

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

PSYCHOEMOTIONAL PROBLEMS OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS UNDER MARTIAL LAW: FROM EMERGENCE TO OVERCOMING

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ABSTRACT

The aim: To study the peculiarities of psycho-emotional problems and needs of the subjects of the educational process and to determine the priority areas of their psychological and pedagogical support in the conditions of martial law.

Materials and methods: To update the aspects of the problem, we used the methods of analysis of normative and scientific sources, system analysis and generalizations, the results of our own empirical studies, materials of the questionnaire, to study the specifics of psycho-emotional problems and needs of the subjects of the educational process.

Results: The problem of socio-psychological protection and support of all participants in the educational process in the conditions of martial law, especially children, is extremely important. Challenge for schools in Kyiv is the organization of the educational process for children who are abroad but continue to obtain general secondary education according to Ukrainian educational standards and programs. This ensures the realization of their constitutional right to education and demonstrates certain support for our citizens who do not yet have the opportunity to return to Ukraine.

Conclusions: Considering the massive nature of traumatization of the population during military operations, there is a need to involve social institutions in the maintenance of public health, for which assistance to the population is not the main function, but which they can perform in these extraordinary circumstances. This can form the basis for establishing psychological and pedagogical support for war-traumatized children and adults.

KEY WORDS: public health, consequences of war, psycho-emotional states, psycho-education, social-emotional skills

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INTRODUCTION

In the conditions of war, the importance of the interaction of social institutions in ensuring public health is increasing. The American Public Health Association (APHA) issued a Political statement «The Role of Public Health Practitioners, Academics, and Advocates concerning Armed Conflict and War», which states that doctors and educators can play an important role in preventing war, as well as in mitigating its consequences [1]. The education system has one of the leading roles in supporting public health. Teachers, students, their parents and relatives, educational psychologists, and social pedagogues, experiencing traumatic effects as a result of military actions, at the same time are a significant social resource for their minimization and overcoming.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights recorded that during the year of the large-scale armed attack by the Russian Federation,

which began on February 24, 2022, Ukraine lost 21,580 civilians, including 8,101 dead and 13,479 wounded. Among the killed were 3,584 men, 2,127 women, 256 boys, and 201 girls, as well as 31 children and 1,902 adults, whose gender is still unknown. Among the injured were 3,536 men, 2,421 women, 398 boys, and 293 girls, as well as 271 children [2]. The psychological well-being of adults and children is also affected by the death or maiming of their relatives and friends who resisted Russian aggression in the armed forces.

According to studies conducted in various countries, military actions cause psychological consequences, including mental health problems, provoking post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (15-42%), depression (16-68%), anxiety (60-72%), and other disorders [3]. It was found that the psychological problems of parents can affect children, primarily this concerns parents with post-traumatic stress disorder [1, 4].

It has been established that psycho-emotional problems are also experienced by those children who left the places of active hostilities to other cities or countries. The anxiety for relatives and friends who have remained is deepened by the difficulties of adaptation to a new sociocultural and linguistic environment and the uncertainty of the future [5]. One of the first Ukrainian studies, conducted shortly after the beginning of the Russian aggression, in March 2022, showed manifestations of psychological problems among internally displaced persons. It was found that two-thirds of the respondents (67.1%) experienced fear, almost half experienced panic (47.0%), and slightly less than a third experienced shock (30.9%) [6].

A survey of teachers, students, and parents, which was conducted in Ukraine a month after the beginning of large-scale Russian aggression, revealed problems in interpersonal interaction (family conflicts, difficulties in communicating with friends and establishing contact); difficulties in emotional regulation, constant or prolonged experiences of fear, anxiety, despair, sadness, guilt, mood swings, inhibition, drowsiness, headache, tachycardia, appetite disorders [7].

Power outages due to Russia's periodic missile attacks on the infrastructure of Ukrainian cities also affect the mood and well-being of children. It is not only about everyday problems or the impossibility of studying (even remotely, due to the lack of an Internet connection). Every blackout is a reminder that a missile strike is about to happen again and there is a real danger of dying far from the front line, in any corner of the country. Kokun's study [8], conducted during the seventh week after the beginning (from October 10, 2022) of massive missile attacks and drone attacks on the energy infrastructure of Ukraine, showed that 70% of respondents had a worsening of their well-being. The negative psychological consequences of power outages were manifested in sleep disturbances, depressive tendencies, increased levels of irritability, and aggressiveness.

