

# Psychosocial Consequences of armed Conflicts on Society

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Original Article

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Source: *Clinical Social Work and Health Intervention*  
Pages: 47 – 55

Volume: 14  
Cited references: 23

Issue: 3

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## Keywords:

Armed Conflict. Psychosocial Consequences. Psychological Well-being. Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. Collective Trauma.

## Publisher:

International Society of Applied Preventive Medicine i-gap

CSWHI 2023; 14(3): 47 – 55; DOI: 10.22359/cswhi\_14\_3\_07 © Clinical Social Work and Health Intervention

## Abstract:

The article presents the study results of the negative impact of armed conflict on society. The research methodology involves assessing the level of psychosocial well-being of the population and internally displaced persons; identification and assessment of urgent psychosocial problems and needs affected by the war in Ukraine: identification of mechanisms for overcoming the negative psychosocial consequences of the armed conflict. The following psychosocial consequences of the armed conflict for Ukrainian society have been identified: low level of psychological well-being, socio-economic and humanitarian problems, personal security problems, acute psychological experiences associated with traumatic experiences, psychological problems of children, emotional problems, problems of social adaptation to new conditions of existence. It is noted that the impact of certain negative psychosocial consequences increases the risk of post-traumatic stress disorder among categories of the population (internally

displaced persons, combatants, children with traumatic experience, victims of violence, torture, captivity). It has been determined that in order to overcome the negative psychosocial consequences of an armed conflict, it is necessary to develop and implement a comprehensive system of psychosocial assistance to war victims through the implementation of the following mechanisms: educational and personnel mechanisms (training and retraining of specialists in the field of psychosocial support), institutional mechanisms (formation of a network of centers' and institutions providing social and psychological assistance), scientific and methodological mechanisms (implementation of best practices in the field of psychosocial assistance to armed conflict victims), organizational and managerial mechanisms (improvement of the management system in the field of psychosocial assistance).

## Introduction

Armed conflicts in the modern world have a negative impact on psychosocial health and well-being both at the individual and collective (social) levels, the consequences of which are forced displacement from war zones, socio-economic and humanitarian problems, poverty, stress and mental disorders. depression, post-traumatic disorders – PTSD, behavioural and adjustment disorders). As studies of the effects of war stress over the period 1985-2015 show, the quantitative indicator of PTSD is more than 20% of the population who survived an armed conflict [11; 12; 13; 14], and the psychosocial consequences themselves have a long-term negative impact [10, p.118]. Studies of the consequences of conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, Palestine, and Syria show that armed conflicts have a special impact on the mental development of children and their mothers [15; 16; 17; 18].

The full-scale Russian armed aggression on February 24, 2022 disrupts the economic and social development of the state and has a catastrophic negative impact on the life and health of citizens. The consequences of war cause lasting physical and psychological damage to adults and children. The number of sections of the population affected by hostilities has increased many times over, among which the most affected are: 1) internally displaced persons (IDPs), who suffered both material and psychological losses, which affected their psychosocial well-being; 2) children with traumatic experience (being in the occupied territories, in war zones, loss of relatives and parents, violence by the occupiers),

for whom the risk of PTSD is quite high [9]; 3) combatants, for whom the rate of occurrence of PTSD is even higher [8, p. 5]. Therefore, the creation of an effective system for overcoming the negative psychosocial consequences of military aggression is of particular relevance for Ukraine, which involves taking into account the social and psychological problems faced by Ukrainian society, the development of effective models of psychosocial assistance to victims, the formation of an institutional system of assistance, training and professionalization of personnel in the field of providing social and psychological assistance to various categories of the war victims.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify and assess the negative psychosocial consequences of armed conflicts (the war in Ukraine) on society and to determine the mechanisms for overcoming the destructive influence.

## Methodology

The pilot study aims to identify the impact of the armed conflict in Ukraine (Russian full-scale military aggression on the part of Ukraine) on society, manifested in the form of negative psychosocial consequences for the population, internally displaced persons (IDPs), children with traumatic experiences, combatants, and also to identify mechanisms to overcome such negative psychosocial consequences. The methodological basis of the study is general scientific and empirical methods of cognition, which made it possible to identify such research tasks as: 1) assessing the level of psychosocial well-being of the population and internally displaced per-

sons; 2) identification and assessment of urgent psychosocial problems and needs of both the population as a whole and the most vulnerable categories of the population most affected by the armed conflict (IDPs, combatants, war children); 3) determination of mechanisms for overcoming the negative psychosocial consequences of an armed conflict.

