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## CREATION OF A SAFE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FOR UKRAINIAN YOUTH DURING WAR CONDITIONS

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### ABSTRACT

*The migration processes in Ukraine have become especially intense in recent years. On the one hand, they are a serious challenge for the education of young people, but, on the other hand, they represent an opportunity for their development, although they require legal support and regulation.*

*For quite some time now, thousands of Ukrainian children and youth have had to pursue their education abroad while hostilities continue in Ukraine. The duration of the war is decisive not only for the number of Ukrainian youths abroad, but also for their ability to plan their future life. Starting life in a new country and finding one's way in a new society can be a very difficult process. Young people face new risks and challenges. They are in dire need of educational opportunities. Many people have to learn a language, identify an educational qualification, or undergo educational retraining. Some of them still need psychological help and cannot adapt and find themselves and their*

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place in a new country, but they cannot return home, where active fighting continues.

The **purpose** of this article is to study the main psychological reactions to life-threatening situations that can affect the psychological well-being of children and youth under martial law in order to develop recommendations for overcoming stress in the process of adaptation to new conditions of existence in a new country and integration into a new educational environment.

The **methodology** is based on the fundamental methodological principles of the systems approach and includes the use of a complex of general scientific (comparison, classification, generalization, systematization) and empirical (observation, search, conversation, description, analysis) methods. The integrative BASIC Ph model for stress management and increasing resilience after severe stress, developed by the Israeli Scientist M. Lahad, was used as the framework through which we sought to identify appropriate stress coping resources. Various procedures were proposed too: searching for meanings, drawing, creating collages, free writing, interaction in a group as in a "safe environment", playing with sand, breathing "4-7-8".

As part of our research, the following **results** were achieved. The views of scientists regarding problematic issues that arise for Ukrainians as they seek to integrate into the system of a new country are summarized. The basic psychological reactions of a person to life-threatening situations are considered. The study summarizes the refugees' feelings of concern about their own situation and the fate of those remaining in Ukraine during the war. Recommendations, which include the use of the integrative BASIC Ph model, are proposed as means to address problem situations during training sessions with pupils and students. In so doing, we seek to ensure the effective educational integration of Ukrainian youth.

The **conclusions** suggest that in order to restore and preserve the psychological state of Ukrainian youth who have gone abroad, it is necessary to understand and determine a person's psychological reactions to life-threatening situations in the current conditions of martial law in Ukraine for the timely application of appropriate measures and techniques to overcome them, depending on the specific situation that has arisen.

**KEYWORDS:** Youth, Educational Integration, Language Courses, Psychological State, Extreme Stress, Stress Management, Model BASIC Ph.

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## INTRODUCTION

The experience of war and flight, loss of a familiar social environment, separation from family members, friends and loved ones cause psychological problems among Ukrainians who have left the country. About 67% of registered refugees are women, about 38% are children and youth. However, due to visa exemptions for Ukrainian refugees upon entry and subsequent travel to other host countries or back to Ukraine, this information is inaccurate.

In conditions of intercultural learning and international understanding, Ukrainian refugees are forced to integrate into the educational system of the countries that have accepted them. Ukrainian children and youth should receive education in other countries, regardless of the possible length of stay, and try to maintain the opportunity to realize their right to education.

The individual's ability to exercise that right, however, can be undermined by their natural reactions to life-threatening situations. Such reactions include, in particular, the following psychological phenomena:

- avoidance – under conditions of existential stress, especially when a person experiences powerlessness, he classifies stimuli from the environment as a “life-threatening situation”. Even if the individual danger to a person has already passed, each similar situation or each similar stimulus (for example, anxiety) can be subjectively perceived as a threat here and now and cause automatic reactions such as flight and fight, freezing, trembling or sweating;
- re-experiencing (intrusion) – many images and events of the war are firmly and vividly imprinted in the memory and are still experienced very close in the present time and in a safe place. This experience may involve people mentally replaying or tracking scenes from the recent past. At the same time, they feel very tired, because they cannot sleep at night, because they again experience some of their fears in the form of nightmares;
- hyperarousal – attention may currently be focused on dangers in the person's environment. The person may therefore appear tense and irritable, be easily distracted, nervous and have difficulty concentrating and will need support. Maintaining a calm and clear demeanour and making it clear that one is safe here and now can strengthen a person's subjective sense of safety.

