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ADDRESSING POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER CHALLENGES: MARIUPOL STATE UNIVERSITY'S APPROACH

Currently, numerous mental health and social care services operate under the assumption that a medical approach is necessary or that recovery is unattainable for many individuals. Nevertheless, there exists a significant body of research indicating that individuals can not only achieve recovery but also succeed in doing so within the realm of mental health.

Regardless of the diverse range of proposed programmes and approaches for treating post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a fundamental principle of all therapies is acknowledging the influence of psychological trauma on the emergence of post-traumatic symptoms. The primary focus of PTSD therapy involves the systematic examination and analysis of an individual's traumatic encounter and the subsequent psychological repercussions. Individuals suffering from PTSD frequently delay seeking psychiatric and psychological assistance, potentially as a result of the stigma and adverse societal attitudes associated with their condition. Currently, in Ukraine, there exist rehabilitation centres, hubs, support groups, and hotlines that offer psychological aid to military personnel, veterans, and their relatives. An environment conducive to trust-building between psychologists and their clients is established, facilitating the reduction of stigma and promoting the healing process from trauma. Previously, students in higher education and educators were solely responsible for dealing with unpleasant psychological and emotional conditions, including symptoms of PTSD. In early 2024, the academic community came together under the All-Ukrainian mental health programme "*How are you?*" with support from the Mental Health Coordination Centre of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. The programme addressed the psychological well-being of Ukrainians during the war and emphasised the role of universities in supporting mental health. This included training specialists in the field

and creating a supportive environment for educators and students of higher education [3].

This study focuses on addressing the problem of stabilising and restoring the psychological well-being of Mariupol State University (MSU) students who have experienced psychological trauma and are currently experiencing symptoms of PTSD. These symptoms include:

- persistent feelings of sadness, anxiety, or hopelessness;
- feelings of guilt or helplessness;
- fears;
- irritability or restlessness;
- intrusive memories and preoccupation with past events;
- decreased motivation in academic pursuits, professional responsibilities, or personal interests;
- unwillingness to engage in social interactions with friends, family, or coworkers;
- persistent sense of tiredness;
- challenges in focusing, memory decline, and decision-making difficulties;
- disruptions in sleep patterns;
- abnormal eating habits, including excessive or reduced appetite, resulting in weight fluctuations;
- prolonged physical discomfort (such as headaches, stomachaches, or joint pain) and unresolved digestive issues despite medical intervention.

When engaging with students, we want to establish an environment that enables them to not only excel in academic subjects, but also access top-notch psychological support from professionals in a secure online setting. The specialists of English Philology Department at MSU enrolled in the master's degree programme in speciality 053 "Psychology" to gain the required expertise on the stated topics.

Understanding the severity of negative psycho-emotional states and the consequences of traumatic events, recognition of the importance of providing psychological assistance during the educational process became the basis of psychological assistance for students with manifestations of PTSD. To achieve the goal, the specialists of the Practical Psychology and English Philology Departments at MSU developed "Unified clinical protocol of primary, secondary (specialized) and tertiary (highly specialized) medical care, reaction to severe stress and adaptation disorders. Post-traumatic stress disorder" [8], the handbook "Basic skills for caring for self and others" [1], the analytical note "Mental health at work" [10], "Psychological first aid: a guide for workers in the field" [5], "The path to healing: basics of working with the consequences of traumatic events" [4], "Transforming Trauma:

The Path to Hope and Healing” [9], “Technologies of psychotherapeutic assistance to victims in overcoming the manifestations of post-traumatic stress disorder” [7], “The mhGAP community toolkit: Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP)” [13], “Self help plus (SH+): a group-based stress management course for adults” [12], “PTSD: workbook. Effective methods of overcoming the symptoms of traumatic stress and appropriate measures of psychological and pedagogical impact have been implemented” [2], “Person-centred recovery planning for mental health and well-being: self-help tool” [11], “Priority multisectoral measures for mental health and psychosocial support in Ukraine during and after the war: operational road map” [6].

The main modalities of psychological help included in this work for providing psychological support after a traumatic experience are as follows:

- trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy (TFCBP);
- cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT);
- trauma-oriented cognitive-behavioral therapy (TOCBT);
- cognitive processing therapy (CPT);
- eye movement desensitisation and processing (EMDP);
- psychoanalysis;
- art therapy.

The focus of our work with students at MSU was on transforming traumatic experiences, restoring personal resources, stabilising psycho-emotional states, normalising physical condition, regulating study / work / rest routines, enhancing self-esteem, implementing effective psychological protection strategies, improving cognitive abilities, developing communication skills, fostering motivation for an active life within the family and society, and facilitating the planning of education, work, and personal life. The study considered several factors that can positively influence the course of PTSD, including: having an internal locus of control (the belief that one has control over their situation rather than external circumstances); self-efficacy (confidence in one’s ability to overcome challenges); sense of coherence (acknowledging that even highly traumatic events can be comprehended and managed); motivation and an optimistic attitude, and an active coping style. We considered the following issues in our work:

- facilitating the establishment of circumstances and chances for individuals to openly express their emotions and personal encounters;
- invaluable acceptance of the experiences and psychological and emotional states of each individual;
- firmly avoiding the use of lessons, explicit directions, and directives;
- providing empathetic support;

- use the individual's past success in overcoming challenging circumstances and personal difficulties;
- disrupting the harmful cycle of negative emotions (“everything is bad”, “I’m a loser”);
- promoting and uniting the principles of positive reinforcement when attaining success and integration in life;
- integrating existential elements into psychological support;
- empowering each student to become self-reliant in decision-making.

From February to March 2024, psychoeducational interventions were introduced at MSU to increase awareness and help students overcome the effects of psychotrauma and symptoms of PTSD.

The schedule of the events is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Events for students at MSU

No.	Event	Term
1.	Primary psychodiagnosis	February 2024
2.	Lecture “PTSD. Strategies for breaking free from a closed loop”	12.02.2024
3.	Lecture “Life before and after. Techniques for stabilisation”	26.02.2024
4.	Lecture “Trauma Transformation”	4.03.2024
5.	Training “Intensive work with psychotrauma”	18.03.2024
6.	Psychological work in classes	February- March 2024
7.	Repeated psychodiagnosis	March 2024
8.	Questionnaire	March 2024

A crucial factor considered in our study was the recognition of the important and uninterrupted provision of psychological assistance. Upon the conclusion of the experimental phase of this research, all students at MSU were provided with the opportunity to contact psychologists. The purpose of these visits was to alleviate current symptoms and avoid the worsening of unfavourable psycho-emotional conditions.

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