## Participants

The study involved 445 participants, including: 1) 100 experts in the field of providing psychosocial support and assistance (psychologists, social workers, medical workers with a psychological education); scientists dealing with the problems of people affected by armed aggression; civil servants who manage the social protection of vulnerable categories of the population through an online survey; 2) 145 internally displaced persons from the occupied territories of the Zaporizhzhia region and Mariupol (the average age of the respondents is 43 years, of which 58% are women and 42% are men); 3) 200 people living in the front-line territory – the city of Zaporizhzhia (average age is 37 years, of which 64% are women and 36% are men). The study among IDPs and the population was conducted during September-October 2022, together with volunteer organizations and specialists who are engaged in the provision of primary psychosocial services to IDPs (especially from territories where hostilities are taking place) and vulnerable categories of the population in Zaporizhzhia city.

## Methods

According to the specific tasks of the pilot study, we used the following methods: 1) to assess the level of psychological well-being of the population and IDPs, the Methodology “Scale of psychological well-being” (K. Riff) was applied – a variant of the questionnaire “The scale of psychological well-being” adapted by M. Lepeshinsky and translated into Ukrainian by S. Karskanova [1]; 2) to assess the current psychosocial problems and needs of both the general population and IDPs – a sociological survey of the population and IDPs in Zaporizhzhia city; 3) to determine the mechanisms for overcoming the negative psychosocial consequences of an armed conflict – an online expert survey. To pro-

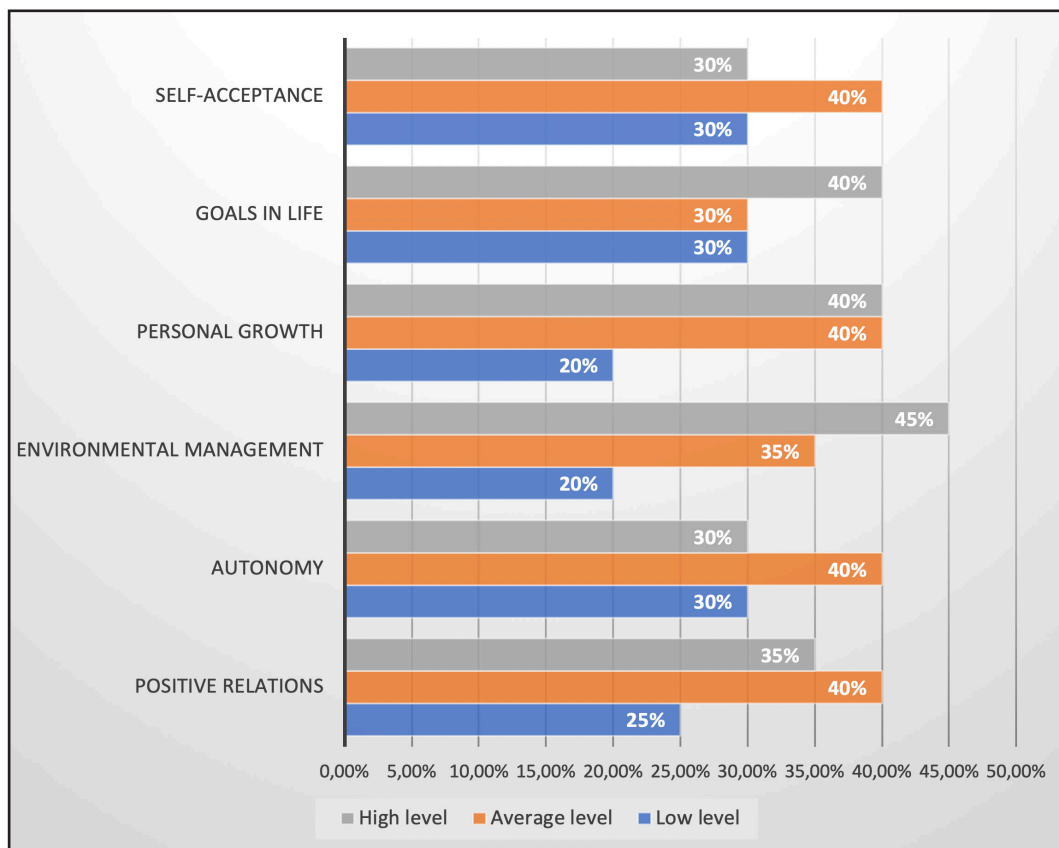
cess the results of the study, methods of mathematical statistics were used (using SPSS 17.0 software) and a method of content analysis of respondents’ answers to open questions.

