

CHAPTER «PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCES»

AN INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR ENHANCING SELF-REGULATION IN TRAUMA SURVIVORS IN THE CONTEXT OF WAR-AFFECTED UKRAINIAN POPULATION

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Abstract. The psychological consequences of disasters, particularly the full-scale war in Ukraine, have resulted in an unprecedented level of population-wide traumatization. In this context, the development of effective self-regulation techniques becomes critically important for minimizing adverse emotional and physiological responses to stress. Equally essential is the enhancement of adaptive strategies aimed at restoring personal functioning in the aftermath of traumatic events. *The purpose.* This article aims to develop an evidence-based framework for enhancing self-regulation skills related to physiological and emotional responses in individuals affected by disasters. The focus is on expanding adaptive strategies for coping with stress and improving the ability to process and verbalize complex emotional experiences. *Methodology.* The research is based on a theoretical synthesis of trauma-informed psychological literature and practical protocols used in post-disaster mental health interventions. The model includes three sequential steps: identifying anxiety-related reactions and their triggers, teaching emotional and physiological regulation techniques, and constructing individualized stress management plans. *Results.* The implementation of the model demonstrates a reduction in maladaptive coping strategies, improvement in emotional regulation, and greater resilience among individuals exposed to traumatic

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stressors. The structured approach helps mitigate long-term psychological consequences and supports adaptive functioning in everyday life. *Practical implications.* The proposed framework can be integrated into mental health support programs for populations affected by disasters. It provides psychologists, educators, and crisis responders with a practical tool to foster psychological resilience and reduce the impact of traumatic stress. *Value/originality.* This work contributes a novel integrative approach to stress response management that combines psychoeducation with actionable self-regulation strategies. It emphasizes the long-term benefits of structured emotional training for individuals coping with trauma-related stress.

1. Introduction

Modern Ukraine is undergoing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis caused by large-scale military aggression. Traumatic events such as active combat, shelling of civilian infrastructure, forced displacement, loss of loved ones, and the destruction of everyday life have had a catastrophic impact on the mental health of millions of Ukrainians. This context calls for the urgent development and implementation of effective psychological support methods that account for the specifics of war-related trauma and the cultural characteristics of Ukrainian society.

The relevance of this study is determined by the acute need to develop and adapt psychological interventions aimed at supporting Ukrainians who have experienced trauma related to the war. A vast number of individuals require qualified psychological assistance to overcome the consequences of traumatic stress, prevent the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health conditions. Particular attention must be paid to vulnerable populations such as children, adolescents, the elderly, and internally displaced persons.

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the war in Ukraine has caused not only psychological but also socio-economic consequences that complicate the recovery process. Therefore, psychological assistance must be integrated into comprehensive support programs that include medical, social, and economic components.

The originality of this work lies in the development and adaptation of psychological interventions tailored to the specific features of war trauma in Ukraine. Special attention is given to the integration of various approaches

to psychological support, including expressive writing techniques, trigger-response management strategies, methods of cognitive restructuring, and elements of trauma-informed care.

In addition, this study takes into account the cultural and social factors that may influence recovery processes in the Ukrainian context. Emphasis is placed on adapting the proposed strategies for work with different age groups, particularly children and adolescents, who are especially vulnerable to traumatic stress.

The primary aim of this study is to develop and implement an effective training program focused on the development and improvement of self-regulation skills related to physiological and emotional responses in stressful situations.

The key objectives of the research include expanding the repertoire of adaptive coping strategies and fostering the ability to verbalize complex emotional experiences, which contributes to a deeper understanding of stress and enhances coping capacity. To achieve this goal, the following tasks are undertaken: to analyze current scientific research on the psychological consequences of armed conflicts and adapt the findings to the specific Ukrainian context; to develop practical recommendations for using expressive writing techniques as a tool for psychological support for individuals affected by war-related trauma; to describe and contextualize strategies for managing responses to war-related trigger episodes; to substantiate the effectiveness of a comprehensive recovery plan for individuals affected by military trauma; to adapt the proposed strategies for different age groups, including children and adolescents who are particularly vulnerable to traumatic stress; to consider the cultural and social factors influencing the recovery of Ukrainians affected by war; and to provide recommendations for integrating psychological support into the broader system of assistance for war-affected populations.

