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THE EXPERIENCE OF STRESS AND FEAR OF STUDENTS – IDPs

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Целью статьи было выявление психологического состояния, в котором находятся студенты – внутренне перемещенные лица (ВПЛ), а именно, как они переживают стресс и страхи по сравнению с контрольной группой (обычными студентами). В исследовании участвовали 63 студента классического университета 1-4 курсов разных факультетов. Экспериментальная группа включала 35 студентов, которые выехали из Зоны Антитеррористической Операции (10 мужчин и 15 женщин), и контрольная группа включала 28 обычных студентов (13 мужчин и 15 женщин). Психическое состояние студентов-ВПЛ характеризуется худшими чертами, чем состояние обычных студентов, что проявилось в большей склонности чувствовать страхи и меньшей стрессоустойчивости из-за пережитых травматических событий. Тяжесть симптомов ПТСР у студентов-ВПЛ связана с их уровнем страхов, в отличие от тяжести симптомов ПТСР обычных студентов, которая у них связана с опытом актуальных стрессовых событий. Симптомы ПТСР у студентов-ВПЛ не достигают клинически значимого уровня, что может быть объяснено достаточно благополучными условиями региона, куда они переселились, и перспективами учебы в университете, куда они были приняты.

Ключевые слова: внутренне перемещенные лица, студенты, страхи, ПТСР, стрессовые события

Метою статті було виявлення в якому психологічному стані знаходяться студенти – внутрішньо переміщені особи (ВПО), зокрема, як вони переживають стрес та страхи у порівнянні з контрольною групою (звичайними студентами). В дослідженні взяли участь 63 студенти класичного університету 1-4 курсів різних факультетів. Експериментальна група включала 35 студентів, які виїхали з Зони Антитерористичної Операції (10 чоловіків та 25 жінок), та контрольна група включала 28 звичайних студентів (13 чоловіків та 15 жінок). Психічний стан студентів-ВПО характеризується гіршими рисами, ніж стан звичайних студентів, що проявилось в більшій схильності відчувати страхи та меншій стресостійкості через пережиті травматичні події. Важкість симптомів ПТСР у студентів-ВПО пов'язана з їх рівнем страхів, на відміну від важкості симптомів ПТСР у звичайних студентів, яка у них пов'язана з досвідом актуальних стресових подій. Симптоми ПТСР у студентів-ВПО не досягають клінічно значущого рівня, що може бути пояснено достатньо благополучними умовами регіону, куди вони переселилися, та перспективами навчання в університеті, куди вони були прийняті.

Ключові слова: внутрішньо переміщені особи, студенти, страхи, ПТСР, стресові події

The aim was to identify which psychological state experience students – internally displaced persons (IDPs), particularly how they feel fears and stress in comparison with the control group (ordinary students). In the study there were involved 63 students of classical university of 1-4 years of studying of different faculties. Experimental group included 35 students which were displaced from Anti-Terrorist Operation Zone (10 males and 25 females) and control group included 28 ordinary students (13 males and 15 females). The mental state of students-IDPs can be characterized by worse features than state of ordinary students, which manifested in a greater tendency to experience fears and less resistance to stress because of experienced traumatic events. The students-IDPs' severity of PTSD symptoms are connected with their level of fears, unlike the PTSD symptoms severity of the ordinary students which are associated with their experience of actual stressful events. PTSD symptoms of the students-IDPs have not reached clinically meaningful level that can be explained by quite affluent conditions in the new region where they resettled, and the perspectives of studying at the prestigious university, in which they were enrolled.

Key words: internally displacement persons, students, fears, PTSD, stress events

Introduction

There are about 1.8 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) because of fighting in Luhansk and Donetsk regions of Ukraine and Crimea annexation by government data on December 2016 [1]. They are refugees who moved to other regions of Ukraine.

The largest number of IDPs is hosted in the areas immediately surrounding the conflict-affected area: in peaceful areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, as well as in Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhie oblasts [12].

