

PSYCHOLOGICAL REHABILITATION OF WAR VETERANS: SCIENTIFIC AND PRACTICAL CONTEXT

ПСИХОЛОГІЧНА РЕАБІЛІТАЦІЯ ВЕТЕРАНІВ ВІЙНИ: НАУКОВО-ПРАКТИЧНИЙ КОНТЕКСТ

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The article analyzes the current state of organization and functioning of rehabilitation centers in Ukraine that provide medical, psychological and social assistance to war veterans. The full-scale armed aggression of Russia against Ukraine has led to a significant increase of the number of individuals who have suffered injuries, concussions and psychological trauma, creating an urgent need for the comprehensive rehabilitation. Ensuring an effective system of medical, physical, social and psychological support for veterans has become a key priority of the national policy in the field of health care and psychosocial support. Addressing this issue requires interdepartmental coordination, involvement of medical, social and educational institutions; improving the professional competence of specialists such as doctors, psychologists, social workers and educators. The article summarizes the main theoretical approaches and practical experience of the psychological recovery of war veterans in Ukraine and abroad. Besides it highlights the role of multidisciplinary teams, the integration of the psychological and social components in recovery programs and the development of new models of the psychosocial support aimed at the reintegration of veterans into the civilian life. The considerable attention is paid to the analysis of Ukrainian scientific researches, the activities of specialized recovery institutions and the implementation of international practices, including WHO, UN, NATO and EU initiatives in the field of veteran support. The study emphasizes that the efficiency of recovery depends on the systemic combination of medical, psychological, pedagogical and social factors. The authors substantiate the necessity of forming the unified state system of multidisciplinary recovery centers, developing the standardized protocols for the psychological support and ensuring the continuous professional training of the specialists. The results obtained can be used to improve national the rehabilitation programs and enhance the quality of the psychosocial support for war veterans and their families.

Key words: war veterans, psychological rehabilitation, recovery centers, psychosocial support, post-traumatic stress, adaptation.

У статті розглянуто теоретичні та практичні аспекти психологічної реабілітації ветеранів війни в умовах сучасних викликів, спричинених воєнними діями в Україні. Здійснено аналіз сучасного стану організації діяльності реабілітаційних центрів в Україні, які надають медико-психологічну допомогу ветеранам війни. Повномасштабна збройна агресія російської федерації проти України призвела до значного зростання кількості осіб, що зазнали поранень, контузій і психотравм, а тому потребують комплексної реабілітації. Проблема забезпечення ефективної системи медичної, фізичної, соціальної та психологічної підтримки ветеранів війни набуває статусу пріоритетного завдання державної політики у сфері охорони здоров'я та соціального захисту. Її вирішення потребує міжвідомчої координації, участі медичних, соціальних й освітніх установ, а також підвищення рівня професійної підготовки фахівців – лікарів, психологів, соціальних працівників, педагогів.

Нині в Україні створено систему комплексної медико-соціальної реабілітації ветеранів війни та членів їхніх сімей, розроблено державні й регіональні програми підтримки. Водночас ефективність реалізації заходів залишається недостатньою: лише незначна частина ветеранів після проходження реабілітації повністю відновлює працездатність і соціальну активність. Це свідчить про необхідність удосконалення наявної системи психореабілітаційних послуг, оновлення нормативно-правових підходів і запровадження нових моделей соціально-психологічної підтримки, спрямованих на інтеграцію ветеранів у цивільне життя.

Ключові слова: ветерани війни, психологічна реабілітація, реабілітаційні центри, соціально-психологічна підтримка, посттравматичний стрес, адаптація.

Introduction. Armed conflicts and military operations exert the profound impact on the psychological well-being of combatants. The experience of participation in hostilities, exposure to life-threatening situations, loss of comrades and moral-ethical dilemmas often result in the long-term psychological consequences that extend far beyond the battlefield. War veterans, upon returning to civilian life, frequently face a complex combination of emotional, cognitive, and social challenges that hinder the successful reintegration of the veterans into the civilian life.

The psychological recovery, as a multidimensional process, plays a crucial role in restoring mental health, personal integrity and social functioning among veterans. It involves not only clinical interventions aimed at alleviating symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety or depression but also the creation

of supportive social environments that facilitate resilience, self-efficacy and the renewed sense of purpose. In the context of modern warfare, particularly during the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the issue of the psychological recovery acquires special urgency. The growing number of veterans, the intensity of traumatic experiences and the continuous stress associated with prolonged military engagement necessitate the development of an effective national system of the psychological support. This system must integrate evidence-based therapeutic approaches, interdisciplinary cooperation and community-based recovery programs. The scientific and practical context of the psychological rehabilitation thus encompasses theoretical foundations, methodological tools and applied strategies for restoring mental health and social well-being.