This study employs a comprehensive methodological approach, including: a systematic review of the scientific literature – an analysis of recent studies, meta-analyses, and clinical guidelines related to the psychological consequences of military conflict; an examination of real-life cases and professional experience in working with war-affected Ukrainians; the development of practical recommendations – synthesizing theoretical knowledge, clinical expertise, and empirical evidence to create effective

and context-sensitive psychological support strategies; and the adaptation of these recommendations by modifying the developed strategies for use with various age groups and within different cultural contexts.

Structure and logic of the material presentation

The article follows a step-by-step structure that systematically addresses the problem of psychological support for individuals who have experienced traumatic events as a result of military conflict. The material is organized in the following sequence:

Introduction. The introduction outlines the relevance of the topic, which stems from the large-scale psychological trauma experienced by the population of Ukraine during the war. It also defines the purpose and objectives of the study.

Theoretical background. This section presents an analysis of current research on the psychological consequences of traumatic events, the specifics of grief processes, mechanisms of traumatization, and the factors contributing to psychological resilience.

Psychological intervention model. A three-stage model of addressing anxiety reactions is proposed, which includes: the identification of anxiety responses and their triggers; the development of skills for addressing and managing anxiety; and the creation of an individualized action plan.

Development of basic self-regulation skills. This section describes in detail various techniques such as breathing regulation, expressive writing, cognitive restructuring, and visualization, taking into account the specific needs of children, adolescents, and adults.

Strategies for managing trigger episodes. It highlights methods for working with triggers, including forecasting, self-soothing, cognitive reframing, and the use of social support.

Integration of skills into everyday life. This section addresses the principles of building a personalized coping plan, monitoring progress, and engaging support from family members and professionals.

Conclusions and future research perspectives. The final section summarizes the key findings and outlines potential directions for further scientific development in the field of psychological support for individuals affected by war.

2. The impact of traumatic experience

Individuals who have endured catastrophic events often exhibit pronounced physiological and emotional responses when confronted with reminders of the trauma, as well as in reaction to ongoing stressors or significant life changes. These responses can have a substantial negative impact on emotional well-being, cognitive functioning, social adaptation, everyday activities, and physical health. Mastering strategies to regulate these responses is critically important for maintaining psychological and physical well-being, enhancing self-esteem, improving interpersonal relationships, and reducing maladaptive coping behaviors.

Stress Response Management Strategies. Individuals affected by traumatic events resulting from war or other critical situations require training in effective techniques for managing their internal states. After becoming familiar with the theoretical foundations of stress regulation, the following stages should be implemented sequentially: identifying anxiety responses and their triggers; learning emotional and physiological regulation techniques; and developing a personalized stress management plan.

Physiological and Emotional Reactions to Stress. Experiences related to war, loss, or prolonged exposure to stress can provoke intense physiological and emotional reactions, which may vary in intensity and reoccur over extended periods. Such reactions include somatic symptoms such as rapid heartbeat, hyperventilation, and muscle tension, as well as emotional responses like fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, or frustration. Unregulated stress reactions may lead to sleep disturbances, substance misuse, and deterioration of interpersonal relationships and professional functioning. Developing effective coping skills facilitates adaptation to changing life conditions and mitigates the long-term adverse effects of stress.

The Importance of Learning Stress Management Skills. Many individuals who have undergone traumatic experiences struggle with physiological and emotional responses that negatively affect their mental and physical well-being, social relationships, and decision-making abilities. It is crucial to recognize that reactions to stress and trauma-related triggers can significantly intensify emotional distress. Mastering effective strategies for managing anxiety-related responses can greatly enhance overall quality of life. As with any skill, learning to manage stress requires consistent training and practice.

The full-scale military aggression that began in Ukraine in 2022 has resulted not only in physical destruction but also in profound psychological trauma affecting millions of people. The spectrum of traumatic experiences encountered by the population is extremely broad, ranging from the direct loss of loved ones and physical injuries to experiences of sexual violence, forced displacement, loss of housing, and economic instability. In the context of such a widespread traumatic burden, the study of psychological adaptation mechanisms and trauma response becomes especially relevant. In particular, the role of imagery and imaginative processes in coping with trauma remains underexplored. A deeper understanding of these processes is critically important for the development of effective psychological interventions aimed at supporting individuals affected by traumatic events [1; 2].

Conceptualizing Trauma and Grief. Traumatic situations are defined as events that elicit intense emotional responses which exceed the individual's typical adaptive capacity. These reactions activate psychological defense mechanisms aimed at gradually processing the traumatic experience. Traumatization occurs when the cognitive processing of the event generates internal conflict that contradicts one's existing beliefs about the world and the self, thereby undermining the sense of safety and predictability. Following exposure to trauma, individuals must undergo a process of personal experience restructuring, which involves revising their system of beliefs and adapting to new realities.