As a result of a sociological survey of 2,000 respondents at the end of January 2023, it was found that traumatic mental states in Ukrainian children of middle and high school age manifest as irritability, apathy, indifference to learning, and former hobbies, and problems with memorization and concentration. Outbursts of anger and aggression are a relatively common problem. High school students (16-17 years old) show signs of anxiety, such as fear of the future, sleep problems, and terror. The youngest children reflect traumatic events in games and creativity. According to the mothers, children were significantly traumatized in the following situations: parting with family and friends (28%), moving to another region of the country (25%), shelling

and bombing (24%), staying in a cold room for a long time (17%). Among those surveyed, 11% moved abroad, 8% were under occupation, 6% witnessed the death of relatives or loved ones, 5% lost their homes, and 5% experienced hunger and lack of water [9].

Based on the analysis of scientific literature, Ukrainian researchers Zlyvkov et al. distinguish two main approaches to psychological assistance for children who are traumatized by the war: «the first is trauma-oriented and emphasizes the need to overcome (treat) the traumatic experience so that children get rid of their traumatic memories as soon as possible and continue to live their natural childhood life; the second is preventive, instead of focusing on experience, interventions are aimed at solving current problems of children so that they can adapt to a maximally productive life in a safe place» [10].

Examples of a trauma-oriented approach are trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy (TF-CBT) and the eye movement desensitization and reprocessing method (EMDR) [11].

The preventive approach is based on proactive interventions aimed at preventing injury or minimizing the consequences of injury when it cannot be avoided. It is natural for the education system, as it is based on the process of spreading knowledge, skills, and values. Wolmer et al. prove that «a teacher-mediated, protocol-based intervention focused on resilience enhancement is an effective method to grant students coping skills to help them face daily stressors and transfer the knowledge to cope with severe life events, process them, and recover swiftly to regain normal routine» [12].

An example of the implementation of this approach is the Stress Inoculation Training (SIT), developed by Meichenbaum [13, 14]. SIT has repeatedly proven its effectiveness. SIT consists of several phases: educational, aimed at understanding the nature of stress and the predictability and control of its consequences; phases of the formation of skills to reduce anxiety and affective behavior in stressful situations; and coping phases under conditions of simulated stressogenic influences. Wolmer et al. [12] within SIT offer an instructional protocol consisting of fourteen 45-minute didactic modules and provides 20 hours of training for school counselors and 4 hours for teachers. As noted by Werner [15], school-based interventions implemented by teachers or trained local professionals have proven to be a viable and inexpensive alternative to individual or group therapy.

THE AIM

To study the peculiarities of psycho-emotional problems and needs of the subjects of the educational

process and to determine the priority areas of their psychological and pedagogical support in the conditions of martial law.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Information collection method: an online survey. Questionnaires were opened using Internet links that were placed on the main page of the KNP website «Educational Agency of the City of Kyiv» (<https://monitoring.in.ua>). As part of this survey, questionnaires were developed for four groups of respondents: 1) students of grades 8-11 of general secondary education institutions (GSEs) in Kyiv; 2) parents of students of grades 1-11 of GSEs of Kyiv; 3) teachers of GSEs of Kyiv; 3) directors of the Kyiv City Public Health Service. 61,023 respondents took part in the survey, among them: 10,370 students of grades 8–11, 44,651 parents of students, 5,625 teachers, and 377 directors of community-owned preschools. Survey period: November 4, 2022 - November 15, 2022. The research was conducted by the Analytical Center «Education Analyst» of the Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University in partnership with the KNP «Educational Agency of the City of Kyiv».

RESULTS

The problem of socio-psychological protection and support of all participants in the educational process in the conditions of martial law, especially children, is extremely important. The relevant issue could not pass by the attention of educators and psychologists, as the prolonged stay of children in a state of severe stress, caused by the loss of a sense of security and confidence in the future, can lead to serious consequences.

To the question «What help do you need today?» teachers and students revealed a significant demand for emotional support, psychologist's advice, and other forms of social-emotional support. As shown in Figure 1, 26.2% of students noted the need for adult support; 11.4% need support from teachers; 23.6% need the advice of psychologists, and 38.8% lose motivation to study and need appropriate advice. As for teachers, 34.6% of them also need emotional support, 10.1% need advice from psychologists, 13.7% need psychological support from the administration of the educational institution, and 33.1% of teachers need to share experiences with colleagues, 8.5% – methodical assistance of the administration of the educational institution. The latter is quite relevant for teachers because 74.8% noted a significant overload at work, which also affects emotional and mental health. This is also correlated with parents' assessments of targeted socio-psycho-

logical assistance to children. 19.9% of parents believe that their children need emotional support, and 17.2% seek to receive appropriate advice from specialists on maintaining children's mental health.

