

УДК 378.091

DOI [HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.33989/2075-146X.2024.34.317989](https://doi.org/10.33989/2075-146X.2024.34.317989)

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PECULIARITIES OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PROFESSIONAL STATE OF UKRAINIAN TEACHERS DURING THE WAR AND THE POTENTIAL OF MORITA THERAPY FOR THEIR RECOVERY

The article highlights the peculiarities of the psychological and professional state of Ukrainian teachers during the war. The results of an all-Ukrainian survey of teachers (January 2024) are presented, which showed that more than half of Ukrainian teachers have psychological distress, most of them have not yet recovered from the shocked mental state they experienced at the beginning of the war. At the same time, a relatively high level of resilience was found among Ukrainian teachers, indicating that the war has hardened them and made them stronger in fulfilling their professional duties and solving problems in supporting students. Most teachers use methods that encourage students to look at everyday life, recognize fear as a natural emotion, and discuss it openly with students. Good communication and creative activities also help students successfully. However, when faced with students' passive attitudes toward life and great losses, teachers have difficulty providing assistance. Most teachers recognized the benefits of Morita therapy for restoring psychological and professional well-being, as well as for overcoming anxiety and tension, as a method of focusing on constructive actions.

Keywords: *teacher, the impact of war on the psychological and professional state of teachers, mental health, crisis situations, education, participants of the educational process, Morita therapy.*

Problem statement. On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, which resulted in a full-scale war that has been going on for more than two years. Military events have dramatically affected all areas of life in Ukraine, including education, as well as the psychological and professional state of teachers who continue to teach and support students in difficult conditions.

The Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine constantly updates data on war losses and damaged educational institutions on its interactive map. <https://saveschools.in.ua/> According to the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, about 3,800 schools have been affected since the beginning of the war, and more than 360 schools have been completely destroyed. The war has led to issues of accessibility and security of education. Many children and teachers have lost the opportunity to join the educational process, and teachers are under the threat of shelling in regions where hostilities are taking place. Even in regions where there are no hostilities, complete security is impossible due to constant missile attacks by the aggressor state.

In a situation where schools being destroyed like this, how is the psychological state of students and teachers? In January and February 2023, a group of researchers led by Professor Olha Nikolenko from the Poltava V.G. Korolenko National Pedagogical University conducted a study on the impact of war on the psychological state of students and the challenges that students and teachers have to overcome during the war. The results of the study were presented in the article "Art therapy for improving the psychological well-being of students traumatized during the war" (2023), as well as at the international conference of UCC University "International Week: Sustainable Living - Globally and Locally" (2023, Copenhagen, Denmark). The study showed that children have serious mental health problems, and the biggest problem for students is overcoming fear (68%). Educators try to support children to continue living and learning despite their anxiety. However, teachers also need support and methods to restore their mental health and professional status. Problems of the students and teachers' psychological state are also paid attention by the Ukraine government. In 2024, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine published the collection "War and Education" (2024), which, among other issues, highlights the

psycho-emotional state of students and teachers. It is noted that only 37% of students had positive emotions during the war. Immediate psychological support is needed by 30% of teachers and 49% of school administrators.

As Professor Olha Nikolenko pointed out in her research, besides the students, teachers also need support. Many teachers are physically and mentally exhausted by their own losses and psychological difficulties, a busy teaching schedule, and constant care for students. Therefore, an important problem that requires theoretical and practical solutions is the search for effective methods to restore the psychological state of Ukrainian teachers and support their professional activities during the war. This will help teachers to better ensure the educational process and help students overcome the difficulties of the war period.

However, psychological support for Ukrainian teachers is considered extremely difficult. The reason is that the mental health situation of Ukrainian teachers has been not good before the war. According to a survey of 1817 teachers conducted in 2018-2020 (T. Dziuba et al., 2021), an unstable level of emotional comfort was dominant in general (57.2%), "Self-assessment of mental health" (61.0%) and "Signs of psychiatric symptoms" (53.0%), due to unbalanced working conditions (overload, daily and weekly overtime) in Ukrainian educational organizations.

