

MEDITATION AS ONE OF THE WAYS OF PREVENTING EMOTIONAL DISORDER WHEN WORKING WITH WOMEN IN EMIGRATION

МЕДИТАЦІЯ ЯК ОДИН ЗІ СПОСОБІВ ПРОФІЛАКТИКИ ЕМОЦІЙНИХ ПОРУШЕНЬ У РОБОТІ ІЗ ЖІНКАМИ В ЕМІГРАЦІЇ

The article is devoted to the study of the impact of active meditation as an effective self-help tool during a full-scale invasion among women of all ages who are in forced emigration. Emotional disturbances are common in women who were forced to leave the territory of Ukraine during the Russian-Ukrainian war. During the two years of the full-scale invasion, the demand for self-help tools that could alleviate the intensity of stress-related experiences has increased significantly. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to theoretically substantiate the beneficial impact of active meditation (using and analyzing self-reports of migrant women) as an effective tool of self-help during emotional disturbances in women who are in forced emigration. The study presents the author's practical experience of working with clients (taking into account all confidentiality rules) on the implementation of meditative practices to reduce stress levels, which in turn contributed to easier adaptation, improved well-being, and normalization of sleep. The method of self-observation analysis was used to retrospectively analyze the impact of meditation practice on the mental state of female respondents. Women kept a diary in a free form of self-report, where there was a low level of formalization. Empirical analysis of practical experience allows us to conclude that active meditation, as a method of self-help, can help a woman cope with anxiety and normalize sleep. At the same time, the author notes that this issue requires further additional research.

Key words: consulting psychologist, meditation, emotional disturbances, emigration.

Статтю присвячено дослідженню впливу активних медитацій, як дієвого інструменту самопомоги, під час повномасш-

табного вторгнення серед жінок різного віку, які перебувають у вимушеній еміграції. Емоційні порушення є поширеним явищем у жінок, які вимушено покинули територію України під час російсько-української війни. За два роки повномасштабного вторгнення затребуваність в інструментах самопомоги, які могли б полегшити інтенсивність переживань, пов'язаних зі стресом, суттєво збільшилась. Отже, мета дослідження полягає в тому, щоб теоретично обґрунтувати корисний вплив активної медитації (за допомогою аналізу самозвітів жінок-мігранток) як дієвого інструменту самопомоги під час емоційних порушень у жінок, які перебувають у вимушеній еміграції. У дослідженні представлено практичний досвід роботи автора із клієнтами (з урахуванням усіх правил конфіденційності) щодо впровадження медитативних практик для зниження рівня стресу, що, у свою чергу, сприяло легшій адаптації, поліпшенню самопочуття та нормалізації сну. Для ретроспективного аналізу впливу медитаційної практики на психічний стан респонденток використовувався метод аналізу самоспостереження. Жінки вели щоденник у вільній формі самозвіту, з низьким рівнем формалізації. Емпіричний аналіз практичного досвіду дозволяє зробити висновок, що активні медитації, як метод самопомоги, здатні допомогти жінці впоратись з відчуттям тривоги та нормалізувати сон. Водночас автор зауважує, що це питання потребує подальших додаткових досліджень.

Ключові слова: психолог-консультант, медитації, емоційні порушення, еміграція.

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Introduction. For ten years, Ukraine has been in a state of military conflict, and for more than two years – in the active phase of the full-scale invasion of the external aggressor – the Russian Federation. Among people of all ages, there is a high demand for psycho-emotional support. We can also observe how people's attitudes toward the role of a psychologist have changed in a country at war, especially among women who are in forced emigration.

After leaving Ukraine, many women need qualified psychological help, which is not always available. This need is no less than that of those who remain in Ukraine, and it has its own mental specificity associated with forced emigration. In the process of counseling and empirical observation, we can state that the vast majority of Ukrainian women feel confused when left alone with their experiences. In the two years since the full-scale invasion, the demand for self-help tools that could alleviate the intensity of stress-related experiences has increased significantly.

The purpose of the article is to study the influence of active meditations as an effective self-help tool in the conditions of a full-scale invasion, during emotional disturbances in women who are in forced emigration.