Children and adolescents often respond to stress with physical symptoms such as headaches, abdominal pain, nausea, and eating and digestive disorders. Normally, such reactions last from several days to several weeks. However, if family members are still in mortal danger in their home country, the subjective sense of mortal danger remains in the here and now, and stress reactions cannot yet be fully processed. In this case, such reactions should be considered as appropriate attempts to cope with a threat to life.

Understanding human responses to extreme stress is of universal importance and helps understand student responses in educational contexts. Despite having new contacts, Ukrainian refugees may feel lonely because close relatives or friends remain in their home country, and the frequency and quality of social contacts in the new country are not sufficient.

The **purpose** of the article is to study the main psychological reactions to life-threatening situations that can affect the psychological well-being of children and youth under martial law in order to develop recommendations for overcoming stress in the process of adapting to new conditions of existence in a new country and integration into a new educational environment.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

People fleeing armed military conflict are usually exposed to high psychological stress. If you have to leave the country, the move is often associated with prolonged physical stress, which also has a negative impact on the physical and psychological well-being of refugees (M. Metzger et al., 2020). As a consequence, in one case this is accompanied by the mobilization of internal vital resources; in another – a decrease or even a breakdown in performance, deterioration of health, physiological and psychological stress phenomena. It depends on the individual characteristics of the organism, living conditions, awareness of current events and understanding of the degree of danger. Thus, factors that give rise to mental tension can in some cases have a positive impact on the person mobilizing it, and in others - a disorganizing, negative impact.

In general, each country's national rules apply to refugees. In every country that accepts Ukrainian refugees, there are courses for integration in the labor market, in the education system and the economy (Siegert, 2019; Siegert, 2021).

It is important for schoolchildren to visit the educational institutions of the state in which they arrived: in a new environment they meet people of their own age, see structured daily life and can take part in various educational activities. Educational offers of states that have accepted refugees from Ukraine take into account two options – early or medium-term return to Ukraine, as well as medium- and long-term integration of people into the context of the country in which they are receiving education (Cerna, 2019).

Attending language courses is a key condition for learning a language (Spörlein & Cornelia, 2019). Thanks to the language course options, there are a number of other types of courses of which Ukrainian refugees can take advantage. In particular, if they are registered as unemployed, they must necessarily participate in integration courses (often with an in-depth target level) (Brücker et al., 2023).

The level of participation in language courses may also differ depending on the intentions of Ukrainians to stay in the country. This suggests that if refugees intend to stay for a limited period of time (for example, only 1 year or until the end of the war), they are less willing to attend language courses.

In addition, it becomes clear that those who plan to stay in the country for a long time spend time with local residents more often than those who do not plan to do so. It is possible that refugees who spend a lot of time with local people feel socially integrated, meaning they are more likely to stay in their host country for a long time.

The vast majority of Ukrainian refugees, if they were employed in Ukraine, had skilled or highly skilled jobs. Acquired professional competencies are an important condition for integration into the labor market of a European state (Kosyakova & Kogan, 2022). However, it is apparent that due to fundamental differences in the education systems of Ukraine and EU countries, Ukrainian refugees often lack qualifications. Thus, the professional qualifications of Ukrainian refugees are partially devalued.

## **METHODOLOGY**

To achieve the research aim, general scientific (comparison, classification, generalization, systematization) and empirical methods (observation, search,

conversation, description, analysis) were used. Based on these methods, we have formulated practical recommendations for ensuring appropriate conditions for preserving the psychological state of Ukrainian youth in modern conditions of living abroad.