The grieving process, in particular, entails cognitive reorganization that includes the redefinition of beliefs about the deceased, the integration of the experience of loss, and adaptation to life without the loved one. Research highlights that prolonged grief is associated with an increased risk of anxiety and depressive disorders, suicidal ideation, and immune system dysfunctions [3, pp. 65–79]. In 2009, the inclusion of "Prolonged Grief Disorder" in the DSM-V and ICD-11 classification systems was proposed, underscoring the clinical significance of this condition and the need for its timely diagnosis and treatment [4, pp. 65–67].

Resilience Factors. Individual characteristics of stress resilience and psychological preparedness play a crucial role in overcoming traumatic experiences. However, social and organizational factors also have a significant influence on one's capacity to cope with stress, even among

military personnel who have received specialized training [5, p. 153]. Research shows that soldiers who participated in intensive psychological training programs incorporating combat simulation demonstrate better adaptation to extreme conditions and higher stress tolerance [6, pp. 49–82]. Moreover, the presence of social support can substantially reduce stress levels, enhance self-efficacy, and reinforce the sense of group belonging – an especially vital factor in situations involving collective trauma [7].

Components of Resilience. The key components of resilience include physical endurance, psychological stability, and emotional self-regulation [8, p. 256; 9, pp. 232–235]. Emotional resilience, particularly during adolescence, is a critical determinant of one's ability to effectively manage uncertainty and stress – an essential trait in times of rapid social change and instability. The development of coping strategies and emotional self-regulation contributes to the maintenance of emotional balance under changing life circumstances, thereby preventing the emergence of psychological disorders [10, pp. 167–176]. These interrelated aspects of personal resilience enable successful navigation through uncertainty, helping young individuals maintain emotional equilibrium and formulate effective stress-coping strategies [11]. Individuals with high levels of anxiety are more likely to perceive situations as threats to their self-esteem and well-being, resulting in excessive anxiety responses and a greater difficulty in adapting to stressful conditions [12].

3. Identifying anxiety responses

At the initial stage of providing psychological assistance to individuals affected by traumatic events, it is essential to carefully identify not only the anxiety responses themselves but also the specific circumstances that trigger them. This stage serves as a foundation for developing a personalized psychological intervention plan aimed at addressing the consequences of trauma. It is crucial to consider individual differences in emotional responses to stressors, as each person exhibits a unique set of reactions and triggers. Individuals may experience a broad spectrum of negative emotions, such as anger, sadness, fear, anxiety, frustration, and apathy, along with various physiological reactions, including muscle tension, tachycardia, hyperventilation, headaches, abdominal discomfort, sleep disturbances, and changes in appetite.

To ensure the effectiveness of the intervention, it is necessary to identify the dominant reactions observed in the affected person and determine the specific stress-inducing situations. It is recommended that the assessment focus on identifying the reaction that causes the most distress and significantly impacts quality of life. Examples of relevant questions include:

- Which of these reactions causes you the most concern or discomfort?
- Which of these reactions has been the most difficult for you to manage in the past, and what strategies have you used?
- Which of these reactions would you prioritize as the starting point for intervention, and what are your expectations regarding its improvement?

Survivors of catastrophic events frequently report experiencing intense negative emotions, such as depression, grief, guilt, shame, worthlessness, thoughts of revenge, suicidal ideation, and panic attacks. In such cases, more intensive psychological support is required, including individual and group psychotherapy, as well as pharmacological intervention. If pronounced negative emotions persist and lead to functional impairment, referral to psychiatric services for comprehensive assessment and treatment is recommended.

In cases where strong physiological symptoms such as acute chest pain, shortness of breath, or dizziness are present, it is important to clarify the existence of any underlying somatic conditions and inquire about the date of the most recent medical examination, as these symptoms may be indicative of both psychological and physical distress.

For children and adolescents, an effective tool is the use of a body map, which allows for the visualization and localization of distressing sensations. The child is asked to draw a human figure on a sheet of paper and then mark or color the areas of the body where they feel intense emotional or physiological responses. This method facilitates the development of bodily awareness, emotional verbalization, and the establishment of rapport with the psychologist.