The article **aims** to analyze the conceptual bases, the key components and the innovative practices of the psychological rehabilitation for war veterans, emphasizing the importance of the holistic and trauma-informed approach to the post-war recovery.

Research core material. The problem of establishing an effective system of recovery centers in Ukraine and training the qualified specialists in the field of restoring the health, working capacity and psycho-emotional state of people affected by military actions is becoming particularly relevant in the current circumstances. The growing number of war veterans, people with injuries, disabilities, and post-traumatic disorders is putting increased pressure on the health-care and social services system, requiring comprehensive and scientifically sound solutions from the state.

The development of the national network of recovery centers and ensuring the adequate level of professional training for the specialists (doctors, psychologists, social workers, educators) are the key prerequisites for the effective restoration of the physical and mental health of veterans. Analysis and synthesis of the scientific sources show that a trend toward deterioration in the health of the population is observed in the most countries of the world, including Ukraine, which is directly related to the consequences of hostilities and the prolonged impact of stress factors [6].

Analysis of the main researches on the issue. The United Nations and its specialized agencies deal with issues of medical, social, psychological and physical recovery. The World Health Organization (WHO) Expert Committee on Medical Rehabilitation is constantly improving its goals and objectives. International forums on these issues are held periodically. Recovery plays a leading role in the implementation of the WHO strategy "Health for All in the 21st Century."

The Law of Ukraine "On Rehabilitation in the Field of Health Care" № 1053-IX of December 3, 2020, defines the legal and organizational basis for the rehabilitation activities in Ukraine. It formed the modern regulatory framework for the functioning of the system of medical and psychological assistance to war veterans.

Today, the problem of development of the effective recovery system for the people who have suffered injuries as a result of the war operations is becoming particularly relevant. The most sought-after areas are comprehensive rehabilitation, including medical, physical, psychological and social components. For the combatants, orthopedic recovery (in cases of injuries and amputations), neurorehabilitation (for traumatic brain injuries), physical recovery (to restore motor functions and working capacity), and psychological recovery (to overcome the effects of war trauma) are important [4]. The scientific and methodological support for this area is provided by the specialized research institutions: the Research Institute of Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities at Vinnitsa Nation-

al Medical University named after M. I. Pyrogov, the Ukrainian Research Institute of Medical Rehabilitation and Health Resort (Odessa), the Ukrainian Research Institute of Social and Judicial Psychiatry and Narcology (Kyiv) and the Ukrainian State Research Institute of Medical and Social Problems of Disability [4; 5]. Their activities are aimed at developing and improving the rehabilitation protocols, establishing standards for the provision of medical and psychological assistance and training the specialists in this field.

The medical and psychological recovery of people who have suffered while performing their professional duties is a set of therapeutic and preventive measures aimed at restoring psychophysiological functions, working capacity and social activity. It includes diagnostics, psychological counseling and support, psychotherapy (pharmacotherapy, cognitive, behavioral and group methods), as well as measures aimed at strengthening self-confidence and forming a sense of security.

Thus, the modern recovery system in Ukraine is based on the comprehensive approach that combines the medical, social and psychological resources of society. But its effectiveness largely depends on the level of scientific support, interagency coordination and training the specialists of rehabilitation sphere.

In Ukrainian the scientific researches of the psychological rehabilitation of war veterans is conceptualized as a multi-level process of restoring mental status, social roles and self-regulation abilities, combining the medical, psychological, and socio-pedagogical interventions. The main approaches highlight the military-psychological, medical, general psychological and socio-psychological aspects, which complement each other and ensure the integrity of assistance.

V. V. Yagupov considers the psychological recovery through the prism of post-extreme adaptation of military personnel, defining its essence as the restoration of the ability of a disharmoniously changed personality to normal activity by creating the conditions for readaptation to the everyday environment [2]. The researcher proposes a methodology for working in cases of the prolonged secondary maladjustment, when spontaneous readaptation is difficult: the principle of purposeful organization of readaptation activities should stimulate protective-adaptive forms of behavior, reduce resistance to change and form skills of "non-extreme" interaction with society [2].