## Results

Assessment of the psychological well-being level. Modern concepts of psychological well-being combine the emotional aspect (satisfaction with life, positive perception of reality) and the activity-semantic aspect (meaningfulness of life, self-actualization, focus on the activity transformation of oneself and the world around) in the concept of psychological well-being, i.e. the psychological well-being of the individual manifested in the experience of the meaningful fullness and value of life, the feeling of satisfaction with life and oneself (as a subjective assessment of one’s own psychological well-being), the achievement of actual motives and needs of the individual in the perspective of a socially significant goal with a focus on the future activity transformation of life [2; 3].

To assess the level of psychological well-being, the methodology “Scale of psychological well-being” (K. Riff) was applied. In general, the average level of psychological well-being prevails over the entire group of respondents – 335 points, and among the interviewed internally displaced persons (IDPs) this indicator is even lower – 286 points according to the normative values of the methodology (in the version of M. Lepeshinsky), taking into account the standard deviation. Such a level of psychological well-being within displaced persons is mainly associated with the inability to establish close social contacts with others, the closeness and emotional detachment of IDPs [5, p. 8]

**Figure 1** Distribution of groups of interviewed internally displaced IDPs according to the scales of the psychological well-being method by K. Riff (in %)



Among the low characteristics, most of all have such components of psychological well-being as positive deeds, personal growth, environmental management and goals in life. The figure 1 shows the distribution of groups of respondents according to the scales of the methodology (in %).

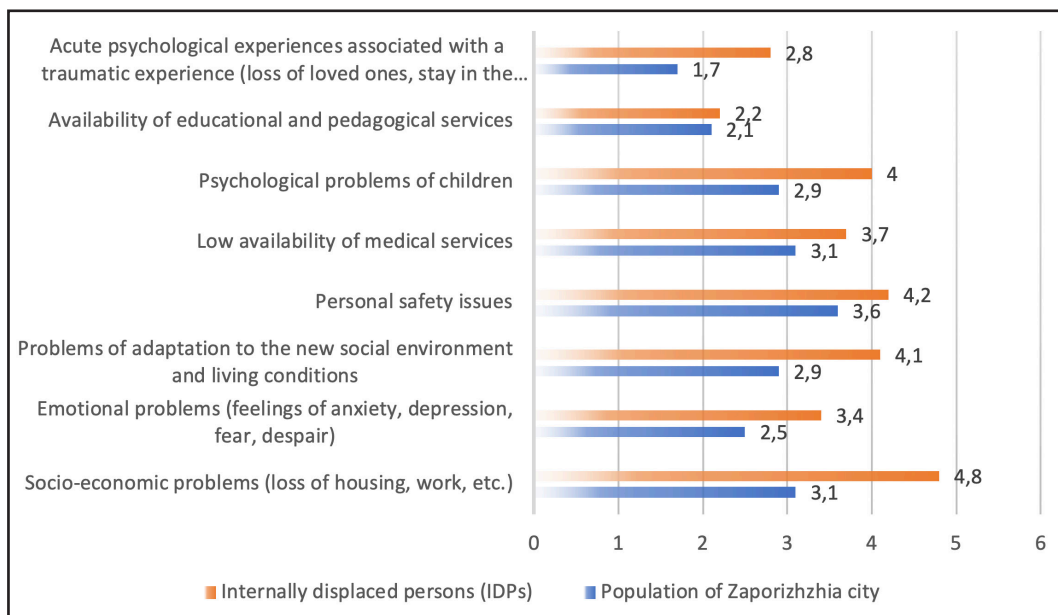
The results obtained by us do not reflect the assessment of the psychological well-being level at the national level, but their trend coincides with the results of a study by the Institute of Social and Political Psychology of the National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine, conducted by the online survey method on the Kantar Ukraine online panel, covering people aged 18-55 years in towns and cities of Ukraine with a population of more than 50 thousand [4]. So, the psychological consequences of the war include a long-term negative impact on the psycho-emotional well-being and purposeful activity of the individual against the background

of violations of social adaptation and social behaviour.