IDPs from Eastern Ukraine report that they have left home due to security concerns (shooting, shelling) and/or the humanitarian impact of the conflict (lack of water, food, medicine). For example, Luhansk city lost electricity and water supply in early August 2014, causing many to flee. Many IDPs delayed their flight until their daily life became entirely unbearable. IDPs tell UNHCR harrowing tales of living in basements for weeks at a time, trying to calm their children's nerves when shelling started, and then making the decision to flee only as a last resort [12].

In 2015 in Kharkiv city region, Ukraine, V. Korostiy et al. showed that acute stress reactions had 75.9% of IDPs, anxiety disorders had 13.3% of IDPs from Donetsk-Luhansk, long-term depressive reaction had 3.3% of IDPs and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) had 8.6%. This screening was done in acute "afterflying"

period in 2014 on the sample of 360 IDPs [9].

Researches on the mental health of refugees are most commonly focused on two areas — PTSD and depression. A number of studies have indicated that refugees suffer significantly more from mental health impairment than other groups. S. Thomas added to this list of negative psychological reactions of refugees and displaced people also somatization and existential dilemmas (where belief patterns have been challenged) [16].

A traumatic event has a capacity to provoke fear, helplessness, or horror in response to the threat of injury or death. The mind's and body's response to feelings (both perceived and real) are fear and intense helplessness. Symptoms may include anxiety, impaired judgment, confusion, detachment and depression. People who are exposed to such events are at increased risk for PTSD as well as for major depression, panic disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and substance abuse, as compared with those who have not experienced traumatic events. They may also have somatic symptoms and physical illnesses, particularly hypertension, asthma, and chronic pain syndromes. There is an overwhelming loss of perceived power and self-esteem. Over 25% of displaced people, for example, said they no longer felt they were able to play a useful role. Widespread depression and feelings of fatigue and listlessness were common and may have prevented people from taking steps to improve their situation. Almost a quarter of internally displaced people had a high startle capacity and said they were constantly nervous [13].

It is established that an average of more than 50 per cent of refugees present mental health problems ranging from chronic mental disorders to trauma, distress and great deal of suffering. Many people suffer from psychosocial dysfunctioning affecting their own lives and their community. It is important to remember that refugees' reactions are normal reactions to abnormal situations. Life in overcrowded camps, deprivations, uncertainty over the future, disruption of community and social support networks lead to psychosocial dysfunctioning. Psychiatric morbidity and psychosocial dysfunctioning depends on the nature and time span of the conflict, on the level and the rapidity with which resilience will emerge, based on socio-cultural factors, and other environmental parameters. The rapidity of mental health support is critical [4].

In 2008 Ergun D. et al. compared psychological responses of internally displaced and non-displaced Turkish Cypriots a long time after the 1963-1964 ethnic conflict and 1974 war in Cyprus. The outcomes indicate that the IDPs were subjected to traumatic incidents at a higher degree due to killing, displacement, captivity, or killing of family members and relatives. The rate of PTSD of IDPs is 20%, and is significantly higher than for non-displaced persons. The comparison shows that IDPs had a higher level of depression scores than the non-displaced persons. But the somatization subscale scores are higher in non-displaced persons. The study reveals a higher frequency of war-related traumatic events in IDPs than in non-displaced people, greater suffering from posttraumatic stress and more negative beliefs about future reunion [5].

The study of Getanda et al. on IDPs living in Nakuru County, Kenya, indicates that being younger, married, perceiving to receive social and governmental health are IDPs who are most protected from poor mental health and wellbeing. But even these individuals still reported very poor outcomes. E.g. they present poor mental health and wellbeing, including suicidal ideation and fear. The theme “unhappy with life as IDP” represents participants' ongoing dissatisfaction and sadness with life as internally displaced person living in transit camps, and the belief that life will continue to be unhappy for as long as they remain in transit camps. The “suicidal thoughts” theme captures IDPs' suicidal ideation which was associated with regret to being born and their ongoing psychological suffering. IDPs also expressed “living in fear” which including the anxiety of being attacked and also the desire to return home but the fear in doing so [7].