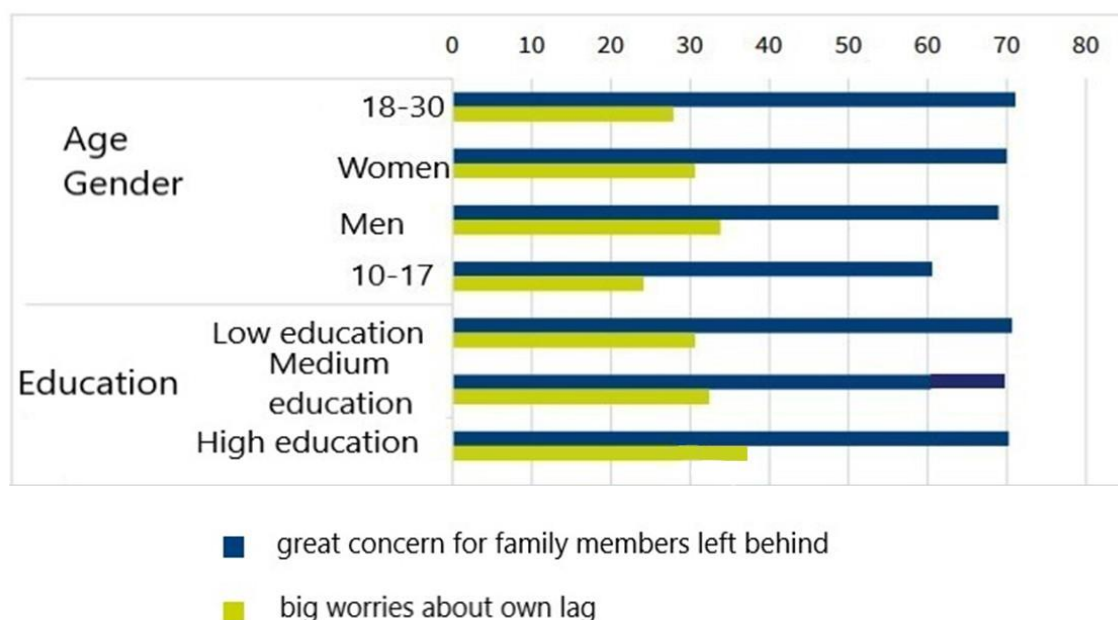
In seeking to develop a resource-oriented stress coping model, reference was made to Israeli scientist M. Lahad's BASIC Ph (Belief, Affect, Social, Imagination, Cognition; Physiology) model for stress management and increased resilience. Research participants were offered a survey (Resource-oriented model of stress relief BASIC Ph, n.d.). In order to strengthen dominant coping resources, as well as to develop passive channels, various methods were proposed: searching for meanings, drawing, creating collages, free writing, interaction in a group as in a "safe environment", playing with sand, breathing "4-7-8".

## RESULTS

It is necessary to take into account the special life situations of Ukrainians abroad (searching for housing, learning a language, getting an education, finding a job, medical care, etcetera). It is important in the current situation to provide special support to Ukrainian refugees, who are very concerned about their own situation in a new country, as well as the situation of loved ones who remained in Ukraine (Fig. 1). The survey involved 120 people who left the territory of Ukraine as a result of Russia's military aggression since February 24, 2022.

**Figure 1**

*Percentage of refugees concerned about their own situation and the fate of those who remained in Ukraine*



71% of young people aged 18 to 30 said they were very worried about their loved ones who remained in Ukraine, which is 11% more than in the 10-17 age group. Perhaps this is due to the greater awareness of this category of people.

The level of education also influences the percentage of refugees' concern about the problems of Ukrainians who remained in the territory of military operations (Fig. 1).

To solve the problem of accompanying Ukrainian children and youth with psychologists and teachers, additional resources are needed. This is particularly relevant because children and youth from Ukraine increasingly will attend regular language classes and will need places in educational institutions. Extra-curricular activities such as sports or music clubs can be very beneficial in terms of facilitating the integration of children and young people.

