PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSISTANCE IN CRISIS AND MILITARY CHALLENGES: PROBLEMS OF TRAINING SPECIALISTS

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ABSTRACT

The article examines both the theoretical and practical aspects of providing psychological support during crises and military conflicts, highlighting the emerging demands for the professional training of psychology specialists. It stresses that the ongoing social and military climate in Ukraine has created a pressing need for psychologists capable of functioning effectively amid heightened stress, uncertainty, and widespread trauma experienced by the population. The study aims to provide a theoretical foundation for the organisational and pedagogical conditions essential for preparing future psychologists for crisis intervention. A review of international and domestic methodologies related to training specialists in crisis psychology is conducted, particularly focusing on contexts involving combat situations, forced migrations, losses, and post-traumatic effects. The article outlines the key

structural components that constitute a future psychologist's professional readiness: cognitive (understanding crisis dynamics and trauma), operational-behavioural (skills in delivering first aid and counselling under extreme conditions), emotional-volitional (stress management, empathy, self-regulation), and ethical (respect for clients, confidentiality, accountability). The empirical section presents findings from the execution of a practice-oriented training model, which features simulation exercises such as 'Crisis Scene,' 'Breathing Under Pressure,' and 'Ethical Dilemma.' These exercises are designed to enhance stress resilience, uphold professional ethics, and foster quick decision-making abilities in crisis scenarios. Results indicate a notable increase in students' confidence regarding their professional capabilities, along with improvements in self-regulation skills and heightened ethical awareness. The necessity for reforming the psychologist training system within higher education institutions is supported through an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates modern educational technologies – such as online courses, simulation labs, and supervision – and establishes a support framework for emerging professionals. The conclusion drawn is that cultivating the professional readiness of future psychologists to operate effectively during crises and warfare represents not only an educational imperative. However, societal necessity also impacts the overall psychological security of the community.

Keywords: psychological assistance; crisis; military challenges; professional training; stress resistance; educational technologies; specialist psychologist.

INTRODUCTION

Today, we face new age experiences of tension, including emerging massive military and social challenges stemming from armed conflicts, humanitarian dilemmas, population movements under duress, and sometimes psychological consequences for loss. This is the new reality in which the conditions of psychological assistance are defined in strategic terms in relation to post-trauma

rehabilitation and rehabilitation of traumatised societies. It means that certain preliminary preparation qualifications will need to be established in psychology. This is for the provision of timely, professionally adapted, and ethically high-quality support to different affected groups under and outside martial law conditions. For example, to the military and veterans, displaced populations, minor groups, as well as bereaved people.

The most recent research indicates that the success of crisis intervention relies greatly on practitioners who possess pragmatic skills to apply their theoretical knowledge intuitively in highly stressful environments. It is essential to react quickly under cooperative tension, and also to resist the ebbs and flows of various emotions. Not accepting this current condition indicates that unspecified psychologists are most likely to be unprepared for work amid such a complex set of stressors; this gap shows the need for a change in the methodologies of preparation (Kashyap & Kashyap, 2024; Psychological First Aid Training, 2021). The idea is that substantial international practices demonstrate that comprehensive training programs integrating simulation exercises and online modules on crisis management, along with supervision techniques utilising interdisciplinary knowledge from medicine, social work, education, and military psychology. These are the most efficient means. Critical thinking, empathy, self-regulation skills, and professional competence will be enhanced (Berger, 2024; Clarke-Habibi & Reimann, 2025).

In the field of education in Ukraine, it appears that scant attention has been paid to training future psychologists to ensure they can operate both theoretically and methodologically smoothly during crisis and wartime situations. Clear is the definition of the most optimal organisational blueprints and didactics strategies, upholding preparedness for crisis interventions. Hence, this part of the research can be used to prepare psychologists for managing wars in conjunction with crises, to achieve better overall efficiency in psychological support systems. It can also be used to monitor the mental health of the population during times of change.

In terms of organised psychological assistance during wartime crises, this field is among the increasingly popular areas to modernise research demands from society concerning organised professional support systems. The theoretical matters regarding crisis interventions from ethical prescriptions for psychologists working in emergencies, as well as the kind of educational model that fosters crisis competencies, have been addressed in international journal publications (Apaydn & Akr Elebi, 2023; Kashyap, 2024; Mospan, 2022; Mospan, 2023; Raphael, 2020; Sheerin et al., 2021).

