

Nuclear Power Plant Disaster: Impact on Mental Health and Lifestyle of Liquidators

(Olha Humeniuk)

Institute for Social and Political Psychology, National Academy of Educational Science of Ukraine, Kyiv,
Ukraine

Introduction. The example of liquidators was studied as a long-term consequence of the traumatic accident affecting mental health and lifestyle, as well as its changes. To this end, the study was conducted where 305 respondents participated (176 – a group of liquidators, 129 – a control group). The examination of approaches to the study of lifestyle has resulted in distinguishing following four psychological components: value, quality of life, subjective assessment, and level of subjective control (locus control). Given the empirical data of the research, such lifestyle patterns of liquidators as “victim”; “constructive and optimistic”; “passive and narcissistic”, “active and responsible” have been identified, including a description of specific features thereof of each.

The Chernobyl accident (ChNPP) is a significant event in the life of liquidators causing changes in all psychological components of their lifestyle, which has been proved empirically – by quantitative and qualitative studies. The author has found out that the Chernobyl disaster is considered by liquidators to have been a momentous experience in their lives (Kuzmenko, 2002; Khodorivska, 2005). The paper describes remote social and psychological consequences of the ChNPP accident for the liquidators, including negative dynamics of perception of an accident, low assessment of their own health and low estimation of quality of life, change in value structure and lack of life perspectives (Yakovliev, Volovich, Popovich, 1997).

Design. 305 employees of the Ministry of Interior of Ukraine (MIU) participated in the study. The test group included 176 responders from the MIU who served in the area of liquidation of the consequences of the Chernobyl accident in 1986-1990, the control group consisted of 129 employees of the MIU who did not take part in the liquidation of the consequences of the Chernobyl accident. Respondents from both groups of males aged from 47 to 65 were university graduates and had served at the MIU for more than two decades. Approximately 85% of respondents are retired from the MIU.

Methodology. Rokeach value survey (RVS); Schwartz outcome scale-10; Morphological test of vital values, V.F. Sopov, L.V. Karpushin; WHO Quality of life assessment instrument (WHOQOL-100); questionnaire "Level of subjective control" E.F. Bazhina, E.A. Golinkina, L.M. Etkind; the technique of self-relation research, V.V. Stolin, S.R. Panteleyev, a questionnaire developed by the author.

Results & Conclusions. A comparative analysis of the data obtained made it possible to distinguish specific features of the liquidators' lifestyle that was changed as a result of work in the ground zero epicenter of the accident. Given the comparative analysis, significant transformations in all structural components of lifestyle of participants of the accident at the ChNPP have been distinguished: value, quality of life, subjective assessment and level of subjective control (locus control).

According to the data and interviews with the liquidators, the following four sub-groups of respondents were formed, subject to their subjective assessment of the Chernobyl disaster impact on the transformation of their lifestyle and life as a whole: 1) the accident has affected their lives and completely changed their lifestyle; 2) the accident has changed their lifestyle; 3) the accident has partially contributed to the change of their lifestyle; 4) after the accident their lifestyle has hardly changed.

Based on the general characteristics of the changes, the types of lifestyle (“victim”; “constructive and optimistic”; “passive and narcissistic”, “active and responsible”) of responders have been developed and the structural and content specifics of the distinguished types have been outlined. The “victim” type is characterized by a very strong negative impact of the accident on the change in lifestyle of liquidators (according to the subjective values of respondents), low motivation and low significance of social values, low level of satisfaction with life, dependence between self-esteem and attitude of society, externality and tendency to accuse blame other people and the state of their problems.

The “constructive and optimistic” type is characterized by lack of the impact of the accident on the change in their lifestyle, and the impact is subjectively assessed as a positive rather than negative. Among the representatives of this type, the prevailing attitudes are the average motivational orientation, the significance of social values, the high level of satisfaction with life as a whole, and the high assessment of the lack of coherence and the subject of social relations. Respondents of this type consider others responsible for their problems, but they are sure that they themselves are responsible for their health.

Strong, predominantly negative influence of the accident on the change in lifestyle is experienced by the “passive and narcissistic” type. This type experiences low importance of individual and high value of social and common values, low level of satisfaction with the quality of life, high assessment of the agent of social relations

and personality, as well as high expectations of positive attitude of others in the expressed outward internal stability, externality in regulating the process of living in society.

The “active and responsible” type is distinguished by such specific socio-psychological Specific socio-psychological features as subjective assessment of the impact of an accident on the change in their lifestyle – moderate (equally positive and negative), high appreciation of individual values as well as of professional and social relations. They consider themselves responsible for the state of their health and for failures in their lives.

Keywords: man-made disaster, [quality of life](#), lifestyle, social psychology, way of life, mental stress, social life, personality

References.

1. Kuz'menko, T. M. (2002). *The influence of extreme situations on human life orientation (on the example of the Chornobyl catastrophe)*. Kyiv: IMMB.
2. Khodorivs'ka, N. (2005). *Chornobyl and the human: social adaptation*. Kyiv: NAN Ukrayiny; In-t sotsiolohiyi [NAS of Ukraine; Institute of sociology].
3. Yakovlyev, B. S. (1997). *Participants in the liquidation of the consequences of the Chernobyl accident as a social group*. Kyiv: Chornobyl'interinform.
4. WHOQOL Group. Field Trial WHOQOL-100. February 1995: facet definitions and questions. Geneva: WHO (MNH/PSF/95.1.B), 1995