The primary task of the educational community of Kyiv today is to provide emergency aid and psychological support to children, which will allow them to cope with the stress of the war, as well as prevent the emergence of more complex problems. An additional challenge for schools in Kyiv is the organization of the educational process for children who are abroad but continue to obtain general secondary education according to Ukrainian educational standards and programs. This ensures the realization of their constitutional right to education and demonstrates certain support for our citizens (parents, children) who do not yet have the opportunity to return to Ukraine.

Most of the interviewed respondents who are students of Kyiv schools live with their families in Germany (32.9%), Poland (17.4%), the Czech Republic (5.1%), Great Britain (4.9%), and in other countries. According to the results of their survey, it was established that 46.7% of them are not yet studying in local schools, and 26.6% are already fully educated in the school of the host country, 15.5% are studying only a foreign language. 25.7% of respondents reported opening Ukrainian-language classes abroad in local schools, which allows them to gently adapt to a foreign-language educational environment, reduce stress, preserve the language, national culture, etc., as well as integration classes where there is no assessment and children learn the language of the host country.

The education of children who simultaneously acquire general secondary education abroad and in Kyiv schools has its advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, these children socialize and adapt more quickly to another intercultural environment, learn the language of the host country, communicate with other peers, and study in an educational environment that differs from the domestic one. And on the other hand, they experience significant mental stress. New language environment, educational overload (from the morning studying at a local school, and then studying in an online format at a Ukrainian school, or independently with parents). Therefore, studying under two programs takes away all their free time, overloads the psyche, slows down physical development, etc. The above cannot be ignored by the teacher when conducting online lessons with such children.

The group of students also changed due to new ones who moved to Kyiv from temporarily occupied territories or from those where active hostilities are taking place. Only 1% of schools do not have a single

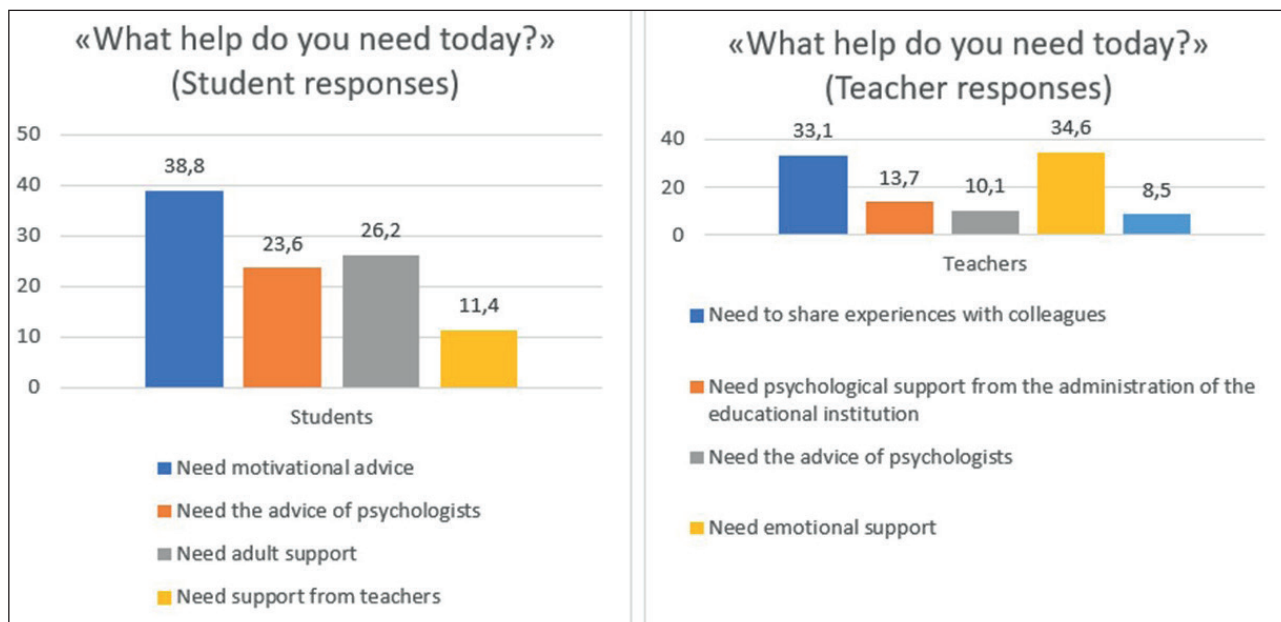


Fig.1. Distribution of students' and teachers' answers to questions «What help do you need today?»