Analysis of recent research and publications. A theoretical analysis of the study of meditative practices, particularly the mindfulness approach, in psychotherapy and the prevention of emotional disorders and disorders was carried out by J. Kabat-Zinn [1], T. Brach [2], J. Cornfield [3], Mark Williams [4], Yellen Langer [5], D. Goleman and R. Davidson [6]. They study various aspects of meditation and its effects on the brain and mental health.

The works of Ukrainian scientists O. Vasilchenko, M. Zubenko (2021) [7, p. 189–194], Y. Stepura (2021) [8, p. 120–124], M. Mazykin (2020) [9, p. 141–158] became the subject of scientific interest in the influence of meditation on personality.

North American scientific school of psychologists Z. Siegel [10] and L. Carlson [11] are also

actively studying the effects of meditation on various aspects of the psyche, which in turn helps to expand our understanding of this practice and its potential contribution to mental health and well-being.

According to D. Gelles, author of the book “Mindful Work: How Meditation Is Changing Business from the Inside Out” (2015), “How mindfulness practice changes the brain and how it can be beneficially applied in a clinical setting are being studied by leading researchers at Harvard, Yale, Stanford, and dozens of other research universities” [12, p. 70].

Meditation has gone from an exclusively spiritual practice and a pseudo-scientific marginal technology of self-help to a toolkit relevant in the academic environment, in the work of a modern psychologist. The Ukrainian Scientific Society is still rather cautious about the introduction of meditation tools into practical activities. Meanwhile in Canada and the USA, a whole direction of practical psychology has been formed, where meditative practices can be used as an auxiliary and effective self-help tool. In the Canadian Psychotherapy and Counseling Association [13], of which we are members, since 2006 there has been a chapter called “Spirituality in Counseling”, that consulting psychologists who use various meditative practices in their practice can join.

The “meditation” category in scientific literature is considered in the works of researchers, psychologists, and philosophers. These definitions reflect various aspects and approaches in meditation, from attention and self-awareness to physiological changes and the psychological well-being of a person.

Philosopher and researcher Osho (Rajneesh Chandra Mohan Jain), emphasized the importance of using various methods and techniques of meditation, including their active forms, which include physical activity. Osho recommended active methods as a means of achieving deeper peace, self-regulation, and self-awareness. Regarding active meditation, Osho suggested various dynamic meditation techniques that included physical activity such as body movements, breathing exercises, expression of feelings, etc. He believed that through physical activity it is possible to achieve a meditative state that helps relieve tension and relax the mind.

J. Kabat-Zinn, the author of the book “Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life” (1994), pays special attention to the analysis of meditation: “<...> the work of meditation, the systematic cultivation of wakefulness, of present-moment awareness. This waking up goes hand in hand with what we might call “wisdom”, a seeing more deeply into cause and effect and the interconnectedness of things, so that we are no longer caught in a dream-dictated reality of our own creation. <...> Medita-

tion is simply about being yourself and knowing something about who that is. It is about coming to realize that you are on a path whether you like it or not, namely, the path that is your life. Meditation may help us see that this path we call our life has direction; that it is always unfolding, moment by moment; and that what happens now, in this moment, influences what happens next. <...> Meditation is the process by which we go about deepening our attention and awareness, refining them, and putting them to greater practical use in our lives” [14, p. 19–21].

In particular, D. Siegel in the book “The Mindful Brain: Reflection and Attunement in the Cultivation of Well-Being” (2007) describes meditation as follows “Mindfulness meditation, as one example, is thought to be especially important for training attention and letting go of a strict identification with the activities of the mind as being the full identity of the individual” [15, p. 11].

Additionally, the analysis of scientific literature allows us to single out the topic of meditation as a new direction of psychological science in Ukraine. We can state that there is an insufficient number of studies in domestic science devoted to meditation. There is no description of special methods that would describe in detail the impact of meditative practices on the emotional state of women and/or people in general.