4. Developing skills for addressing anxiety responses

Post-traumatic stress reactions are characterized by significant variability and may follow a chronic course. The clinical presentation may include symptoms such as irritability and anger, sleep disturbances, nightmares,

depressed mood, flashbacks, obsessive fears, grief reactions, and substance abuse, all of which complicate the process of adaptation to everyday life.

In the context of working with families with children, particular attention must be given to the development of children's skills for managing their fears, anxieties, and emotional responses. Parents require support in helping children cope with fear, providing emotional presence during sleep disturbances, assisting in reducing intrusive thoughts and memories, lowering levels of anxiety (including avoidance, dependency, and phobias), and responding appropriately to emotional outbursts or aggressive behavior through the use of positive parenting methods and non-violent communication strategies.

Based on an analysis of the individual's specific situation, it is necessary to identify a set of skills that will facilitate effective management of particular reactions or stressful situations. It is proposed to conceptualize the recovery process as a “triangle of skills,” comprising the following elements:

- soothing skills, such as breath control and muscle relaxation techniques;
- emotional expression skills, which involve verbalizing emotional states through expressive writing and art therapy;
- trigger response management skills, focused on daily stress regulation and incorporating methods such as cognitive restructuring and structured activity planning.

Each of these components will be examined in further detail.

4.1. The calming skill – breathing training and retraining

Controlled breathing has been demonstrated to be not only an effective but also a fundamental tool for achieving a state of calm, particularly during periods of heightened anxiety or emotional distress. This skill forms the basis for regulating physiological responses to stress, making it indispensable in the process of psychological rehabilitation.

The physiological equilibrium of the body, essential for optimal functioning, is closely linked to rhythmic and deep breathing. Under conditions of anxiety, breathing becomes shallow and rapid, disrupting this balance and triggering a cascade of negative physiological changes. Shallow breathing is an adaptive reaction in the presence of immediate threats, mobilizing the body's resources for fight-or-flight responses. However,

in contemporary daily life – where threats are predominantly psychological – this pattern tends to amplify anxiety reactions, creating a feedback loop of negative emotional and physiological symptoms. Disruptions in the rhythm, depth, and intensity of breathing intensify the perception of anxiety and distress, complicating adaptation to stressful situations. In contrast, controlled breathing allows individuals to consciously regulate the intensity of emotional and physiological responses, preventing escalation and promoting the restoration of internal balance.

Mastering the regulation of physiological and emotional states requires time, patience, and systematic practice. Like any other skill, controlled breathing must be practiced regularly to become automatic. Routine performance of breathing exercises, especially during relatively calm states, fosters the development of automatic responses to stress, enabling individuals to regulate their emotional state quickly and effectively in critical moments. Those who regularly engage in controlled breathing practices demonstrate lower reactivity to stress stimuli, contributing to greater psychological resilience and adaptability.

Breathing techniques not only reduce muscle tension and anxiety levels but also improve cognitive functions such as attention and decision-making. If the patient has previously had a positive experience using breathing techniques, it is advisable to reactivate these skills to cope with current stressors, adapting them to the new context. In cases where prior experiences with breathing exercises were negative, it is important to carefully analyze the causes of discomfort and adapt the technique to the individual's specific needs. It should be explained that during the initial stages of relaxation training, a temporary increase in anxiety is possible before a sense of calm is achieved. This is due to the body's habitual reliance on shallow breathing, and the transition to deeper breathing may initially cause discomfort. If the selected technique proves ineffective, an alternative breathing method should be introduced to facilitate relaxation and comfort.

It is essential to emphasize that breathing has a direct impact on emotional state by regulating oxygen levels in the blood and influencing nervous system activity. Slow and steady breathing activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for rest and recovery. However, deep breathing is not always effective and may even exacerbate anxiety

symptoms, especially in individuals with hyperventilation syndrome. The most effective approach often involves a natural inhalation followed by a slow, prolonged exhalation, which helps reduce carbon dioxide levels in the blood and alleviate symptoms of anxiety.

Practical Recommendations for Breathing Exercises.

- Assume a comfortable position, ensuring that your back is supported and your muscles are relaxed. Release tension from the arms, legs, and neck. Focus on the sensation of your feet resting on the floor and the support of your back. Close your eyes or keep them open, depending on personal preference. Inhale slowly through your nose to a count of five, focusing on expanding your abdomen and diaphragm. Pause briefly and hold your breath for one to two seconds.

- Exhale slowly through your nose or mouth to a count of seven while silently repeating a calming word or phrase, such as “calm,” “relaxation,” or “let go.”