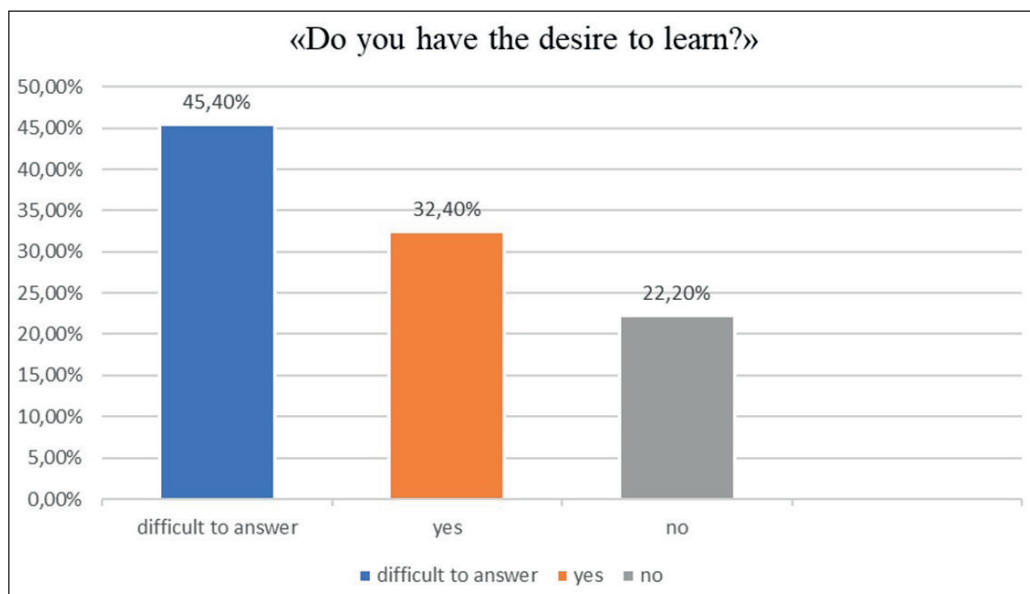


Fig. 2. Distribution of students' answers to questions «Do you have the desire to learn?»

such student. The rest of the schools have: from 31 to 50 students - 22.7%; from 11 to 20 - 22%; from 1 to 5 - 17.4%; from 51 to 300 - 11.2%; from 6 to 10 - 9.5% of schools. These children have varied experiences of the impact of war, from the most tragic to the need to move to a safe place. Everyone has their psychological trauma.

Analysis of students' motivation for learning in difficult conditions of martial law, increased anxiety, uncertainty, and tension of the situation also affected its character. Thus, to the question «Do you have the desire to learn?» the majority of students (45.4%) found it difficult to answer, and 22.2% expressed their reluctance to study in such conditions. Only 32.4% of respondents confirmed their desire to study. In our opinion, not only external factors but also internal factors affect the

decrease in students' motivation to study. Because the education of an individual at school coincides with the period of development of his/her social emotions, the need to communicate with peers, etc. However, in the conditions of distance learning, these social and psychological needs of students are not always fully met.

Heads of general secondary education institutions, realizing the importance of this problem, strive to constantly organize such work in schools. Thus, 92.9% of directors noted that in the institutions headed by them, measures were organized to provide psychological assistance to participants in the educational process. However, according to students' estimates, the school does not hold such events (27.8%), most children were not interested in such events (55.7%), and only 4.3% were participants in such events.