H. M. Dmitrenko position specifies the content of the recovery influence. It is the organized psychological process of overcoming the consequences of traumatic stress of military activity in order to achieve a level of mental health sufficient for the effective performance of tasks and restoration of social functionality [4].

P. M. Lisovskyi and A. O. Goliachenko emphasize the systematic nature of the medical and psychological measures: normalization of the emotional and motivational sphere, restoration of the functional state of the body, optimization of the professionally

important qualities and ensuring the socialization as the ultimate goal (restoration of legal status, social roles, confidence and life autonomy) [1; 3]. In this context, the tasks of rehabilitation are more than therapy; it includes guaranteeing social rights, legal support and shaping positive public opinion about veterans [1; 3].

Some researches consider the psychological recovery as a targeted correction of non-psychotic disorders of psychological reactions using the special methods to restore behavioral adaptability and prevent mental disorders [5]. H.V. Bondarev and P.P. Krut describe the typical post-combat features (nightmares, aggression, social isolation) and emphasize the need to combine psychological, pedagogical and social measures aimed at restoring the personal and social status of military personnel [6; 7].

R.P. Popeliushko offers the approaches to the practical tools: individual consultations for veterans and family members, debriefing, group training of the existential nature and psychoeducation as a way of increasing awareness and self-regulation [10]. As a result, the researchers agree on the need to combine the individual and group formats, integrate cognitive-behavioral, supportive and educational components; emphasize the importance of interagency cooperation between health, education, and social services professionals [1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 8; 9; 10].

The summary of the scientific ideas of Ukrainian authors gives proves that the psychological recovery of war veterans is the interdisciplinary process that combines clinical, psychotherapeutic and socio-psychological tools. Its goal is not only to eliminate the effects of combat stress but also to form an adaptive life strategy for the individual, ensuring their active participation in civil life. That is why modern rehabilitation practice requires a systematic approach that integrates the efforts of state and public institutions; and takes into account the international experience in post-conflict support.

The experience of foreign countries in the field of rehabilitation of military personnel and veterans is of considerable interest for the comparative analysis. The US Armed Forces psychological support system is one of the most developed in the world. It is based on the principle of bringing assistance closer to the place of service: each unit has the psychologists and rehabilitation specialists who provide primary psychological support and conduct training on coping with stress. Military medical centers, such as the Tripler Army Medical Center (Hawaii), have specialized departments for the treatment of combat mental trauma, combining pharmacotherapy, psychotherapy, group training and social adaptation. It is important that recovery programs is not only for military personnel but also their family members, providing comprehensive psychosocial support [12].

In Israel, the rehabilitation system is organized on the basis of Combat Fitness Retraining Units, which include psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and officers with combat experience. The requirement

of the own combat experience helps establish a relationship of trust between the veteran and the consultant, which significantly increases the effectiveness of psychotherapeutic work [9].

In the European Union countries, the model of multidisciplinary rehabilitation dominates, where assistance is provided not only in the medical institutions but also in the social centers and communities. Latvia has a national rehabilitation center "Vaivari", whose activities are coordinated by the Association of Rehabilitation Specialists and the Medical Academy. The specialized recovery departments (physiotherapy, occupational therapy, social work) have been established in the country that provide training and professional development for specialists [1; 12].

In the UK, the elements of rehabilitation are integrated into all hospital structures and specialized centers focus on the most severe cases requiring long-term therapy and professional reorientation of patients [9].

In Germany the rehabilitation assistance is mainly provided within the social insurance system. There are two levels of centers: medical rehabilitation clinics and social and professional adaptation centers, which combine treatment with education and vocational training. Croatia has a network of regional centers for social and psychological assistance to war victims (21 centers), as well as a National Center for Mental Trauma in Zagreb, which provides daily reception, mobile teams, and round-the-clock counseling [11].

The general analysis of foreign experience shows that the effectiveness of the rehabilitation system is ensured by several factors: state funding and quality control of services; multidisciplinary interaction between medical, psychological and social services; continuous professional training of staff; scientific and methodological support for programs. For Ukraine these approaches may be useful in developing a national network of rehabilitation centers and creating unique standards for the providing the psychological assistance to veterans.