Rosenfield & Peltz (2025) state that psychological assistance during crisis conditions is a multi-layered assistance reconciling psychoeducation, a brief intervention model, and long-term therapeutic support. The needs for organised psychological support among individuals with some degree of collective traumatic experience are recognised. Crisis intervention is also claimed to be a role of a psychologist, especially regarding

competence in early-response intervention and proper communication within a system with other humanitarian workers. Apaydın & Çakır Çelebi (2023) investigated emotional competence, which has been identified as a significant influencing factor in the success of psychological interventions. The finding indicated that personal competencies, such as empathy and resilience, compete with professional skills in helping people during crises (Sheerin et al., 2021). Addressing the supervisory practices in their work and strategies for reducing professional burnout among psychologists.

Most contemporary writings concern the preparation of psychologists through crisis response activities. Arguments, therefore, suggest the use of interactive teaching methods, including simulation scenarios and role-playing, as indicated by Kashyap (2024). This approach prepares the future crisis manager to enhance readiness in providing active assistance under conditions that closely resemble real-life scenarios. The well-documented reports from international educational programs, such as Psychological First Aid Training, for example, demonstrate the subjective modularity of theory and practice integration in developing crisis intervention skills.

From 2014 onwards, and even more so after the launch of the all-out aggression in early 2022, interest in providing psychological support during wartime has increased in the academic environment of Ukraine. Kokun et al. (2023) also examine post-traumatic growth among military personnel and

their adaptations after combat, thereby representing a part of the research space. Concepts of research by Timchenko (2000) are between the psychometry relating to post-traumatic stress disorder related to military service, as well as overdue interventions related to emotional exhaustion in combat specialists.

Current challenges posed by war are explored by Shatyrko (2024) and Karamushka (2024), particularly in terms of fostering students' readiness to navigate high-stress environments effectively within educational contexts. Contributions from NASP (2024) further elucidate the system supporting psychological services across educational institutions, underscoring an interdisciplinary approach that merges psychology with pedagogy and medical knowledge into a cohesive framework aimed at preparing professionals to deal with crises (Lazaro et al., 2025; Myer et al., 2013).

So far, the flow of information involved shows that national scientific literature, combined with foreign literature, has been sufficient to form the theoretical and methodological bases for crisis intervention studies. These generated possibilities for general recommendations on psychological support during trauma experiences and, at the same time, on professional training of future specialists in applied psychology. Another, much less developed scientific and pedagogical problem is the far-reaching substantiation of the conditions that ensure the effective formation of psychologists' readiness for professional work in crisis and war situations. Far less clear are the issues of incorporating

international models for crisis intervention into Ukraine's psychological education, developing adaptive learning technologies for training psychologists to work with different categories of victims. Also, developing performance criteria and indicators of their professional readiness. The **research aims** to theoretically substantiate and define the conditions for pedagogical effectiveness in training future psychologists to provide professional help during crisis and war situations. The scientific novelty of the study lies in its targeted theoretical justification and experimental verification of the construction of a system of practical psychological preparation exercises designed to train future psychologists in professional activity within crisis-related contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study describes the interrelationship between qualitative and quantitative methodologies in achieving the goals and evaluating the effectiveness of a training model developed for aspiring psychologists to assist during crises or military interventions. Data merging thus ensures scientific weight and validation of the achieved results.

The review of national and international scientific literature sources is relevant to issues of crisis psychology, psychosocial support, ethics of training for specialists, and new technologies in education. Systematic approaches and classification-structural techniques enabled the identification of the main structural

components of future psychologists' professional readiness: cognitive, operational-behavioural, emotional-volitional, and ethical-and-institutional. It is worth noting that the current study's theoretical modelling yielded a conceptual model of practice-oriented training in crisis intervention.

Concerning the experimental research, pedagogical design covered the mentioned qualitative and quantitative methods. The experiment used two levels: ascertainment and forming. Practically, a group of simulation exercises: "Crisis Scene", "Breathing Under Pressure", "Ethical Dilemma", designed to develop stress resilience, ethical reflection, and the capability of making operational decisions in difficult situations. The dynamics of professional developments were tracked using psychodiagnostic methods (Crisis Intervention Self-Efficacy Scale, Ethical Sensitivity Scale), surveys, self-assessment, observation, and reflection on communicative and behavioural strategies by the participants.

Data processing for quantitative evaluation was supported by statistical methodology to calculate means, frequencies, and compare pre- and post-implementation results, suggesting positive dynamics regarding the formation of future psychologists' professional readiness for crisis response.

AI tools were employed in various phases of the research, primarily to facilitate the scientific translation process of the text, linguistic editing of the English version of the article, and optimisation of terminological consistency. The implementation

of AI technologies aimed to enhance the precision of scientific concept communication and ensure that the text meets international academic standards, without altering the content structure or research results.