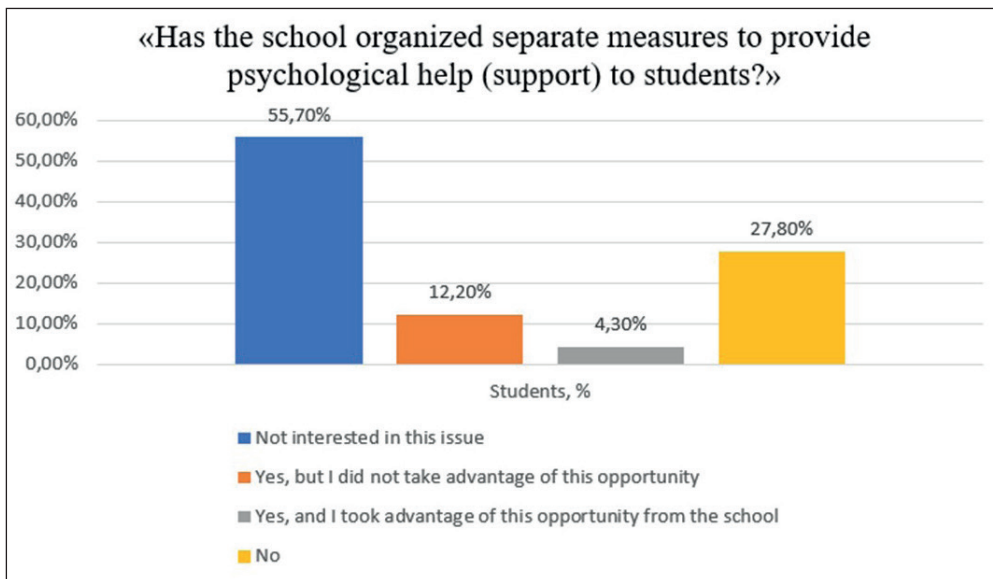


Fig. 3. Data on the organization of measures to provide psychological support.

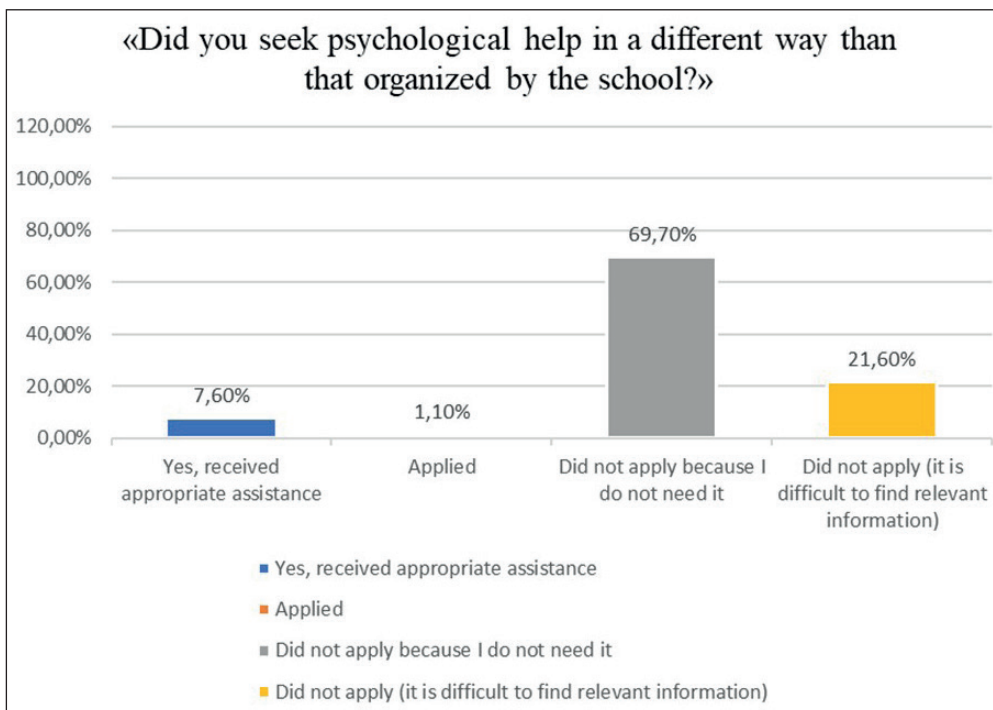


Fig. 4. Distribution of teachers' answers to questions «Did you seek psychological help in a different way than that organized by the school?»

The analysis of teachers' answers showed that the school had organized psychological support for teachers, but they did not take advantage of this opportunity (50.0%), and a little more than 30.0%, on the contrary, were participants in psychological consultations and training. 69.7% of teachers indicated that they also do not need psychological support that can be provided outside the school. Only 7.6% of teachers needed such help and received it in another way. Work on providing psychological support to all subjects of the educational process cannot be formal. After all, the heads of educational institutions determined in the questionnaires a sufficiently high indicator (92.9%) regarding their organization of measures to provide psychological assistance to the participants of the educational process. At

the same time, teachers and students were not always informed about such events, so they did not participate in such events, although they need psychological support. It is also urgent to identify specific psychological problems of participants in the educational process, establish their nature and provide targeted assistance.