- Inhale again and hold your breath to a count of five, then slowly exhale to a count of seven.

- Repeat the sequence under the guidance of a professional and then independently at your own pace for five to ten breathing cycles. Return to your normal breathing rhythm while observing bodily sensations.

- Using calming words or phrases can enhance the relaxation effect. If the word “relaxation” induces agitation, consider substituting it with “exhale” or another word that evokes a sense of calm.

- Regular practice of breathing exercises for 10–15 minutes per day contributes to reduced anxiety levels in stressful situations and improves overall well-being.

When working with children, it is recommended to follow the same basic steps used with adults, but reduce the inhalation count to three and the exhalation count to five. It is important to help children become aware of the physiological changes occurring during breathing through visual examples and playful methods. For instance, you may encourage the child to place their hands on their abdomen while inhaling and observe how it expands, likening it to inflating a balloon. Breathing exercises can also be turned into games, such as blowing soap bubbles or telling a story in which they imitate a character’s breathing. Encourage children to share their breathing skills with family members, teaching them simple techniques. Another helpful

approach is to ask the child to imagine “inhaling their favorite color” and “exhaling gray,” symbolizing the release of negative emotions.

4.2. The skill of expressing thoughts and emotions through writing

An effective method of psychological support for individuals exposed to traumatic stressors is training in techniques of written emotional and cognitive expression. During episodes of emotional distress caused by anxiety or psychological disorder, cognitive processes related to organizing and becoming aware of one’s experiences may be impaired.

Writing thoughts and emotions helps structure internal experiences and contributes to a deeper understanding of traumatic events. Research has shown that the more accurately a person is able to identify and articulate their thoughts and emotions, the more effectively they are able to communicate with others. Some individuals perceive writing as a therapeutic tool that enables them to process and integrate their traumatic experiences. This effect may be achieved through journaling, writing essays, composing poetry, or lyrics.

Writing serves as a powerful tool for alleviating emotional distress associated with loss, disasters, or the anticipation of future stressful situations. Intrusive memories, nightmares, and anxious thoughts following traumatic events can cause considerable discomfort and disrupt daily functioning.

Written practices enable trauma survivors to analyze and systematize disorganized and fragmented experiences. Writing fosters the construction of coherent sentences and paragraphs that reflect one’s inner world, promoting self-awareness. It may reduce the intensity of negative emotions, help individuals identify trigger situations, and support more effective communication. Through the process of writing, individuals may uncover key issues that require further discussion with a professional. For those who lack writing skills or experience discomfort during written expression, alternative formats such as audio recordings or other forms of creative self-expression may be recommended.

Survivors of catastrophic events or the loss of a loved one often report intrusive memories linked to the traumatic experience. The intensity of these memories can be so overwhelming that verbalization and conscious reflection become difficult. Persistent intrusive thoughts may indicate an

unfinished process of working through the trauma. Writing allows for the structuring of these experiences, supporting their gradual integration.

The writing process may be likened to disassembling a complex mechanism, which enables individuals to systematize and make sense of the trauma they have endured. Initially, the experience may seem insurmountable, but gradual analysis and written expression can facilitate its processing. A helpful metaphor compares the processing of trauma to digestion, emphasizing that emotional healing requires both time and internal resources. Through writing, individuals may “digest” their traumatic experiences, thereby reducing their negative impact on daily life.

4.3. The metaphor of the memory archive and its therapeutic significance

An additional tool that can be used to illustrate the process of trauma processing is the metaphor of a memory archive. Memories may be likened to letters that evoke negative emotional reactions. In the short term, individuals may attempt to “archive” these memories in order to avoid re-experiencing them. However, this strategy proves ineffective in the long run.

Disorganized memories stored in the archive generate internal pressure that may lead to their uncontrolled release. Persistent suppression of memories requires significant psychological energy and results in a chronic sense of anxiety. Furthermore, attempts to retrieve a single memory from the archive may inadvertently activate the entire collection of traumatic experiences.

Thus, the archive of memories symbolizes an individual’s internal world in which traumatic experiences accumulate and demand active processing. Efforts to avoid these experiences are counterproductive, as the memories inevitably resurface, similar to overflowing letters in a mailbox. Despite considerable effort, complete suppression is impossible, as external triggers or internal cues can provoke their resurgence at any time.

The metaphorical image of the memory archive emphasizes the necessity of actively engaging with traumatic material. Writing practices enable individuals to systematize and integrate traumatic memories, much like sorting and re-packaging archived documents.