DISCUSSION

Psychological assistance during times marked by crises or conflict is characterised as an intentional process aimed at stabilising individuals' emotional states while helping restore internal resources necessary for developing adaptive coping mechanisms against stressors – ultimately working towards averting psychotraumatic outcomes (Shalev et al., 2000; Yeager & Roberts, 2025). The scholarly discourse defines this process through various lenses, including short-term interventions combined with supportive measures that extend into long-term therapeutic strategies focused on reintegrating individuals into functional societal roles.

From a methodological standpoint, today's practices surrounding psychological care are grounded in biopsychosocial models, recognising that individuals' responses operate at biological, psychological, and social dimensions concurrently. This model synthesises cognitive-behavioural, humanistic, and ecological principles, enabling consideration not just of individual traits but also of contextual circumstances that influence the events experienced. Particularly noteworthy under wartime/post-war settings is integrating trauma-informed approaches that prioritise

safe interaction spaces, acknowledging traumatic experience effects, promoting client control, autonomy, and dignity (Cureton, et al., 2018; Klymchuk, 2020; Kokun, et al., 2023).

Recent global research substantiates claims that implementing practice-driven teaching modalities alongside specialised training techniques, including simulation exercises, role-play, dynamic digital platforms, and supervisory interventional practices, enhances efficiency (see Fig. 1).
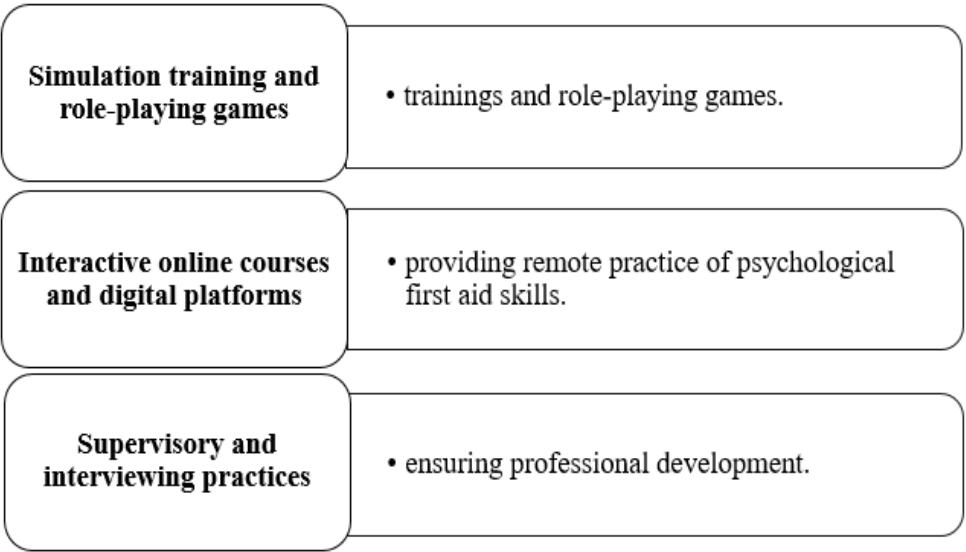
Simulation training and role-playing games	• trainings and role-playing games.
Interactive online courses and digital platforms	• providing remote practice of psychological first aid skills.
Supervisory and interviewing practices	• ensuring professional development.

Figure 1. *Practice-Oriented Learning Methods*

Simulations, training, and role-playing enable psychologists to operate effectively in real-world crises, utilising various protocols for interventions, communication, and client support for acute stress (Sheerin et al., 2021). This, too, may help them improve their problem-solving abilities in critical situations and make impromptu decisions under very uncertain circumstances.

Utilising interactive online modules and other digital platforms enables remote psychological first-aid skills training courses to be conducted (Psychological First Aid Training, 2021). The current educational methodologies make it insightful for incoming graduate students. They can incorporate the use of acronyms, such as LISTEN, SAFERR, and RAPID, with virtual interventions, providing them with the real ability for simulation and reflection.

Supervision and intervention remain the fulcrum of professional development, burnout, self-awareness among caregivers, and resilience against stress (Sokol et al., 2022). This means that while caregivers are totally relaxed under a mother's wing in an agency, supervision will help build their skills in extreme situations. Therefore, supervision is a foundational unit that links various packages in all service adaptations.

The other methodological approach involves addressing cultural dimensions in their treatment, whereby social and transcultural issues of conscious and unconscious awareness become integral to intervention theory for traumatised communities. It proposes that practitioners should be culturally competent and tolerant, as these qualities appear to prevent re-traumatisation in multicultural environments (Rosenfield & Peltz, 2025). Cultural appreciation is critical in the military setting, where conflicts or forced migrations affect people's mental resilience, spiritual beliefs, and trust in the mental health support system. Another significant concern, from a psychological perspective, is the ethical issues. According to the Ethical

Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, APA: Psychologists, when in crises, must maintain confidentiality, show respect for autonomy, avoid harm, remain competent, and thus be socially responsible throughout the crisis scenario.