Many IDPs are students who entered or transferred at the universities, where they had anew settled. It was shown that students-refugees, who have survived ethnic genocide tragedy in the Karabach, under-estimate time-intervals in comparing with those students, who had not such stressful event in their life. It means that students-refugees feel increased level of uneasiness and internal discomfort which correspond to underestimation of temporary time [3].

The purpose of our study was to identify which psychological state experience students-IDPs, particularly how they feel fear and stress in compare with control group (ordinary students). Fear and stress are the key negative features that characterize psychological state of IDPs as it can be concluded from the literature analysis. The study tasks were: 1) to conduct a qualitative analysis of the last two years stressful events that students-IDPs remember in compare with the local students; 2) to conduct a quantitative analysis of the last two years stressful events; 3) to conduct a qualitative analysis of IDPs-students' fears in compare with the ordinary students' fears; 4) to conduct a quantitative analysis of IDPs-students' fears in compare with the ordinary students' fears; 5) to conduct an analysis of IDPs-students' PTSD-level in compare with the ordinary students' one; 6) to identify the relationships between the stress indicators and the fear level in the experimental and control groups.

Method

Participants. In our study were involved 63 students of classical university – V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University of 1-4 years of studying of different faculties. Experimental group included 35 students which were displaced from Anti-Terrorist Operation Zone (10 males and 25 females) and control group included 28 ordinary students (13 males and 15 females). Average age of participants was 20 years, age scope – 17-22 years. There are near 200 students study at the University from Anti-Terrorist Operation Zone. All of them were invited through the stuff of their faculties by a specified time at the Psychology School for taking part in the research of their psychological state. 35 students came. The control group of students – not IDPs

was collected randomly in the campus.

Measurement. 3 psychological tests were used. First test was The Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS) of T.H. Holmes and R.H. Rahe in Russian adaptation [2, 8]. This method was used because as it was found in many researches the stressful life events, by evoking psychophysiological reactions, played an important causative role in the natural history of many diseases. There was identified one theme common to all these life events. The occurrence of each usually evoked or was associated with some adaptive or coping behavior on the part of the involved individual. Thus, each item has been constructed to contain life events whose advent in either indicative of or requires a significant change in the ongoing life pattern of the individual. SRRS is a table of events rating with their coefficients of «stressfulness» [8]. The more events with higher scores person has in own life during two last years, the worse is his/her adaptation and stress resistance.

The second method was The Mississippi Scale for Civilian PTSD (CMS) in the Russian adaptation. It is a sub device of the Mississippi Scale for combat-related PTSD. The Mississippi Scale for combat-related PTSD was devised by Keane, T.M, Caddell, J.M, and Taylor, K.L. in 1988 [2, 10]. The scale consists of 39 self-report items derived from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders III-R criteria for PTSD [10]. CMS includes items about intrusive memories and depressive symptoms, interpersonal adjustment problems, lability of affect and memory, ruminative features of PTSD, other interpersonal problems and sleep problems which reflect the psychological state of people who experienced a traumatic situation.

The third method was The Inquirer of Hierarchical Structure of Person's Actual Fears of U.V. Scherbatykh, E.I. Ivleva [14]. This test describes 24 types of fear. It needs to estimate fear emotion level which appears when person reads each test item by 10-scores scale. Test includes descriptions of physical, physiological and social fears.

Data analysis was done by MS Excel and STATISTICA 7.0.

Procedure. The research was conducted in V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University. Data were collected from December 2015 to February 2016. Students-IDPs were studying at this university for 0,5-1,5 years from the displacement time. The research design was approved by the Ethical Commission of School of Psychology of V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University. All participants gave informed consent for participation in the research.

Results

1. Qualitative analysis of the last two years stressful events

SRRS gave us the information about kinds and frequencies of stressful life events from the list of 43 ones during last two years in experimental and control group. It also allowed us to estimate their magnitude of stressfulness. The frequency of designation of each life event in groups was transferred in percent from whole amount of group members – look Table 1. The events are numbered in first column in accordance with their frequency rating in each group.