Presentation of the main material. Meditation, as a scientifically based self-help technique, has an effect on the brain and its effects include: *changes in brain structure* – some studies show that regular meditation practice can lead to an increase in the density of gray matter in various areas of the brain, such as the hippocampus associated with memory and learning) and cortical areas responsible for attention and self-regulation. *Changes in functional activity* – meditation can modulate the activity of different brain networks, including the default network (responsible for internal thoughts and ruminations), the attention network (responsible for concentration and focus), and the emotion regulation network (responsible for emotional regulation). *Improved cognitive function* – some studies show that meditation can improve cognitive functions such as attention, concentration, memory, and problem-solving. Reduce stress and anxiety – meditation can help reduce stress and anxiety levels by regulating the activity of the brain’s stress centers, such as the amygdala, and increasing the activity of areas associated with feelings of calm and well-being.

Having analyzed a variety of meditative techniques, including Osho’s active meditations, which are more relevant to our topic, we draw attention to the fact that the purpose of the meditations proposed by us to the interviewees was to encourage the experiment participants to go beyond the limits of the analytical mind (without

losing it), plunging into the deeper layers of the preconscious and subconscious. Suppose we imagine the neocortex (cortex of the frontal lobes) as a shelter of the analytical mind, which is related to the analytical processes of our consciousness and formal logic. Thus, in the process of meditation, our consciousness can go beyond the neocortex, which has been repeatedly confirmed by research. In other words, to reduce the intensity of the work of the neocortex, it is necessary, at least for a moment, to stop analyzing everything, to give up analysis, internal dialogue, evaluative judgments, and constant planning of affairs in one's mind. This is what we meant when we asked women in migration to go beyond the analytical mind. In our opinion, it is active meditations that can dampen the activity of all the automatic neural connections in the brain that are familiar to our consciousness, without harming our health. This can be monitored without functional magnetic resonance imaging and other neuroimaging technologies. Instead, we conducted interviews with respondents before and after the meditations and analyzed their self-reports in detail.

Self-reports analysis of female respondents confirms that meditation can help redirect one's attention from the mode of "survival in emigration" to the mode of "creating a life in emigration". In "survival mode", women described life as something that allegedly happened to them and in this state, they could feel a loss of responsibility for their own life. And in the "creating life" mode, women described their insights, which they connected with their actions. They described their life situations, their new reality, as the life they are building with their daily actions, even when they were in extremely difficult life conditions. During the analysis of self-reports and interviews of female respondents, a certain regularity was revealed – long-term work with a consulting psychologist and weekly practice of active meditation contributed to the fact that certain emotional rigidity naturally became less intense.

Rigidity is a feature opposite to plasticity; it is the difficulty or inability to reorganize when performing tasks if circumstances require it. Rigidity in cognitive activity is manifested in the slow development of ideas during changes in the conditions of life and activity. In emotional life, it manifests itself in inhibition, lethargy, and immobility of feelings. In behavior, this is manifested in inflexibility, inertia of motives, and moral and ethical actions, despite their obvious impracticality.

In our practice and during research, the reduction of rigidity became noticeable in the way women described their daily worries, the words they chose to describe their emotions, feelings, and states – we observed more ease with which immigrant women adapted to new living conditions.

Given the insufficiency of practical recommendations for the use of meditation techniques in the

work of a psychologist, we present the practical experience of middle-aged women who successfully coped with anxiety disorders and continue to cope with stressful situations by using the active meditation technique in their everyday lives.

Before the women moved to the practical part, directly to the performance of meditative practices, they individually received instructions with a detailed introduction to each of the four stages of active meditation. The duration of meditation is one hour, the practice was performed in the afternoon and only to one specific musical composition, which we sent to the respondents. Also, it is worth noting that in practical activities we used meditation together with psychological counseling as an aid to self-discovery, relaxation, and self-regulation. Before learning about meditation, women turned to us for psychological help. The method in which we worked at the request of women who were in migration is transomatic dialogue (Association Transomatic Dialogue Practitioners Union, Switzerland), the founder of the method is researcher C. Newman [16].

According to our observations, active meditations have become an effective addition to our work as a consulting psychologists and have a positive effect on the emotions of clients who sought help during a full-scale invasion. Some women refused to try meditative practices and limited themselves exclusively to our work as a counseling psychologist. 53 respondents agreed to try meditative practices as an aid after the consultation. Later, 11 female respondents refused to continue meditative practices. 2 respondents reported that they already have meditative practices that they have been using for a long time, so they do not want and are not ready to try new ones.