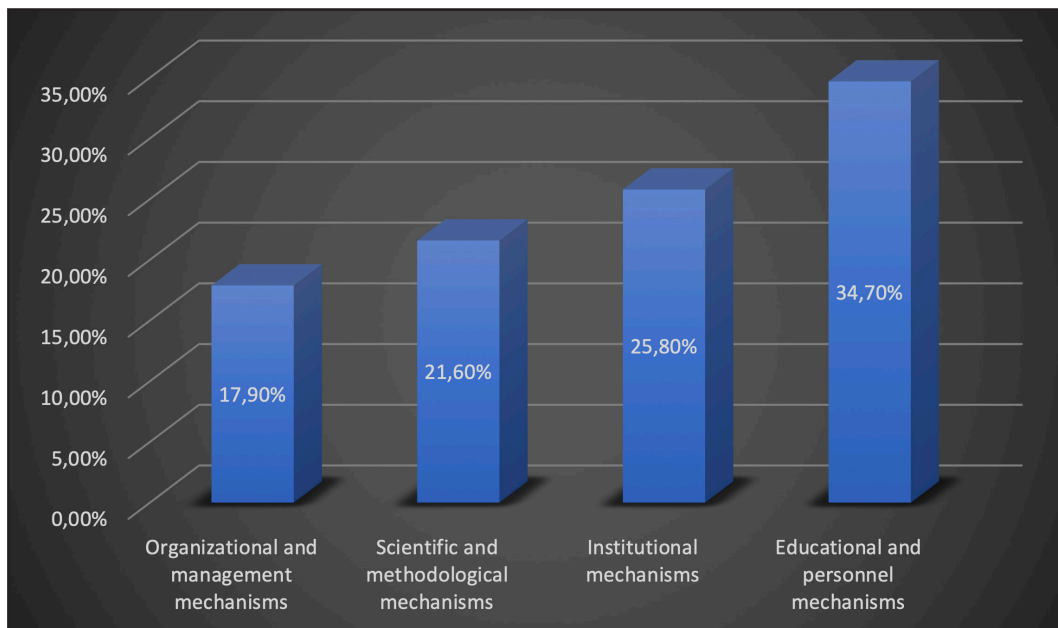
To assess the current social and psychological problems and needs of the population and separately internally displaced persons, the respondents were asked to answer the question “What social and psychological problems bother you personally and need to be addressed immediately?” It was proposed to evaluate on a five-point scale, where 1 – they have a slight effect, and 5 – they affect life activity significantly (Figure 2).

According to the results of the study, the most relevant and significant social and psychological problems for the population of frontline territories (Zaporizhzhia) and IDPs are: 1) for the population of Zaporizhzhia – problems of personal security (3.6 points), socio-economic problems (3.1 points), accessibility of medical services (3.1 points), psychological problems of children (2.9 points); 2) for IDPs, the most

**Figure 2** Assessment of actual social and psychological problems of the population of Zaporizhzhia and internally displaced persons.



**Figure 3** Mechanisms for overcoming the negative psychosocial consequences of a full-scale war in Ukraine (based on the results of a content analysis of experts' answers)



acute problems are of a material and humanitarian nature (4.8 points), problems of personal security (4.2 points), problems of adaptation to a new social environment (4.1 points), psychological problems of children (4 points), acute

psychological experiences of a traumatic experience (2.8 points) and emotional problems (3.4 points) have a significant indicator. So, the main psychosocial consequences of the war, which are negatively experienced by society, are so-

cio-economic problems associated with the loss of housing, work, forced migration; meeting the need for security; psychological problems of children; emotional problems and trauma that increase the risk and development of post-traumatic stress disorder.

To determine the mechanisms for overcoming the negative psychosocial consequences of a full-scale war in Ukraine, an expert survey was conducted online. The experts suggested answering an open question: “A full-scale war on the territory of Ukraine poses serious threats to the psychological health and well-being of the majority of the population. Please indicate what, in your opinion, will help to effectively counter these threats and overcome their destructive consequences for Ukrainian society?” A total of 189 statements were received (several options could be indicated). The content analysis of the experts’ statements made it possible to single out the following groups of mechanisms for overcoming the negative psychosocial consequences of war in society: institutional, educational and personnel, scientific and methodological, organizational and managerial mechanisms (Figure 3).