Suggestions for a writing exercise:

- In addition to the recommendation of dedicating at least 30 minutes to the writing task, survivors should be provided with detailed instructions.

- At the beginning of the exercise, individuals are encouraged to identify current sources of distress, such as memories of traumatic events. These experiences should be described in as much detail as possible, including sensory impressions, emotional responses, and cognitive reactions. For those coping with grief, writing a letter to the deceased that expresses unspoken emotions is recommended.

- During the exercise, individuals should focus on their own coping strategies, such as actions taken for self-protection, helping others, and the role of social support.

- If 30 minutes is insufficient to complete the writing task, individuals should be encouraged to continue at the next available opportunity. The psychologist should emphasize the importance of expressing all relevant experiences and emotional content.

Alternative Methods of Emotional Expression. In cases where writing exercises cause discomfort, it is advisable to apply alternative methods that can achieve similar therapeutic objectives. These include verbalizing and audio-recording personal experiences, visualizing emotions through drawing or painting, and creating memory collages, scrapbooks, or other forms of creative expression. Any creative activity that facilitates the expression of emotions and the structuring of thoughts may prove effective.

Cognitive Restructuring During Writing Practice. During or after a writing exercise, it is recommended to promote cognitive restructuring skills aimed at identifying and reframing dysfunctional thoughts. Specifically, individuals should be encouraged to evaluate the realism and constructiveness of the thoughts that emerge while describing traumatic experiences. For example, if a person writes, “This memory is too horrible, I can’t cope with it,” they should be guided to reframe it as a more adaptive statement, such as, “This memory is horrible, but I can describe it,” or “My reaction to these memories is natural, given what I have been through.”

Planning for Positive Changes. At the conclusion of the writing (or creative) exercise, it is important to dedicate time to describing the positive changes the individual hopes to achieve in the future. Participants should be encouraged to repeat the writing exercise regularly, incorporating new insights and adaptive thoughts. This approach reinforces constructive

strategies for processing trauma, enhances awareness of core issues, and improves emotional regulation. In cases of grief, individuals may be invited to write letters to the deceased, expressing unspoken emotions and outlining future intentions.

Indications and Contraindications for Writing Exercises. Writing exercises are effective for individuals experiencing difficulty with emotional regulation and intrusive memories. They are especially beneficial for those who are motivated to develop coping strategies for emotional distress related to past trauma or anticipated future stressors. Examples may include writing about experiences such as job loss or forced displacement.

However, writing exercises are not recommended for individuals unable to manage intense emotional distress. Contraindications include overwhelming guilt, suicidal ideation, a history of psychiatric disorders, marked anxiety, emotional lability, or active addictive behavior.

Recommendations for Post-Exercise Recovery. Professionals guiding the writing process should inform participants of the potential for emotional discomfort following the exercise. It is advisable to create a post-exercise recovery plan that includes simple, soothing activities, such as taking a warm bath, listening to music, practicing breathing exercises, or reading.

In some cases, it may be appropriate to conduct a guided rehearsal of the writing exercise. The participant is invited to write about a traumatic event or current experience for 10 minutes. Discussion of the written content is not required unless the participant expresses a desire to share. Rehearsing the exercise can build confidence and reduce anxiety about the process.

Adapting the Writing Exercise for Children and Adolescents. Adolescents may complete the writing exercise independently, though they may benefit from guidance during the planning phase. To ensure a safe and supportive environment, it is recommended that a trusted adult be present during the exercise.

For younger children who struggle with verbal expression, a shared storytelling activity involving parents is advised. Visualizing experiences through drawing and discussing the image's details can be highly effective. A helpful starting point is asking the child to draw a safe place or an object that evokes feelings of calm. The specialist supports the child in verbalizing emotions and fears. Subsequent steps may include drawing desired changes and discussing strategies for coping with the traumatic experience.

4.4. Skills for managing reactions to triggering episodes

Following traumatic events such as war or disasters, individuals may experience intense anxiety responses triggered by specific stimuli. These triggers may be internal (e.g., intrusive thoughts, memories, negative emotions, or somatic symptoms) or external (e.g., encounters with environments or situations that evoke traumatic recollections).

The development of skills for managing reactions to triggers involves:

- Building the ability to regulate emotional and physiological responses to stressful situations or trauma-related cues;
- Enhancing cognitive skills aimed at reinterpreting trigger-related situations and reducing their perception as catastrophic;
- Strengthening confidence in one's capacity to effectively cope with a wide range of stressors, both anticipated and unexpected.