Table 1. Rating of stressful events in study groups

Experimental group (35 people, IDPs)				Control group (28 people)			
#	Event	Magnitude of stress	Frequency, %	#	Event	Magnitude of stress	Frequency, %
1	Change in residence	20	100	1	Christmas, New Year, birthday	12	82,1
2	Change in living conditions	25	82,9	2	Change in eating habits	15	64,3
3	Christmas, New Year, birthday	12	68,6	3	Revision of personal habits	24	53,6
4	Revision of personal habits	24	65,7	4	Vacation	13	42,9
5	Change in financial state	38	65,7	5	Change in recreation	19	42,9
6	Change in number of family get-togethers	15	57,1	6	Change in living conditions	25	39,3

7	Change in eating habits	15	54,3	7	Change in social activities	18	35,7
8	Change in recreation	19	51,4	8	Change in health of family member	44	32,1
9	Change in health of family member	44	45,7	9	Outstanding personal achievement	28	32,1
10	Outstanding personal achievement	28	22,86	10	Personal injury or illness	53	28,6
11	Death of close family member	63	17,1				

Table 1 shows that the total number of stress events mentioned in the experimental group more on one than in the control group. It was not mentioned in the control group such events as "change in residence", "change in financial state", "change in number of family get-togethers" and "death of close family member", which were mentioned in the experimental group. It was not mentioned in the experimental group such events as "vacation", "change in social activities" and "personal injury or illness", which were mentioned in the control group.

Thus, the events that occurred in the group of students-IDPs represent the most typical sources of stress for IDPs – moving, worsening of the financial situation, overcrowding and loss of family members.

2. Quantitative analysis of the last two years stressful events

Quantitative analysis showed that the overall average score for all named stressful events in a group of students IDPs totaled 222.5 scores, while in the group of ordinary students – 182.4 scores. This amount, according to the authors of the SRRS, reflects the level of accumulated stress, which can lead to the disruption of adaptation, and increase the incidence of severe somatic diseases. According to the authors the total score from 150 to 199 shows a high resistance to stress and a sufficient level of adaptability that is peculiar to the control group of ordinary students. If the total score lay from 200 to 299 then this level corresponds to a 50% probability of a some disease occurrence, and if the total score is 300, this probability rises to 90%. Lower than optimal level of stress resistance is inherent to students-IDPs, which corresponds to the sum of scores between 200 and 299. Level of 300 or more scores, which is already critical and which correspond to low resistance and high vulnerability to stress and the disruption of adaptation in the form of various diseases has not been registered in our sample.

Average sum of the SRRS scores was on 40.1 scores higher in the group of students-IDPs than in the group of ordinary students, which corresponds to the trend of significant differences between groups' meanings by the Mann-Whitney U test: $U=367,5$; $p=0,090$.

3. Qualitative analysis of fears

Results of analysis of different fears of experimental and control groups are showed in Table 2. In accordance of The Inquirer of Hierarchical Structure of Person's Actual Fears each kind of fear is estimated by respondent by 1-10 rating scale. For example: Are you afraid of the dark? 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10. In Table 2 it is showed mean scores of each kind of fears in the group of students-IDPs and in the group of ordinary students. In the column "#" it is indicated rating of fears in accordance with their mean scores.

Table 2. Level of fears in studied groups

Experimental group (35 people, IDPs)			Control group (28 people)		
#	Fear kind	The average severity of fear in the group	#	Fear kind	The average severity of fear in the group
1	Fear of war	8,7	1	Fear of possible relatives' illness	7,5
2	Fear of possible relatives' illness	8,5	2	Fear of negative consequences of relatives' illness	6,3

