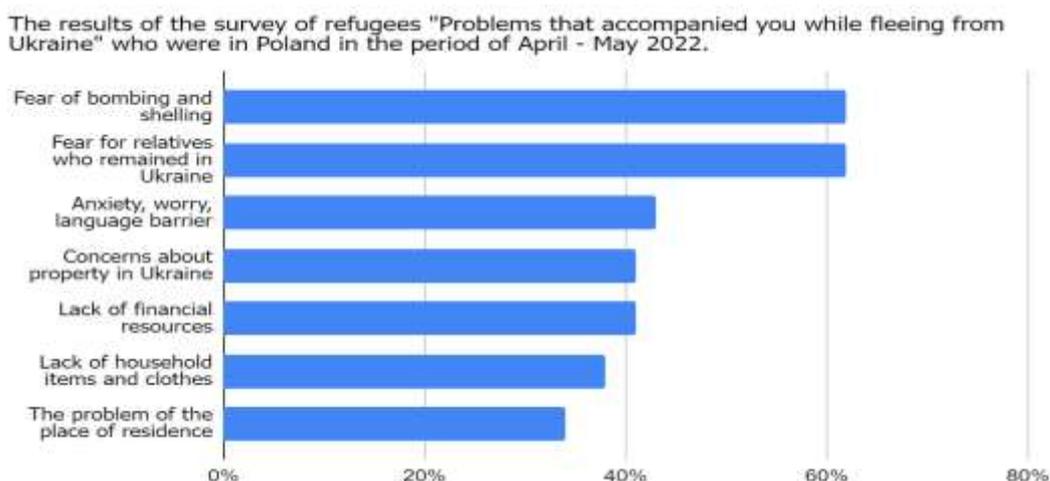


Fig. 3. Psycho-emotional states of Ukrainians who were forced to stay in Poland during the first months of the war (based on the results of Polish research)*

*created by the authors

Measuring war trauma using the RHS 15 scale showed that the majority of refugees suffer from disorders caused by traumatic stress (76%), and psychological stress was observed (50%). Respondents indicated that to improve their mental health, they do everything to cope with problems (59%), do things that distract and improve their mood (53%), pray (32%), seek advice and help from other people (28%), take sedatives (15%), reach for alcohol, cigarettes, other stimulants (3%), etc. (Izbebska-Długosz, 2022). We present these results in the diagram (Fig. 4).

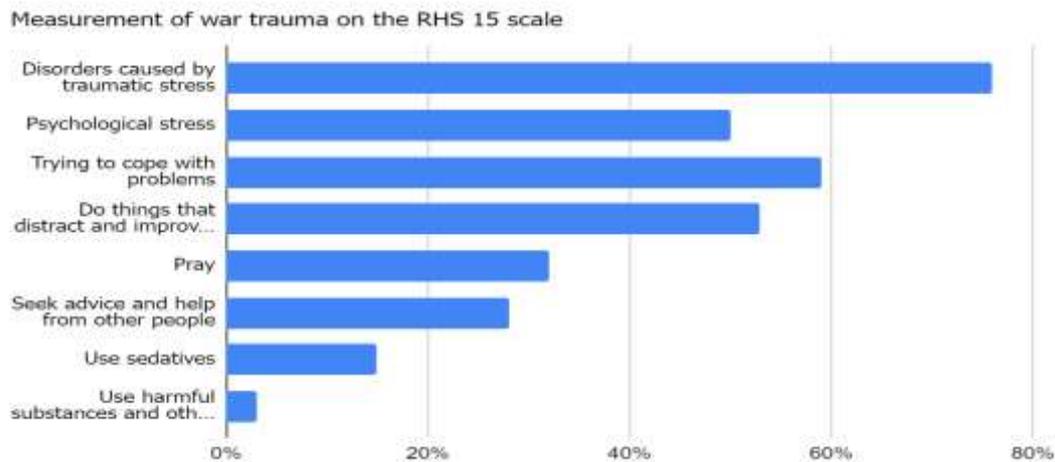


Fig. 4. Measurement of war trauma using the RHS 15 scale in Ukrainians who were forced to stay in Poland during the first months of the war (based on the results of Polish research)*.

*created by the authors

According to our data analysis, since March 1 (the sixth day of the war). Interestingly, parents of children aged 5 years (first position), 11 and 15 years (second position), 2, 3, 12, and 16 years (third position) had the most requests for psychological help for their children. In our opinion, one of the reasons that most psycho-emotional problems occur in five-year-olds is that this is the age group of "why-ers" who actively explore the world and require detailed explanations from their parents about what is happening around them. Stressed parents were not able to explain the war situation to their children in the first days of the war. An interesting fact was that parents (mostly Ukrainian mothers) during the first week of the war, when they got abroad to a safe place, did not leave their children for a minute, even in Poland, so they even attended online classes with them and did not want to go to work in order not to be without their children, the most valuable thing they managed to take out of their home country. Inquiries also recorded frequent psychological support to parents from children of primary school and adolescent age (calming, finding other

adults to provide psychological assistance to parents, etc.) This led to special psycho-pedagogical classes with children of different ages to teach them techniques of self-regulation/regulation of psycho-emotional states.