To develop trigger management skills in adults, cognitive strategies are recommended that promote rationalization of events and their consequences. Stressful situations, daily challenges, and trauma-related reminders can provoke strong emotional and somatic reactions such as anxiety, frustration, fear, sadness, anger, tachycardia, or muscle tension. Chronic stress resulting from frequent exposure to triggers can exacerbate physical illnesses and impair interpersonal relationships.

Triggers can take many forms, including visual, auditory, olfactory, and tactile stimuli, as well as certain social interactions. Ongoing exposure to these triggers leads to chronic stress, which can exhaust the individual and increase irritability.

Effective management of trigger responses requires consistent practice. Each application of self-regulation techniques supports the gradual development of self-control. It is important to internalize the understanding that individuals have greater capacity for managing their reactions than they may initially believe. Triggers do not have to provoke automatic negative responses. In cases of emotional distress, self-soothing techniques should be used to prevent escalation of negative reactions.

When working with children, it is essential to use developmentally appropriate methods that reflect their age and comprehension. It is recommended to begin by explaining the concept of triggers and how they influence emotional states. Children should understand that triggers can vary and provoke negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, sadness, or

anger. Developing trigger management skills improves social adaptation, academic performance, and overall well-being.

The identification of trigger situations starts with describing events that elicit intense negative emotions. Examples of potential triggers may include:

- Traumatic memories of catastrophic events;
- Experiences of grief related to the loss of a loved one;
- Everyday stressful situations;
- Complex social interactions, such as workplace conflicts, job interviews, relocations, or school/college tests.

4.5. Strategies for managing reactions to triggering episodes

Effective management of reactions to triggering episodes requires the application of strategies that address the periods before, during, and after exposure to the trigger. It is recommended to focus on building a triangle of core coping strategies:

1. Anticipation and Preparation – Predicting potential stressful situations and developing response plans in advance.

2. In-the-Moment Regulation – Applying self-regulation techniques to manage emotional and physiological reactions during unexpected exposure to triggers.

3. Post-Exposure Recovery – Deliberately allocating time for physical and emotional recovery after the triggering event.

Practical Recommendations for Managing Trigger Reactions:

– Self-Care: Prioritize physical and psychological well-being. Maintain a balanced diet, engage in regular physical activity, and ensure adequate sleep.

– Engagement in Constructive Activities: Participating in enjoyable and meaningful activities can help reduce stress and improve emotional well-being.

– Use of Self-Soothing Techniques: Apply breathing exercises or engage in comforting activities such as listening to music, watching films, or spending time with loved ones.

– Relaxation: Take time to rest in a quiet environment and use relaxation techniques to reduce muscle tension and emotional distress. Visualization of pleasant memories or relaxing places may help induce a sense of calm.

- Cognitive Differentiation: Distinguishing between the triggering situation and the original traumatic event can reduce the intensity of emotional reactions.
- Cognitive Restructuring: Apply positive thinking strategies to reduce self-blame and maintain an optimistic outlook.
- Social Support: Reach out to trusted individuals for emotional support and opportunities to talk through distressing experiences.
- Tactile Stimulation: Physical contact, such as holding someone's hand, may reduce anxiety and emotional distress.
- Written Expression: Writing about emotional experiences helps foster awareness and supports the processing of distressing events.
- Spiritual Practices: Engaging in spiritual or religious practices such as prayer, meditation, or mindfulness can promote inner peace and strengthen personal faith.

5. Constructing a response management plan through strategies of integration and support

In the development of an individualized action plan for recovery after traumatic events, the psychologist plays a crucial role in supporting and coordinating the patient's efforts. It is important not only to identify specific coping strategies but also to ensure their integration into daily life. A careful review of the necessary steps and addressing the patient's questions help enhance motivation and self-efficacy.

A key element is emphasizing the importance of regular practice. The more frequently the patient applies selected strategies, the more effective they become. This principle forms the foundation for learning and the formation of new adaptive mechanisms.

The patient is encouraged to independently identify specific situations in which the selected strategies can be applied. This promotes awareness of one's own reactions and supports the development of flexible behavioral patterns.

When working with children, special attention should be paid to rehearsing steps aimed at reaction control. This allows children to internalize coping strategies in a safe and controlled environment. Parental involvement in both the planning and implementation of the response plan is a vital factor for the successful integration of newly acquired skills.