The Ukrainian government has realized the difficult condition faced by teachers. On April 11, 2023, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted amendments to Article 51 of the Law of Ukraine "On Complete General Secondary Education" regarding the professional development of pedagogical staff in providing psychological support to participants in the educational process. According to the Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, at least 10% of the total number of hours for the in-service training of pedagogical staff should be allocated to improving knowledge, skills and practical skills in terms of providing psychological support (2023). In his article "Education in Time of War" (2022), the Educational Ombudsman of Ukraine Serhiy Horbachov spoke about the support for teachers from the temporarily occupied territories and teachers abroad (Horbachov, 2022).

The international society is also trying to contribute to the psychological support of Ukrainian teachers. UNESCO and the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, with the support of Japan, are training school psychologists to support students and teachers. <https://ukraine.un.org/en/233260-ukraine-unesco-joins-forces-protect-mental-health-educational-community>

Methods of supporting Ukrainian teachers during the war have been reflected in recent publications. The manual by V. Andreyenkova, T. Voitsakh, I. Hrytsiv et al. "Psychosocial Support for Participants in the Educational Process" presents the theoretical and practical foundations of psychosocial support for teachers to work in critical and crisis situations (V. Andreyenkova, T. Voitsakh, I. Hrytsiv, 2023). The methodology of crisis psychosocial assistance is proposed, which will promote teachers' readiness to solve typical tasks during their professional activities in wartime. A series of qualitative and quantitative studies on methods of supporting Ukrainian teachers was conducted by A. Tolstoukhov and V. Lunov (2024). They identified resilience and coping strategies among teachers. Effective coping strategies include below. In an individual level, teachers participate in professional development workshops focused on stress management and resilience training. Many have also sought personal counseling and psychological support. In an institutional level, schools and universities have adapted their curricula to include components that address mental health, resilience, and coping with trauma, as well as psychological support services within educational institutions, including on-site counselors and online mental health resources. In a community level, teachers have community support networks and collaborations with NGOs. Some innovative approaches have also been carried out, such as Holistic Wellness Programs like yoga, meditation and group therapy, as well as online psychological support services. Online support services require personalized and culturally sensitive support (Chorna, 2024). On the other hand, those strategies also have challenges: resource limitations, uneven access to mental health services and support systems, and sustainability problems.

Other method that may be useful for supporting Ukrainian teachers is crisis support. Although different from war, in Japan, where there have been many disasters such as earthquakes and volcanic explosions, psychological support for teachers in affected areas has also been provided. T. Kobayashi (2011) explains the importance of peer support among teachers, and T. Kobayashi (2013) suggests reducing the workload of teachers. H. Arabori (1997) reports on the interaction between teachers and students that teachers are at a loss to cope when students are undergoing severe physical and mental changes, but are usually energized and encouraged by the students.

In summary, the above research shows that Ukrainian teachers are in dire need of support as they are affected by the dual effects of the crisis of war and the burden of their primary duties. When providing support, support is needed at the individual, institutional, and community levels, and concrete methods include those that deal with negative psychological reactions such as trauma response, and positive methods such as holistic well-being and positive interactions with students. Online psychological support is also viable, with emphasis on individualization and cultural sensitivity. Research on the psychology of teachers in wartime Ukraine and in crisis situations is still scarce, and most studies seem to focus on teachers' mental problems, with little consideration given to how to support them. The question of effective methods for the psychological and professional recovery of Ukrainian teachers remains open, which makes our article relevant.

The purpose of the article is to find out the peculiarities of the psychological and professional state of Ukrainian teachers during the war, as well as the possibilities of Morita therapy for their support and recovery.