Students may feel the need to talk about events and reactions they have experienced. Classroom discussion, led and facilitated by the instructor, can create a protected space in which uncertainty and fears can be appropriately addressed. It is advisable not to leave children and young people alone with their feelings and information, but to offer them such spaces for discussion (Kostikova & Viediarnikova, 2023).

Some children and young people may react more strongly to news of war and flight and need more support than others. It is important to emphasize that this situation is new and threatening to many people. It evokes different feelings: discomfort, anxiety, sadness, anger, pity, helplessness, fear, etcetera. The main focus of communication should be on reducing the risk of social isolation, discussing as many options as possible for overcoming stress and negative feelings of a person (Tverdokhliebova, & Yevtushenko, 2022; Tverdokhliebova, & Yevtushenko, 2023).

It is important for a specialist to determine appropriate coping mechanisms for individuals who find themselves in a stressful situation. The Lahad's integrative BASIC Ph model for stress management and increased resilience after severe stress, is suitable for this (Lahad, 2017). The survey was as followings.

*Belief and values:*

1. In what and in whom do you believe? What are the traditions in your life that you love and/or follow?
2. What group or community would you like to belong to (professional community, interest group, etcetera)? Which of their values are close to you?
3. What do you value in partners with whom you have a common business, work, hobby, interests, etcetera? What do you think your partners value in you?
4. What meanings fill your life?

*Affect and emotion:*

1. What emotions are you experiencing at a certain moment, can you name them?
2. Can you recognize other people's emotions?
3. Do you influence yourself and the people around you, taking into account their/your emotional reactions?
4. Do you share your experiences with those close to you?
5. Do you allow yourself to show your emotions? With whom do you allow them to manifest?

*Socialization:*

1. Do you ask for help when you need it? Do you provide help to those who need it?
2. Do you agree on the division of responsibilities in the family?
3. Do you like to communicate with others? What kind of people are they and what do you like about them? What do you get in this communication?

*Imagination:*

1. Do you like to create something new? In what sphere of life can you call yourself an innovator?
2. Which area for creating something new is most interesting to you?
3. Do you allocate time in your life to communicate with art, to produce something new?
4. Do you allow yourself to dream? Do you imagine your dreams and desires?

*Cognition and thought:*

1. Is it important for you to accurately assess the situation, collect all the information? What is "all" information for you? What risks do you include in planning when the collected information is not exhaustive? How do you check the reliability of the received information?
2. Do you analyze difficult situations in your life? Does your experience help you "not to step on the same rake"? Do you monitor progress in solving difficult life situations over time (with age)?
3. How often in your life do you train yourself, self-discipline?

*Physiology and activities:*

1. How do you take care of yourself?
2. Do you sleep well?
3. Can you be passionate about work, despite physical discomfort (cold, hunger, dampness, etc.)? Are you attentive to yourself and can you distinguish between physical discomfort and emotional dissatisfaction?
4. How do you alternate your activity and periods of rest?
5. What types of recreation do you like more? Do you plan a vacation in your daily life? Do you fulfil these points of the plan?
6. What types of physical activity are there in your life?
7. Are you attentive to your body in your nutrition? Do you maintain a balance between the healthy and the pleasurable in your diet?
8. Do you use relaxation techniques? Which of them do you practice?

According to M. Lahad, every person has 6 main channels, each of which helps to get out of a crisis situation (Table 1). The BASIC Ph model allows you to assess a person's condition and at the same time serves as a map for making a decision: is it enough to leave existing operating modes or do you need to connect new ones.