At the same time, the issue of studying the dynamics of psycho-emotional states of the population from the first days of hostilities onward requires a separate study. This is necessary not only to find out the culminating moments of the psycho-emotional states of Ukrainians but also to determine the causes of both deterioration and improvement and, first of all, to outline the specifics of providing psychological assistance to the population during such a period.

Conclusions. Thus, based on the analysis of scientific sources, statistical data and the results of an empirical study, the author characterised the psycho-emotional states of Ukrainians and aspects of psychological assistance at the beginning of the current war – the first two months: from February 24 to April 24, 2022. The following conclusions we have drawn:

1. Obviously, in the first months of the war, the psycho-emotional state of the population deteriorated significantly. Determining the true psycho-emotional state of Ukrainians during this period is complicated by active displacement, defence, flight, stupor, etc. At the same time, the population of Ukraine "met" the war with a critical psycho-emotional state caused by the 8-year "hybrid war" in the east of the country, COVID-19 quarantine and economic and crisis quarantine; lack of professional training in Ukrainian practical psychologists to work in war conditions, although hostilities have been going on in the country since 2014, in particular in the context of family and child psychology.

2. The deterioration of the psycho-emotional state of Ukrainians was influenced by: loss of work or the opportunity to attend work/study, etc.; increased "free time" (unwillingness or fear to continue working/studying), i.e. physical and mental inactivity; lack of care for others (loneliness); lack of publicly available information on the rules of conduct during the bombing, alarms, in shelters, panic attacks, and the ability to provide psychological self-help/assistance in extreme psychological situations; the lack of a culture of seeking help from psychologists that has developed over the years (having deteriorated mental conditions, they did not realise this and were not used to seeking help from psychologists); parents' inability to explain the situation of war to their children.

3. Typical negative characteristics of the psycho-emotional state of the population of Ukraine at the beginning of the war were a manifestation of a latent form of depression, mass anger or irritation, the main negative emotion - fear (of shelling and bombing and for life (own, friends and family), the future, lack of adequate resources for life, etc.); manifestation of selfishness and maximum self-care; the demonstrative need for care through hysterics and panic attacks, primarily among young mothers of young children (pseudo-cultural behaviour called "яжемать" in social networks): depression, aggression, stupor, forgetting or poorly caring for their children, etc.

4. The improvement of the psycho-emotional state of the population was facilitated by active, organised involvement in the work performed, which shifted attention to professional responsibility, responsiveness, mobility, etc.; engagement in patriotic activities, including volunteering. However, volunteering improved the psycho-emotional state only if it was unconditional: without expectation of external evaluation recognition, or reward. If volunteering was done "insincerely", conditionally, then by the end of the second month of the war, aggression, physical and mental exhaustion, apathy, etc. were manifested. There was a frequent provision of psychological support to parents by children of primary school and adolescent age (calming them down, finding other adults to provide psychological assistance to their parents, etc.)

5. The following psychological assistance to the population during the first two months proved to be effective: positive and optimistic posts and video tips on social media; positive SMS messages every morning based on linguistic psychology; tips on social media on self-regulation of these conditions and prevention of panic attacks, etc.; activities of volunteer telegram channels and other ways of providing volunteer psychological assistance; conducting special psycho-pedagogical classes with children of different ages to teach them self-regulation/re The activity of volunteer educational and psychological projects proved to be significant: daily conducting special resource and educational online lessons for younger students to redirect their attention during the war, providing an opportunity to communicate with peers, reducing anxiety; daily supervision of teachers and psychologists after these lessons to develop a strategy and tactics for psychological support the next day; applying a psycho-pedagogical approach by organizing training as psychological support for students and their parents.

6. We believe it is important to popularise in peacetime and increase the effectiveness of the social and psychological service in Ukraine; teach from preschool age the skills of self-regulation/regulation of psycho-emotional states and introduce the above into compulsory classes in general education and higher education institutions; apply a psycho-pedagogical approach in the educational process; improve the professional training of future workers in the social and psychological sphere of Ukraine and retrain current practical psychologists, social workers; modernise, according to

We do not pretend to cover this issue in full and note that further research should be aimed at studying the dynamics of the psycho-emotional states of the population from the first months of hostilities onwards; substantiating ways to protect and overcome the internal causes of the sharp deterioration in the psycho-emotional states of citizens in the first months of the war for their further self-realisation and cohesion, etc.

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