Presentation of the main material. Our group is doing psychological supports for Ukrainian teachers, based on Morita Therapy, a traditional Japanese Psychotherapy. The aim of our activity is to provide Ukrainian teachers with group training of Morita therapy in order to improve their own mental health and, through this, the mental health of their students. As the preliminary research, we conducted interviews and a survey, to investigate the daily lives and mental states of teachers and students, as well as educational methods beneficial to students' mental health. This paper introduces the results and implications of the survey.

This survey was approved for ethical review by the Poltava University of Education (Approval Number: 2024-1105-16).

In December 2023, interviews were conducted with three Ukrainian education-related university teachers. Based on the results, in January 2024 our team conducted a teacher survey through Google Forms, from elementary, junior high, and high schools across Ukraine.

Participants. 506 teachers participated in this survey. The gender of participants was 14 male (2.8%), 488 female (96.4%) and 4 (0.8%) did not want to answer. 25 participants (4.9%) were in their 20s, 85 (16.8%) were in their 30s, 112 (22.1%) were in their 40s, 186 (36.8%) were in their 50s and 98 (19.4%) were in their 60s. The majority of participants had been teaching for more than 10 years (451 participants, 89.1%). Above results showed that the majority of participants in this survey were experienced female teachers above 40s.

Participants were from 17 regions in eastern, central and western Ukraine. There were 20 other participants who were displaced (teaching online) in 10 European countries, including Poland (8), Germany (5), Romania (2) and other countries.

Questionnaire and procedure. The instruction of the survey was as below. "Please read the description and, if you agree, kindly participate. It will take approximately 15 minutes. While we strive to ensure your comfort, there may be questions that could be psychologically distressing. Therefore, you are not obligated to answer those questions, and you may choose to discontinue your participation at any point (simply by closing your browser). Personal identifying information will not be disclosed in any way to protect your privacy. Your responses will be securely managed and will be carefully disposed of after a certain period of time has elapsed. Having understood the above explanation, please select "Agree" if you are willing to participate. You may choose "disagree" to end the survey if you do not wish to participate".

The questionnaire consisted of parts as below. Firstly, we examined teachers' mental health. We used the psychological distress as one indicator. The Shortened version of Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) (Kessler et al., 2002) was used. This item was rated on a five-point scale anchored at *strongly disagree* and *strongly agree*. We also examined teachers' resilience as another mental health indicator. Resilience Scale (Hirano, 2014) was used. This item was rated on a five-point scale anchored at *strongly disagree* and *strongly agree*. Meanwhile, we also asked teachers to answer changes in both scales between the beginning of the war and now, as well as reasons for these changes.

Secondly, we asked about the students' school life, contents of students' anxiety and fears, as well as what coping techniques teachers were using to decrease students' anxiety and fears.

Thirdly, we asked about useful psychological trainings teachers have learnt.

Finally, we introduced Morita Therapy and asked teachers' responses to it.

Results and discussion.

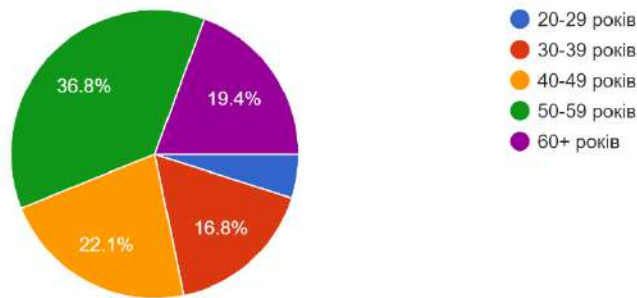
1, Teachers' mental health.

1) Psychological distress.