We analyzed the responses of women who agreed to take part in the survey and used the practice of meditation and singled out several components that were influenced by the practice of meditation in the lives of women. The responses are described with the voluntary consent of the respondents and are described in compliance with all confidentiality rules, none of the immigrant women were in Canada at the time of counseling and research.

Respondents noted that *the level of stress and anxiety has decreased* in everyday life. Client M. (32 years old), who started meditating during a full-scale invasion, writes in a self-report that "<...> meditation helped me reduce my stress and anxiety levels; when I meditated before bed, I knew I was guaranteed to be in a state of deep relaxation and peace, which greatly improved my sleep. I read that you should meditate regularly, but I couldn't bring myself to do it regularly, so I ended up practicing once every three days. And it helped me develop self-regulation skills that allowed me to more effectively cope with stress-

ful situations that surrounded me every day at my new place of residence” [17].

Emotional management skills have improved. By regularly practicing meditative practices, the woman helped herself to reduce reactivity to emotional stimuli and improved her ability to manage her emotions in everyday life. Client A. (37 years old) describes her experience as follows: “<...> during active meditation practices, I learned to be aware of my emotions, accept them as they are, and express them within the meditative process, without harming myself and others” [17].

Some of the women drew attention to the fact that they felt an *increase in the manifestation of positive emotions*. That is, they began to record this state in their lives more often than before. Client I. (40 years old), after six months of meditative practices, noted: “<...> meditation helped to improve my mood, I noticed the good in my day-to-day life, which led to an increase in positive emotions, for example, such as gratitude and love. I used to pay attention to what irritated me, and now, however, this feeling didn't go away <...> However, I started noticing the pleasant moments in my life. The practice of mindfulness contributed to my openness to positive and pleasant moments, I began noticing them, and later feeling them. <...>, but as for love, I am kinder to myself” [17].

The full-scale invasion and forced emigration became a powerful catalyst for instantaneous change for which few were ready. Summarizing the self-reports and interviews we conducted with female respondents, we can state that the permanent state of anxiety, which was often encountered in the questions of women at the first consultation, was often caused by traumatic events experienced by a person in early childhood. In working with early childhood memories (up to the age of 6–7), we could observe prejudices about ourselves, people around us, and life, which were formed in a specific situation and contributed to the transition to a state of emotional rigidity.

From our empirical observations, a full-scale invasion did not become a source of anxious states in immigrant women, but a full-scale war is a powerful catalyst for the manifestation of emotional disturbances in the mental state of women. Such unusual, complex conditions unfold around a woman that it is difficult for her to ignore permanent anxiety, which could previously have been a common condition. All repressed emotions, prejudices, and beliefs that were previously at the subconscious level, during the sudden changes and constant feeling of danger, became available at the level of consciousness due to loss of concentration, emotional fluctuations, inability to control emotions, and/or sleep disturbances. Analyzing the self-reports of female respondents, we could observe how fear, anger, shame, and

anxiety hindered the integration of rapid changes into the “new life”, which in turn led to cognitive dissonance, which caused internal tension, and this could also contribute to the recurrence of anxiety disorders.

Women's self-reported outcomes confirm improvements in psychological distress and work performance. Reviews indicate that meditation is a practice that can be used at home, at any time. This technique is especially valuable for migrant women who have limited access to qualified psychological help. Instead, setting aside an hour to be alone with yourself can be an affordable and effective method of self-help.

Conclusions. Therefore, meditation is an additional tool in the provision of psychological assistance, which improves the quality of life, no matter what extremely difficult conditions a woman finds herself in.

Forced migration is a stressful factor for all women, which is further aggravated by the factor of war when living “here and now” ceases to be a beautiful metaphor and turns into a harsh everyday life for every Ukrainian woman. This, in turn, leads to the search for internal support, and one of these tools can be the regular use of meditative practices. In their self-reports, the respondents highlighted that active meditations, as a self-help method, help migrant women cope with feelings of anxiety and normalize sleep. At the same time, it is worth noting that this issue requires further research and that our conclusions can be considered transparent, it is necessary to cover a larger number of female respondents and increase the duration of observation.

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