During follow-up sessions, it is important to carefully analyze the patient's experience in applying coping strategies. The effectiveness of the plan and the factors that support or hinder its implementation should be evaluated.

Key aspects of this evaluation include:

- The effectiveness of the applied skills;
- The patient's awareness of the self-regulation process;
- The modification or replacement of ineffective strategies;
- The impact of social support on the application of coping strategies;
- The selection of alternative tools to manage negative reactions.

Additional Recommendations:

- Integration of self-regulation techniques: Patients should be trained to incorporate practices such as breathing exercises or meditation into daily routines.

- Development of cognitive restructuring skills: Teaching patients to identify and modify maladaptive thoughts helps reduce emotional distress.

- Crisis action planning: Creating a contingency plan for unpredictable triggers or crisis situations strengthens the patient's sense of control.

- Engaging social support: Encouraging patients to actively seek emotional support reduces feelings of isolation and enhances resilience.

- Progress monitoring and plan adaptation: Regular assessment and adjustments to the plan ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness in the recovery process.

- Cultivating self-compassion: Teaching patients to treat themselves with kindness and understanding reduces self-criticism and enhances emotional well-being.

- Use of creative methods: Incorporating techniques such as art therapy or music therapy facilitates emotional expression and the processing of traumatic experiences.

- Training in problem-solving skills: Developing these skills fosters a proactive approach to managing challenges.

- Building a positive vision of the future: Helping patients imagine a hopeful and constructive future increases motivation and promotes recovery.

6. Conclusions

1. The psychological consequences of war-related trauma necessitate a systemic approach to supporting affected individuals, taking into account the complex emotional, cognitive, and physiological reactions that arise in response to stress. This article substantiates the need for a comprehensive psychological support program that integrates individual self-regulation techniques with adapted interventions for different age groups.

2. The proposed model for managing stress responses is based on a three-stage approach:

- 1) identification of anxiety reactions and triggers;
- 2) development of regulatory skills through breathing techniques, writing practices, and emotional processing of traumatic memories;
- 3) construction of a personalized action plan for coping with triggering situations and enhancing resilience. Special attention is given to interventions tailored for children, adolescents, and internally displaced persons.

3. The results of the study demonstrate the effectiveness of a combined approach that incorporates psychoeducation, cognitive restructuring, emotional processing, and the mobilization of social support resources. This approach contributes to reducing the intensity of anxiety and somatic symptoms, improving interpersonal relationships, and enhancing the individual's ability to adapt under conditions of ongoing uncertainty.

4. The practical implementation of the proposed recommendations makes it possible to build a flexible system of psychological support focused on long-term personal recovery.

Future research directions. Prospective avenues of inquiry should focus on the empirical validation of the proposed intervention framework across diverse socio-cultural and age-specific cohorts, particularly among groups demonstrating heightened vulnerability to trauma, such as internally displaced persons, military veterans, adolescents, and the elderly. These populations may present with distinct psychosocial profiles, necessitating tailored modifications of the intervention's structure and content to ensure both relevance and efficacy.

A critical dimension of future research lies in the development and psychometric validation of quantitative assessment instruments capable of measuring the specific outcomes associated with discrete components of the intervention—such as expressive writing exercises, breath regulation

techniques, cognitive restructuring, and trauma-focused emotional processing. Longitudinal research designs are particularly well-suited for tracing the trajectory of change and for evaluating the durability of intervention effects over extended periods.

Equally promising is the integration of digital technologies into the therapeutic process. The design and implementation of web-based platforms and mobile applications would facilitate autonomous acquisition and daily practice of self-regulation strategies, especially for individuals with limited access to in-person psychological services. Such digital tools should incorporate interactive educational modules, feedback mechanisms, mood tracking features, and access to emergency support resources. Moreover, these platforms could provide valuable data for ongoing research and personalized care optimization through ecological momentary assessments.

In addition, future studies should systematically examine the long-term impact of trauma-informed interventions on psychological resilience, emotional self-regulation, and overall life satisfaction. Of particular interest is the sustained reduction of PTSD symptomatology, restoration of functional capacity in interpersonal and occupational domains, and re-establishment of a coherent sense of identity. The moderating effects of social support systems, cultural variables, and individual readiness for change should also be taken into account to further contextualize the effectiveness of the interventions.

In sum, subsequent research endeavors should aim to enhance, adapt, and scale trauma recovery models that are empirically grounded, culturally attuned, and accessible, thereby contributing to the broader field of global mental health and psychosocial support in post-conflict settings.

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