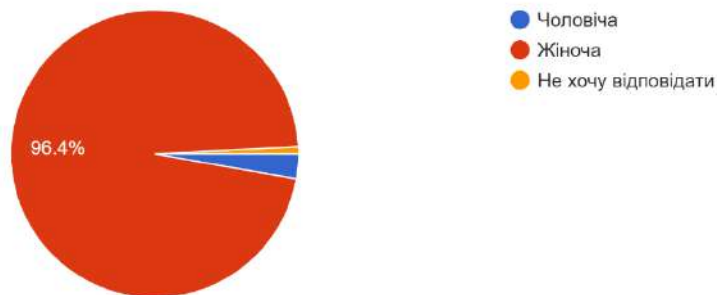
Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) was examined as one indicator of mental health. The cut-off point as suspected mental illness is 25, and 53.4% of all participants was above 25. This result suggests that the mental health of Ukrainian teachers is in a critical situation. Compared to when the war started in February 2022, 148(29.2%) had improved their mental health, 214 (42.3%) were almost the same and 144 (28.5%) had deteriorated.

This result indicated that the majority of teachers had not been able to recover from the shocking mental state they were in at the beginning of the war. Free text entry showed the reasons for this included 1) 'hopelessness' (12 participants) such as 'I don't see a way out when the war will end', 2) 'The constant trials of war' (10 participants) such as 'constant explosions, fear and tension', 3) 'unable to control emotions' (6 participants) such as 'I can't control my emotions', 4) 'Loss (of past, youth)' (4 participants) such as 'I got old in a sudden', 5) 'fatigue' (3 participants) such as 'work with children and parents, interaction with colleagues, being not only a teacher but also a second mother, a psychologist for the children, a friend to encourage them, there are many other roles that teachers play, everyone is exhausted in some way', and 6) 'The decline in social morals' (1 participant).

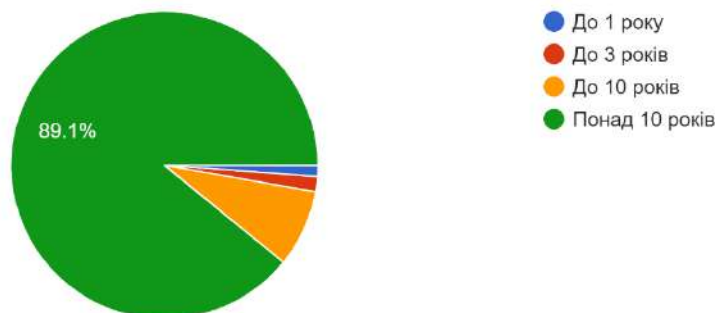
Age:
506 responses



Стать:
506 responses



Teaching experience:
506 responses



On the other hand, reasons for the improvements since the beginning of the war (multiple responses) included: 'I have started to evaluate events around me more realistically' (300 participants), 'I have a concrete understanding of the situation and know what to do' (201 participants), 'I am more solution-oriented' (136 participants), 'I have a routine' (101 participants), 'I dive into work' (1 participant), 'I believe in the victory and mercy of God' (1 participant).

2) Resilience.

Resilience was also examined. Factor analysis revealed three factors (Table 1). Factor 1 is 'Behavioral ability and optimism' ($M=3.62$, $SD=0.56$), Factor 2 is 'Understanding others and self-understanding' ($M=3.93$, $SD=0.46$) and Factor 3 is 'Sociability' ($M=3.89$, $SD=0.66$). Reliability coefficient of each factor is .79, .70, and .76, which are sufficient values. The original scale consisted of seven factors: optimism, self-regulation, sociability, behavioral ability, problem-solving orientation, self-understanding and understanding of others. The results of the

Ukrainian teachers showed a simpler factor structure, with behavioral ability, optimism and self-regulation integrated into the first factor, and understanding of others, self-understanding and problem-solving orientation into the second factor. It is interesting to note whether this is a result of wartime or Ukrainian culture.

The mean values (*M*) of each factor exceeded the theoretical middle value of 3, suggesting that the resilience level of Ukrainian teachers was not low, especially compared to their psychological distress examined above.