The specific attention should be paid to the current stage of development of the international approaches to the psychological rehabilitation of military personnel, which is characterized by a transition from a medical-centered to a human-centered model. Within the framework of WHO and UN programs, the concept of "psychosocial recovery" is becoming increasingly widespread, viewing veterans not only as patients, but as active agents of their own recovery, capable of self-regulation and social self-realization. In this model, the emphasis is shifted to the formation of internal personal resources, the support of personal meaning in life and the restoration of a sense of control over the own life. The important component of such model is interdisciplinarity: a combination of medical, psychological, pedagogical and social approaches. In many EU countries (including Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark), rehabilitation centers operate in a community-based rehabilitation format, i.e. as close

as possible to the veteran community. This not only shortens the readjustment period but also prevents from the social isolation. The psychological assistance is integrated into everyday forms of interaction through the local support clubs, the mutual aid groups, the volunteer initiatives and the partnerships with veterans' organizations.

In Ukraine, such approaches are only beginning to form. In particular, the state and public programs provide the creation of regional psychosocial support centers that combine health professionals, psychologists, social workers and educators. The emphasis is on individualizing the recovery process, working with veterans' families, preventing addiction and repeated traumatic reactions. At the same time, there is a need to create the unified methodological basis for such institutions, which will allow for the standardization of working methods and effectiveness criteria.

The current Ukrainian practice demonstrates progress in the digitalization of the rehabilitation services system. An important step was the introduction of the electronic platform "Rehabilitation," which provides the registration of veterans, the routing of services and the monitoring of recovery results. This creates the basis for the formation of the national register of people who undergo the psychological and social readaptation; and allows to analyze the program effectiveness at the state level.

The cooperation between the state structures and the public sector has significant potential. Many non-governmental organizations, such as veterans' associations, charitable foundations and volunteer centers are implementing the programs of psycho-emotional recovery, art therapy, sports rehabilitation, family counseling. Their activities contribute to the creation of the environment of trust and open communication, which is a main factor in overcoming the post-traumatic effects.

The prospects for the development of the psychological rehabilitation system for veterans in Ukraine are linked to a combination of state, scientific and public initiatives. It is important to ensure the transition from fragmented local practices to the unified, standardized system with clear mechanisms for interagency cooperation, training of specialists and monitoring of effectiveness. Only under such conditions it is possible to achieve a lasting effect in the restoring mental health, social integration and improving the quality of life of war veterans.

Thus, international and Ukrainian experience proves that the effective psychological rehabilitation of war veterans is a complex process that requires coordination of medical, social and psychological-pedagogical efforts. It should be based on the principles of partnership, individual approach, gradualness, continuity and interagency coordination.

The international practice (UN, WHO, USA, Israel, the EU countries) confirms the feasibility of the integrating medical and socio-psychological approaches, which ensures the comprehensive restoration of a person physical, mental and social condition [13; 14].

The Ukrainian researchers (V. Yagupov, G. Dmi-trenko, P. Lisovskyi, A. Yena, R. Popeliushko and others) are developing their own models of the psychological rehabilitation, which focus on the gradual readaptation of veterans to peaceful life, overcoming post-traumatic disorders, restoring social ties and working capacity. Particular attention is paid to combining the individual and group work, involving specialists from the various fields and creating the conditions for the self-actualization of veterans.

The study of foreign experience proves that the effective the rehabilitation system is only possible with state management, interdepartmental coordination, regulatory control, training of highly qualified specialists and scientific and methodological support. For Ukraine it is important to implement these principles in the activities of national rehabilitation centers, adapt successful international models and develop unified standards for psychological assistance to war veterans.

Conclusions. Psychological recovery of war participants is a comprehensive system of medical, psychological, social and educational measures aimed at restoring mental health, vitality and adapting veterans to peaceful life. It involves coordinated interaction between the specialists from the various fields (doctors, psychologists, educators, social workers) and is based on the principles of continuity, individual approach, partnership and interagency coordination.

The analysis and systematization of the scientific sources confirm the need to create and implement the unified model of multidisciplinary rehabilitation centers at the state level, whose activities should be aimed at providing comprehensive services for the physical, psychological and social rehabilitation of war veterans, people with disabilities and victims of hostilities.

The effectiveness of such model is determined by an interdisciplinary approach, the high level of professional competence of specialists, scientific and methodological support for the rehabilitation process, combining group and individual forms of work (self-regulation training, psychological counseling, debriefing, psychodiagnostics, lectures, and classes on restoring the inner potential). It is complemented by health, cultural and leisure activities aimed at reducing psycho-emotional tension.

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