3	Fear of negative consequences of relatives' illness	7,6	3	Fear of war	5,6
4	Fear of the exams	7,2	4	Fear of spiders and snakes	5,6
5	Fear of change in personal life	6,7	5	Fear of responsibility	5,4
6	Fear of madness	6,7	6	Fear of the exams	5,1
7	Fear of responsibility	6,4	7	Fear of the future	4,9
8	The fear of public speaking	6,2	8	Fear of change in personal life	4,9
9	Fear of poverty	6,2	9	Fear of poverty	4,7
10	Fear of the future	6,2	10	Fear of superiors	4,5
11	Fear of crime	5,6	11	Fear of crime	4,4
12	Fear of spiders and snakes	5,3	12	Fear of ill by a disease	4,0
13	Fear of ill by a disease	5,1	13	Fear of deep	3,9
14	Fear of superiors	5,1	14	Fear of height	3,7
15	Fear of height	4,4	15	The fear of public speaking	3,5
16	Fear of senility	4,2	16	Fear about heart	3,5
17	Fear of death	4,2	17	Fear of madness	3,4
18	Fear about heart	4,1	18	Fear of senility	3,3
19	Fear of deep	3,8	19	Fear of darkness	3,2
20	Fear of darkness	3,4	20	Fears associated with sexual function	2,8
21	Claustrophobia	3,2	21	Fear of aggression towards relatives	2,8
22	Fears associated with sexual function	3,2	22	Fear of death	2,6

23	Fear of aggression towards relatives	3,0	23	Claustrophobia	2,3
24	Fear of suicide	1,6	24	Fear of suicide	2,1

We concluded from the Table 2 that fears of war and possible relatives' illness dominate in both groups, but in the IDPs-group these fears are experiencing more intensively and on the first place is the fear of the possibility of war in comparing with the ordinary students group, in which the fear of possible relatives' illness is on the first place.

The fear of mental illness (possible pathological changes in mental state) is on a high place in the rating of fears of the students-IDPs' in comparing of the control group, in which this fear has a much lower power. Students-IDPs feel the fear of death two times more compared with the ordinary students. Also, students-IDPs feel more intensively fear of responsibility and fear of the uncertainty of the future.

4. Quantitative analysis of fears

It was found thanks to quantitative analysis of the summative level of fears that IDPs-group has total average test score for the hierarchical structure of fears at 127, 3 scores, and the group of ordinary students – at 110.0 scores. The difference between the groups is significant that was showed by Mann-Whitney U test: $U=312,0$; $p=0,014$. It means that students-IDPs feel much more fears, especially it concerns fears of own survival and mental health, and with health of closely related people than students who did not had forced displacement. We compared our empirical results with the norms for this test and found that average test score in group of ordinary students is close to the middle normative interval (which is between 73,2 – 106,5 scores). But average test score in the group of students-IDPs is higher over the middle normative interval on 20,8 points, that is more than one standard deviation ($S=16,65$). That is students-IDPs have increased level of fears experience.

5. Analysis of PTSD level

It was not achieved clinically significant levels of PTSD at 100 scores in any group. Nobody from our sample had no PTSD. Average score of the CMS was 78.3 scores in the group of students-IDPs, and it was 82.9 scores in the group of ordinary students. This difference is not significant, as Mann-Whitney U test showed: $U=413,0$, $p=0,286$, i.e. the level of PTSD symptoms measured by this test is the same in the both groups.

6. Relationships between the stress indicators and the fear level

Further correlation analysis was performed between signs of PTSD, level of stress, which was accumulated by difficult events, and experienced degree of fear in the experimental and the control group. This analysis was planned in order to verify whether after the forced relocation there are various links between these psyche properties, or they do not differ from those that are proper to people who live in stable and safe conditions. It was found by Spearman correlation analysis that indeed other structure of connections of psychological features exists in the group of IDPs-students than in the control group of ordinary students. It was revealed positive relationship between level of fears and level of PTSD symptoms in the group of students-IDPs: $\rho=0,59$; $p=0,0002$, but it was not revealed relationships between level of accumulated stress measured by SRRS and level of PTSD symptoms and between level of accumulated stress measured by SRRS and level of fears.