Table 1
Resilience scores of Ukrainian Teachers

Items	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Factor Loading		
		1	2	3
Factor 1: Behavioral ability and optimism ($\alpha=.79$)				
12. I can carry out decisions through to the end	3.59 (0.86)	.78	.05	-.14
9. I value working hard.	3.37 (0.89)	.73	-.22	.06
14. I think that I can wriggle out when faced with a difficult problem	3.85 (0.72)	.57	.04	-.08
1. I think that things will work out on most occasions in any case	3.44 (0.81)	.52	.03	.10
19. I can control my feelings even if there is a disagreement	3.44 (0.88)	.52	.03	.13
5. It is good to be intimate with another person	4.00 (0.69)	.44	.10	.14
Factor 2: Understanding others and self-understanding ($\alpha=.70$)				
21. I am good at understanding others' ways of thinking	3.91 (0.64)	.10	.59	-.02
11. I can handle difficult experiences well	3.89 (0.73)	-.10	.59	.12
17. I understand how unpleasant things influence my feelings	4.14 (0.61)	-.11	.54	.09
18. When I am faced with unpleasant situations, I try to gather information to solve the problem	3.89 (0.70)	.12	.51	-.09
13. I treat someone with consideration	3.76 (0.89)	-.08	.48	-.05
20. I think I have perseverance	4.00 (0.73)	.16	.46	.00
Factor 3: Sociability ($\alpha=.76$)				
2. I am good at preserving friendships since I was a child	4.03 (0.68)	-.07	.00	.81
6. When I am faced with unpleasant situations, I try to gain something from those experiences	3.93 (0.78)	.03	-.02	.80
15. I am an outgoing person and have a wide circle of friends	3.70 (0.93)	.14	.07	.50

Note. *N* = 506. The extraction method was Promax rotation with Maximum likelihood. Factor loadings above .40 are in bold.

Compared to when the war started in February 2022, 152 participants (30.0%) had improved, 217 (42.9%) were almost the same and 127 (25.1%) had deteriorated. Reasons for the improvements included 'I evaluate the events around me realistically' (300 participants), 'I have become more resilient and solution-oriented' (136 participants). And the worsen reasons are 'People have changed and become unpredictable (58), 'I feel hard to decide what is right and what is wrong now' (70 participants). The worsen reasons suggested that the uncertainty of society may influence teachers' recovery from distress.

We also performed a correlation analysis (Table 2). The correlation between each factor on the resilience scale and the K10 shows that each factor of resilience has a strong negative correlation with the K10. It was suggested that increasing resilience may reduce psychological distress in Ukraine in wartime.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Resilience and K10

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	F1	F2	F3	K10
F1: Behavioral ability and optimism	506	3.62	0.57	–			
F2. Understanding others and self-understanding	506	3.93	0.46	.49**	–		
F3. Sociability	506	3.89	0.66	.51**	.46**	–	
K10	506	25.00	7.44	-.41**	-.18**	-.23**	–

p* < .05. *p* < .01.

Taken together, these results indicated that while the distress level of Ukrainian teachers is in crisis, their resilience meets a certain level, which suggests that they have been forged tougher by the war. Meanwhile we can do more practice to enhance teachers' resilience, in order to reduce their psychological distress.

2, Students' school life, contents of students' anxiety and fears, coping techniques.

1) Students' school life.

'The normal day is often interrupted by missiles and air raid sirens, and we have to go to shelters' (382 participants), 'Students are studying in a hybrid online and offline form, while having no safety regulations during the air raid sirens' (91 participants), 'Students don't want to show their faces and communicate' (1 participant), 'The students cognitive abilities and the ability to work productively have decreased significantly' (1 participant), 'They are not calm' (1 participant).

2) Contents of students' anxiety and fears.

Contents of anxiety and fears (multiple choice) of students on a daily basis: Anxiety and fear for the safety of family and friends (352 participants), fear for their own safety (344 participants), and fear of losing their homes (164 participants).

3) Coping techniques being taught to students and successful cases.