Table 1

*Six main channels for overcoming a crisis situation*

Channel	Strategy of actions
<b>B</b> (Belief and values)	A person, relying on his own convictions, the desire for self-fulfilment and self-expression, finds support in faith and spiritual values that help him survive difficult times of tension and turning point
<b>A</b> (Affect and emotion)	This is a type of adaptation in which a person uses affective or emotional methods (communication and expression of emotions), such as journaling, crying, dancing, drawing or reading, verbally expressing one's feelings to someone.
<b>S</b> (Social)	A person with this type of adaptation will find support in belonging to a group (from family and friends), participation in public organizations (exchange of ideas, communication, completing tasks).
<b>I</b> (Imagination)	A person through his own creative thinking and imagination, for example, writing poetry, singing, participating in a theater group, visiting exhibitions, playing a musical instrument, can mask the gross facts of reality.
<b>C</b> (Cognition and thought)	These are cognitive strategies that involve obtaining and gathering information and knowledge, problem solving, self-direction, self-talk, or making lists of actions and preferences, such as structuring daily life, developing possible solutions to conflicts and what helps people in stressful situations.
<b>Ph</b> (Physiology and activities)	Physical activity, bodily methods of dealing with stress. These methods include relaxation, desensitization, exercise and physical activity in general.

We can conditionally divide strategies for overcoming stress into 2 groups: already existing elements of BASIC Ph and elements that are still missing. At the primary level of work, a multidimensional approach is to consider what coping mechanisms are available to each individual. It is important to teach a person many different ways to cope with a crisis. This will help him gain the flexibility he needs to avoid getting stuck in the future and relieve stress. Alternatively, you can collect ideas for ways and strategies to overcome the crisis into separate cards and place them in a prominent place in the classroom. In this way, they will be available to each participant to visually confront numerous troubling issues.

Teachers should always take a student's unusual and disruptive positioning seriously and not judge initially, but provide fact-based comments. To avoid conflict and injury, it is important not to embarrass students, especially in front of the entire group. A one-on-one conversation may be a more appropriate interaction option. Because group dynamics can often be about preserving self-esteem or youthful oppositional attitudes, there is a greater likelihood that children and young people will be able to



show themselves to be more open to other points of view in individual conversations. It is important to agree on a stop sign in the case of direct personal attacks and accusations, as well as in the case of discriminatory, violent, extremist and degrading statements.

Let us formulate the main aspects of educational integration of young people from Ukraine:

- young people should be offered psychological support from professionals to help them cope with traumatic experiences and fears;
- refugees must be able to start their studies as quickly as possible;
- refugee students should receive educational offers that will enable them to master a foreign language as the language of instruction as quickly as possible. They should also be given the opportunity to receive education in their own language;
- it is necessary to take into account the possibility for students finishing school to study according to Ukrainian curricula;
- psychological stress after migration should be reduced. This can be facilitated by adequate housing, adequate financial support or work permits, psychological support for carers and successful social integration;
- a sufficient number of high-quality language courses should be available to adult immigrants so that they can quickly master a foreign language and find themselves in a new country.

## DISCUSSION

We agree with the fact that student youth are the most vulnerable segment of society to the negative impact of social factors on psychological and physical health (OECD/European Union, 2020). However, as the war continues (Trubavina et al, 2023), the vast majority of Ukrainian refugees are still in dire need of support from the states that accepted them and, despite all the difficulties, are determined to continue on their way and try to live a normal life.

The educational level of the population in Ukraine is significantly higher than in European countries. In addition, many qualifications are available for mastering in Ukraine. Practical professional qualifications are acquired through internships at enterprises at both the secondary and higher levels of education. That is, the professional qualifications of Ukrainians are not identical to those of EU countries due to differences in education systems. But despite this, a significant part of Ukrainian refugees are employed below their level of education. Therefore, the support systems used should take into account the level of education of Ukrainian youth, their qualifications and competencies, and also be focused on their long-term stay in the country.

## CONCLUSIONS

Low life satisfaction due to war, flight and family separation places a heavy burden on Ukrainian refugees. This concerns children and young people. The longer people who fled Ukraine stay in other countries, the more acute the questions about their integration into the educational process and into the local labor market become.

To restore and preserve the psychological state of Ukrainian children and youth who went abroad due to the outbreak of hostilities by the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine, it is necessary to understand and determine their psychological reactions to life-threatening events in the conditions of residence in the country that received them, for the timely application of appropriate measures and techniques to overcome them, depending on the current situation.

Thus, the political spheres of European states are faced with the task of creating favorable conditions in the education systems, health care and the labor market. At the same time, it is necessary to take into account the high degree of uncertainty and heterogeneity of prospects for the stay of Ukrainians in these countries.