The content of the selected categories of content analysis is as follows:

- educational and personnel mechanisms (34.7% of all statements). Typical answers: “training of specialists in psychosocial support”, “increasing the qualifications of specialists in psychologists and social workers”, “urgent training in providing emergency psychological assistance”;
- institutional mechanisms (25.8% of all statements). Typical answers: “creation of a network of centers and institutions for psychological assistance to the population”, “formation of a services system for the psychological and social rehabilitation of IDPs and combatants”, “attracting foreign organizations to cooperate in overcoming the negative psychosocial consequences of the war, etc.;
- scientific and methodological mechanisms (21.6% of all statements). Typical answers: “formation of a model for overcoming the negative impact on the psychosocial well-being of the population”, “incorporation and implementation of foreign experience in psychosocial support for victims of armed conflicts”, “development and implementation of adap-

tation and resilience programs for IDPs and combatants based on the resilient approach” implementation of training courses and training programs for specialists in the field of mental and psychological health”;

- organizational and managerial mechanisms (25.8% of all statements). Typical answers: “Improving the system of governance and management in the provision of social and psychological assistance”, “Decentralization and expansion of the autonomy of social work institutions”, “Involving public and voluntary organizations in the provision of social and psychological services in cooperation”, “Promoting intersectoral social partnership in a system of psychosocial support for war victims, etc.

## Discussion

The results of the study indicate that in the conditions of armed conflicts there are two types of psychosocial traumas (as their consequences) – collective and individual. In the context of the realities of the war in Ukraine, collective trauma concerns both the entire society and individual vulnerable segments of the population most affected by hostilities (IDPs, combatants, children with traumatic experiences, people who have lost loved ones, etc.). For the Ukrainian society, the characteristics of collective mental trauma, according to researchers, are social frustration, a deep collective sense of injustice, and the prolonged nature of traumatization [8, p. 3]. As we have found, an indicator of collective trauma is a decrease or loss of psychological well-being, especially in such parameters as the ability to control the environment, autonomy and goal setting in life, which can contribute to the emergence of individual trauma, manifested in the form of PTSD, chemical and non-chemical addictions, and disorders behavior, personality, nutrition, dissociative states, anxiety and depression, panic, even in bipolar affective disorder.

For the most vulnerable categories we have identified, a common manifestation of individual trauma is post-traumatic syndrome, among the symptoms of which are: re-experiencing traumatic memories, active avoidance of external or internal reminders of a traumatic event, changes in the cognitive and emotional spheres,

symptoms of excessive arousal, psychosomatic disorders [19].

An important aspect of the study was to identify mechanisms for overcoming the psychosocial consequences of the war in Ukraine, which creates a comprehensive system of psychosocial assistance to victims of armed conflict. As we have identified as an important aspect of such a system, there should be a staffing of specialists in the provision of psychosocial assistance, which implies high-quality training and retraining of psychologists, psychotherapists, social workers, and psychiatrists. In parallel with staffing, it is important to create a network of specialized centers, institutions and organizations for the provision of psychosocial assistance, institutionally implemented in the national system of social, psychological and psychiatric work, including the regional and local levels (providing for their certain autonomy).

Of particular importance are the mechanisms for the implementation and introduction of leading innovative models of psychosocial work with victims of armed conflicts, among which the resilience approach should be noted as the formation of resilience, adaptation to new conditions of existence and overcoming the consequences of stressful and emergency events [20; 21; 22].

The creation of such a comprehensive system of psychosocial assistance involves effective management at all levels of government using innovative social management practices [23].

## Conclusion

So, according to the results of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

firstly, the psychosocial consequences of armed conflicts are manifested in the following: the emergence of a large number of groups affected by the war (IDPs, combatants, children with traumatic experiences, victims of violence, captivity, torture, etc.); a general decrease in the level of psychological well-being of the population; problems of a socio-economic and humanitarian nature; increased risk of psychological problems and mental disorders, PTSD; social adaptation and reintegration in the newest social conditions;

secondly, overcoming the negative psychosocial consequences requires the creation of an

effective and comprehensive system of psychosocial assistance to victims of armed conflict through educational, personnel, institutional, scientific, methodological, and organizational and managerial mechanisms.

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