Techniques teachers taught their students to cope with anxiety and fear included 'talking about everyday life' (287 participants), 'telling them it is okay to be afraid' (258 participants), 'talking about their fears and anxieties' (197 participants), 'telling them not to be afraid' (64 participants) and 'organizing creative events' (27 participants), 'psychological techniques' (2 participants) and 'switch to positive topics emotionally' (1 participant). The majority of teachers use methods that encourage students to look at everyday life, recognize fear as a natural emotion and discuss it openly with students. Creative activities are also used. On the other hand, some teachers teach students to 'not to be afraid'. The teachers' responses showed that they are sincerely tackling the problems of their students through a process of trial and error.

Examples of successful cases (multiple choice) included good communication with students (399 participants), creative activities with students (260 participants), small group events (watching films, discussing books, watching theatre) (140 participants) and share emotions, jokes and life stories (2 participants).

Good communication with students can help the students express their feelings, understand others, feel connected, and feel validated, all of which can reduce feelings of anxiety and fear. Creative activity is a form of self-expression and a means of releasing negative emotions such as anxiety and fear by giving form to feelings. It requires concentration. Activities such as painting, writing poetry or making music require students to focus on the present moment. When they achieve something through creative activities, their self-efficacy improves. This increases their confidence in their own abilities and effectiveness and helps to reduce anxiety and fear. Also, many creative activities have a relaxation effect. Small group events can provide a supportive environment for students to express their feelings, learn from others, improve their social skills, gain self-awareness, and build accountability, all of which can help in managing anxiety and fear. The free text entry also gave the answer as "Sharing life story". It can be a powerful tool too, for coping. It provides a platform for self-expression, promotes self-understanding, fosters connection with others, empowers the individual, and contributes to healing.

4) Difficulties in supporting students.

Cases of teaching difficulties (multiple choice) were 'students with a passive attitude to life' (270 participants), 'students who had suffered great losses (family, friends, home, etc.) in the war' (217 participants), and 'students' panic attacks' (119 participants), 'difficult to understand students' level of anxiety for they hide and avoid contact during online classes' (3 participants). The above results showed the constant ingenuity and hard work of the teachers.

3, Useful psychological trainings for teachers.

The idea that one should be prepared to be resilient (265 participants), breathing exercises (206 participants), relaxation exercises (203 participants), think about good & bad future scenarios and what actions should be taken (150 participants), conversation with psychologists (125 participants).

4, Teachers' responses to Morita Therapy.

We introduced Morita Therapy as below. "Here we would like to introduce Morita Therapy. It can be considered as one form of psychological support to help children and teachers in Ukraine cope with anxiety and enhance resilience. Morita Therapy is a form of psychotherapy that was initiated by Japanese psychiatrist Shoma Morita in 1919. While it was primarily targeted at treating neurasthenia at the time, it is now mainly used for neuroses such as anxiety disorders and obsessive-compulsive disorders. In recent years, it has been applied to PTSD, psychosomatic disorders, depression, and panic disorders. The basic principles of Morita Therapy are as follows: Anxiety and tension should not be considered as 'things that should not exist', but rather, the underlying 'desire to live better' should be appreciated. As anxiety and tension intensify the more one tries to eliminate them, they should be left as they naturally arise (as they are), and focus should be directed towards the actions one should take, building up constructive actions. Its effectiveness has been reported not only in Japan, but also in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy, as well as in war and conflict regions".

We asked participants if it is useful for anxiety coping and resilience (multiple choice), 326 said it was useful for coping with fear and anxiety, 282 said it was useful for actively thinking about action and solving problems, 13 said it was not useful because it was difficult to understand, and Ten participants said that it was not useful because it was difficult to understand. Most participants were observed to be resonate and have interest in Morita therapy.

Conclusions. Our results show that more than half (53.4 %) of Ukrainian teachers have psychological distress at the level of suspected illness, and most have not recovered from the shocking mental state they were in at the beginning of the war. Compared to this, resilience was found to be relatively high, with the protracted war not reducing resilience in more than 70 % of people. These results indicated that while the distress level of Ukrainian teachers is in crisis, their resilience meets a certain level, which suggests that they have been forged tougher by the war. It was also suggested that increasing resilience may reduce psychological distress in wartime Ukraine.