To the question «Does the school organize measures to provide psychological assistance (support) to participants in the educational process?» 93% of respondents-directors answered optimistically «yes» and 7% - «no».

As for the teacher respondents, their answers to the question «Did the school organize separate measures to provide psychological help (support) to teachers?» were distributed as follows: 31% answered «yes, I used it»; 47% - «yes, but I didn't use it»; 22% - «no».

Accordingly, student respondents answered the question «Has the school organized separate measures to provide psychological help (support) to students?». 55.7% of students answered that they were «not interested in this issue»; 12.2% - «yes, but I did not take advantage of this opportunity»; 4.3% - «yes, and I took advantage of this opportunity from the school»; 27.8% - «no».

It should be noted that the answers of different groups of respondents to the mentioned question differed significantly. In particular, the answer «no» was given by only 7% of respondents-directors, but this answer was given by 22% of respondents-teachers and 27.8% of respondents-students. Therefore, it can be concluded that representatives of the school administration are somewhat embellishing the situation. Perhaps the interested parties were not sufficiently informed about the possibility of involvement in measures to provide psychological assistance (support). In any case, the provision of psychological assistance (support) to the participants of the educational process in the conditions of martial law is an important and necessary component of the activities of general secondary education institutions and requires special attention. The students themselves feel stressed and, as a result, quickly get tired. But teachers, like other participants in the educational process, can use psychological help outside the general secondary education institution, therefore, during the research, the teacher respondents gave answers to the question «Did you seek psychological help in a different way than that organized by the school?». The answers to this question were distributed as follows: 69.7% - «did not apply because I do not need it»; 21.6% - «did not apply (it is difficult to find relevant information)»; 7.6% - «yes, received appropriate assistance»; 1.1% - «applied».

The results of the survey demonstrated the importance of timely assistance and psychological support to all subjects of the educational process, which should become mandatory elements of the educational process and should not be of a formal nature.

DISCUSSION

War with its inherent dangers and the proximity of hostilities has a significant impact on the mental and psychological health of both children and adults. Conditions that pose a danger to life and health are a source of constant stress for all participants in the educational process. Therefore, timely psychological help and social-emotional support can minimize the harmful effects of stress on the human psyche.

Important in this context is the monitoring of the psycho-emotional state of teaching staff and students, the

main tools of which are observation and conversation, and the use of valid and reliable methods approved by the professional community. It is urgent that school psychologists work in cooperation with parents. At the same time, they retain the right to choose a specialist - a psychologist and the place of receiving the appropriate help. The task of the general secondary education institution is to convince parents of the importance of timely referral to a specialist to prevent possible psychological problems in children. At the same time, the relevant institution should not remove itself from the socio-emotional support of students, children remain in the attention zone, and changes in their psycho-emotional state are monitored [10].

In our opinion, it is also worth paying attention to the potential of extracurricular education as a factor of psychological relief, and the introduction of new forms of it regarding the collective and individual participation of children.

In turn, we recommend:

- to carry out constant communication with all participants of the educational process regarding the organization of the educational process in the conditions of martial law, using its various forms;
- to continue the practice of conducting “psychological support minutes” for employees of general secondary education institutions and “psychological minutes” for students to strengthen the mental health and improve the psychological culture of all participants in the educational process;
- to diversify the forms of extracurricular education as a factor in the psychological relief of students, taking into account the peculiarities of the organization of the educational process in a mixed format. It is appropriate to involve students in various forms of creative, project, and volunteer activities, as well as the organization of thematic exhibitions, humanitarian actions, etc.;
- to determine one of the important directions of the work of the psychological service of educational institutions - educational activity, which should be aimed at increasing the competence of participants in the educational process (in particular, teaching staff) in the context of providing psychological first aid and mastering modern technologies of such aid, teaching methods of psycho-emotional stabilization concerning methods of psycho-hygiene, psychological support for children in a crisis period, support and recovery of their psychological health, providing knowledge to create a psychologically safe environment in an educational institution. To implement this direction of work through the teaching of educational material according to the programs of

optional courses, electives, and psychological and socio-pedagogical circles.

CONCLUSIONS

Considering the massive nature of traumatization of the population during military operations, there is a need to involve social institutions in the maintenance of public health, for which assistance to the population

is not the main function, but which they can perform in these extraordinary circumstances. The education system covers a significant number of students and their families, it employs qualified teachers with a psychological and pedagogical education, and interaction has already been established between these groups. This can form the basis for establishing psychological and pedagogical support for war-traumatized children and adults.

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Conflict of interest:

The Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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