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## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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#### АНОТАЦІЯ / ABSTRACT [in Ukrainian]:

#### СТВОРЕННЯ БЕЗПЕЧНОГО ОСВІТЬОГО СЕРЕДОВИЩА ДЛЯ УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ МОЛОДІ В УМОВАХ ВОЄННОГО СТАНУ

Міграційні процеси в Україні стали особливо інтенсивними за останні роки. З одного боку, вони є серйозним викликом для освіти молоді, але, з іншого боку, являють собою можливість для розвитку, хоча і вимагають правового забезпечення та регулювання.

Вже достатньо довгий час тисячі українських дітей і юнаків мають продовжувати навчання за кордоном, поки продовжуються воєнні дії в Україні. Фактор тривалості війни є вирішальним не лише для кількості української молоді за кордоном, а й для планування її майбутнього життя. Розпочати життя в новій країні і знайти свій шлях в новому суспільстві може бути дуже складним процесом. Молоді люди стикаються з новими для себе ризиками та проблемами. Вони гостро потребують освітніх можливостей. Багатьом доводиться вивчати мову, визнавати освітній ценз або проходити освітню перепідготовку. Деякі з них досі потребують психологічної допомоги і не можуть адаптуватися, знайти себе і своє місце в новій країні, але вони не можуть повернутися додому, де тривають активні бої.

**Метою** даної статті є дослідження основних психологічних реакцій на небезпечні для життя ситуації, що можуть впливати на психологічне благополуччя дітей і молоді в умовах воєнного стану для розробки рекомендацій щодо подолання стресу в процесі адаптації до нових умов існування в новій країні та інтеграції в нове освітнє середовище.

**Методологія**, на яку спирається ця стаття, базується на основоположних методологічних принципах системного підходу і включає використання комплексу загальнонаукових (порівняння, класифікація, узагальнення, систематизація) та емпіричних (спостереження, пошук, бесіда, опис, аналіз) методів. Спираючись на них, ми запропонували заходи для відновлення та покращення психологічного стану української молоді в сучасних умовах проживання за кордоном. Було також використано тестування для визначення домінуючих ресурсів подолання стресу, які потребують подальшого розвитку, для інтегративної моделі BASIC Ph (аббревіатура від слів – віра, вплив, соціалізація, уява, пізнання; фізіологія) для управління стресом і підвищення стійкості після важкого стресу, розробленої ізраїльським ученим М. Лахад. Для формування напрямів, менш виражених в індивідуальному стилі подолання стресу, учасникам було запропоновано опитування. Пропонувалася й така діяльність: пошук смислів, малювання, створення колажів, вільне письмо, взаємодія в групі як у «безпечному середовищі», гра з піском, дихання «4-7-8».

У рамках нашого дослідження було досягнуто наступних **результатів**. Узагальнено погляди науковців щодо проблемних питань, які постають перед українцями під час інтеграції в систему нової країни. Розглянуто основні психологічні реакції на небезпечні для життя ситуації. Пропоновано результати дослідження щодо почуття стурбованості біженцями власним становищем і долями тих, хто залишився в Україні в умовах війни. Запропоновано рекомендації щодо вирішення проблемних ситуацій в процесі навчальних занять з учнями і студентами. А також пропоновано використання інтегративної моделі BASIC Ph для підвищення стійкості після пережитого стресу, сформульовано основні аспекти освітньої інтеграції української молоді.

**Висновки** дозволяють стверджувати, що для відновлення та збереження психологічного стану української молоді, яка виїхала за кордон, необхідно зрозуміти і визначити психологічні реакції на небезпечні для життя ситуації в сучасних умовах воєнного стану в Україні для своєчасного застосування відповідних заходів і прийомів щодо їх подолання залежно від конкретної ситуації, яка склалася.

**КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА:** молодь, освітня інтеграція, мовні курси, психологічний стан, екстремальний стрес, керування стресом, модель BASIC Ph.

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