Mental health was found to improve by realistically assessing surrounding events and being solution-oriented, suggesting the importance of not turning a blind eye to the facts and solving what is in front of oneself. On the other hand, social uncertainty had a negative impact on teachers' mental recovery.

The majority of teachers use methods that encourage students to look at everyday life, recognize fear as a natural emotion and discuss it openly with students. Good communications and creative activities can successfully help the students. While facing students' passive attitudes to life and students' great losses make teachers feel difficult in helping.

Useful psychological trainings to teachers are: the idea that one should be prepared to be resilient, breathing exercises and relaxation exercises, make good & bad future scenarios and consider actions.

Most teachers agreed with Morita therapy's main theory as "anxiety and tension are the underlying 'desire to live better', so one should let them naturally arise, and focus on constructive actions", and considered it beneficial for mental health.

Prospects for further research. In the future, we plan to conduct new surveys to know more about how to effectively support teachers. For example, of the methods used by teachers, which ones really benefit themselves and their students, and which ones may have the opposite effect. Basing on the knowledge from the surveys, we will communicate those results to Ukrainian teachers, improve our training contents, and continue to introduce Morita Therapy to teachers through online training and other ways.

In a climate of pessimism about the war situation and increasing difficulties in providing psychological support, we would like to provide solid and sustained support to Ukrainian teachers and students.

Acknowledgement. We would like to give thanks for the supports from Mental Health Okamoto Memorial Foundation, Advisor Kiyooki Okamoto of the Seikatsu-no-hakkenkai and Professor Susumu Nonaka at Saitama University.

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ОСОБЛИВОСТІ ПСИХОЛОГІЧНОГО ТА ПРОФЕСІЙНОГО СТАНУ УКРАЇНСЬКИХ УЧИТЕЛІВ ПІД ЧАС ВІЙНИ ТА ПОТЕНЦІАЛ МОРИТА-ТЕРАПІЇ ДЛЯ ЇХ ВІДНОВЛЕННЯ

У статті висвітлено особливості психологічного та професійного стану українських учителів під час війни. Представлено результати всеукраїнського опитування учителів (січень 2024 р.), яке показало, що більше половини українських педагогів мають психологічний дистрес, більшість із них ще не оговталися від шокового психічного стану, в якому вони перебували на початку війни. Водночас встановлено високий рівень життєстійкості українських учителів, який свідчить про те, що війна загартувала їх і зробила сильнішими у виконанні професійних обов'язків та вирішенні проблем щодо підтримки учнів. Психічне здоров'я вчителів покращується завдяки реалістичній оцінці навколишніх подій та орієнтації на пошук конкретних рішень проблем під час війни. З іншого боку, соціальна невизначеність негативно вплинула на психічне відновлення вчителів. Більшість учителів використовують методи, які заохочують учнів поглянути на повсякденне життя, визнати страх природною емоцією і відкрито обговорювати його з учнями. Успішну допомогу учням надають хороші комунікації і творчі заняття. Хоча, стикаючись з пасивним ставленням учнів до життя і великими втратами, вчителі відчувають труднощі в наданні допомоги. Більшість учителів визнали користь Моріта терапії для відновлення психологічного та професійного стану, а також для подолання тривоги і напруги, як метод зосередження на конструктивних діях. Тренінги для вчителів у контексті Моріта терапії допомагають усвідомити ідею готовності бути стійким, створення хороших і поганих сценаріїв майбутнього, обмірковування потенціалу та можливих дій тощо.

Ключові слова: учитель, вплив війни на психологічний та професійний стан учителів, ментальне здоров'я, кризові ситуації, освіта, учасники освітнього процесу, Моріта терапія.

Стаття надійшла до редакції 27.07.2024 р.