It was found positive relationship between level of accumulated stress measured by SRRS and level of PTSD symptoms in the group of ordinary students: $\rho=0,51$; $p=0,005$, but it was not revealed relationships between level of fears and level of PTSD symptoms and between level of accumulated stress measured by SRRS and level of fears. It was conducted equal correlation analysis for joined sample for a control. It were got the same two relationships, but with lower coefficients and significances: $\rho=0,35$; $p=0,005$ (between fears and PTSD) and $\rho=0,31$; $p=0,014$ (between accumulated stress and PTSD) appropriately. It means that these relationships are really inherent to the different groups separately and the groups' joining just decreases these relationships.

The obtained results show that level of PTSD symptoms of students-IDPs tied to their level of fears. We think that their level of fears after displacement is so high that it became connected with psychological impairment which is described in PTSD symptoms. In contrast, level of fears of ordinary students is not so high and their sings of psychological impairment, which is described in PTSD symptoms is tied to their level of accumulated stress by actual stressful life events.

Discussion

In our study it was found several differences of psychological state of students-IDPs in comparing with psychological state of ordinary students. In particular students-IDPs have experienced more stressful events, i.e. have lower levels of resistance to stress and social adaptation, and they have a higher level of fears. PTSD symptoms of students-IDPs are connected with their level of fears in contrast with PTSD symptoms of ordinary students, which are connected with actual life events. It was not found in our sample clinically significant level of PTSD, but in the literature it was mentioned rather often for IDPs [5, 9, 13, 16]. We can explain our results about absence of PTSD in our sample by fact that although all participants of experimental group had replacement, but they lived now in the houses/flats of relatives or in rental housing and did not live in camps,

they had not problems with food and goods supplies, they resettled in the big region and second by size city of Ukraine.

It is known that lower resilience of IDPs and refugees associated with food insecurity, lower social support availability and social isolation as it was shown in a 1-year follow-up study of resilience in a conflict-affected ethnic Sri Lanka Muslim population [15].

Erola N. et al. indicated that while some studies have shown that immigrants have more psychological problems than the native reference population, others have reported that these individuals may face similar or even reduced risk, especially if they have moved away from adverse to favorable circumstances. It has been argued that factors purported to be important for the psychological adjustment of immigrants, as in acculturation, may be less important when individuals are displaced and resettled within their own country. Results of effects of internal displacement and resettlement on the mental health of Turkish children and adolescents conducted by Erola N. et al. suggested that internal displacement and resettlement might be related to higher internalization problems. However, this effect was small [6].

Porter M. and Haslam N. found that the psychological aftereffects of displacement by war cannot be understood simply as the product of an acute and discrete stressor, but depend crucially on the economic, social, and cultural conditions from which refugees are displaced and in which refugees are placed. Refugee characteristics also moderated mental health outcomes. There is apparently greater resilience of younger refugees implying that children and adolescents are less affected by the enduring stresses of displacement [11].

Thus such factors as young age, good circumstances in the new city and in the new university, availability of social support, food, goods and water can play a positive role for save students-IDPs from PTSD development.

Conclusions

The mental state of students-IDPs can be characterized by worse features than state of ordinary students, which manifested in a greater tendency to experience fears and less resistance to stress because of experienced traumatic events. The students-IDPs' severity of PTSD symptoms are connected with their level of fears, unlike the PTSD symptoms severity of the ordinary students which are associated with their experience of actual stressful events. We explain different structure of relationships in the mental state of students-IDPs by their high level of fears after war and social catastrophe experience because of which their level of fears become connected with psychological impairment described in The Mississippi Scale for Civilian PTSD.

PTSD symptoms of the students-IDPs have not reached clinically meaningful level that can be explained by quite affluent conditions in the new region where they resettled, and the perspectives of studying at the prestigious university, in which they were accepted. IDPs of students' age in Ukraine have benefits when entering to the universities or opportunities to transfer to any university of the country. The prospects of this research are to study the social and psychological adaptation of the students-IDPs in the new environment of relocation.

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