Models of psychological aid need to be summarised as being on crisis or wartime-related, a) integration or reiteration of multiple theories, and b) structural and activity-oriented, as well as humanistic in approach, in that it emphasises trauma sensitivity and cultural awareness. Together, this enhances the empowerment of victims while protecting the professional well-being of those working in crisis regions. This concept should be included in the training curriculum for future psychologists, both as a theoretical concept and a practical skill for effective application in crisis intervention.

A review of contemporary scientific literature reveals that training institutions preparing future psychologists worldwide, such as those in Ukraine, have yet to adapt their training programs to meet the practicalities of crisis or war mode. Incidentally, training is being offered, but only if it's not based on psychology for the crisis or psychological traumatology; best-case scenarios would make these areas optional electives. What was there is training concerning one of them might be at the introductory level and thus should not be treated as a means to gain success, as it lacks a proper understanding of the crucial dynamics of crisis (Yeager & Roberts, 2025).

That theory-practice gap calls for theory students who are more theoretically inclined, yet have very short or indeed no actual

exposure to the crisis interface or psychological first aid on the fringes of stress response (Sheerin et al., 2021).

There are no theoretical or grounded applications of experiential-phase practice, simulation; hence, there are hardly any practical offerings. Currently, simulation is employed in a creative, hands-on mentoring ethos, as expressed by mentors, to develop the latest technology setup for the most respected global leaders in a reflective capacity during a crisis (Kashyap & Kashyap, 2024).

In most cases, programs fail to consider the needs of different vulnerable groups during crises. Many graduates have not learned about traumatised children, even though this knowledge would shape their capacity to give psychological support during real crises (Sokol et al., 2022).

Emotional competence development falls far behind; however, international curricula are developing ethical savvy, and with some guidance, individuals can learn self-care strategies to prevent burnout. But these two remain intensely unacknowledged areas of study in many of their even more established universities. Then, the near-universal absence of mentorship, in brighter surroundings, unreserved guidance from senior colleagues to junior colleagues within the initial few years of training ought to entail regular feedback. This would make the young psychologists prone to errors, indeed unsupportive, thereby compromising the quality of care available to the clients (Du Plessis & Thomas, 2021).

All that much ado about wartime psychosocial training remains amenable to improvement: real wartime preparedness for

withstanding moral distress. An effective educational framework should be based on interdisciplinary cooperation and practical orientation, keeping ethical accountability and reflective practice in mind. International best practices suggest successful implementation strategies in this area. Meanwhile, theoretical guidance to provide psychological assistance in crises has propelled us into action-denoting steps, defining effective forms and properly oriented methodologies leading toward the preparation of future psychologists for crisis response.

This requires experimental validation, which involves testing practical exercises designed to ensure emotional stabilisation alongside ethical awareness, while also developing the communicative proficiency necessary under uncertain circumstances. These objectives will not be achieved merely by immersing oneself in a vast amount of theoretical learning, but through concerted effort aimed at developing integrated professional abilities, linking humanistic ideals to culture-sensitive harmonisation, and culminating in accountable professionalism. On this foundation rests a collection comprising exercises such as 'Crisis Scene,' 'Breathing Under Pressure,' and 'Ethical Dilemma,' specifically designed to enhance the efficacy of crisis specialist training, with respective findings presented throughout our study's practical component.

In this experimental exercise set, a pedagogical experiment was organised with an experimental group and a control group. This study was conducted in the Department of Practical

Psychology at Donbas State Pedagogical University (Dnipro, Ukraine). In this experiment, a sample of 64 students, aged between 19 and 23 years, was purposively selected for the study. The participants were undergraduates from the 3rd to the 4th year. All students attended lectures in such courses as "Psychological Assistance in Extreme Situations" and "Psychological Support of IDP Refugees." They were divided into two groups: an experimental group and a control group. The sample for the experimental group consisted of 30 subjects who underwent a modified training course with a series of exercise sessions; the remainder of the control group comprised 34 students who followed traditional training programs. Measures of self-efficacy, stress resistance, and ethical awareness were assessed in the first phase, and these same measures were repeated in the control phase using standardised methods.

Each exercise was considered individually. The Crisis Scene exercise aimed to achieve rapid functionality in emergencies. Small groups (four to five persons) were constituted to act out a situation during which one meets a soldier mourning his colleague, or an IDP, potentially an underage witness of a shelling. Each group could take on the role of the psychologist and the other as the client, with the remaining group members observing. Afterwards, the scene allowed for discussions of what effective behaviours would look like and what obstacles one would encounter, as well as possible suggestions for achieving better professional acts. Here are some parameters that will be

relevant to state their measure of the exercise: rapid response (the time used to find and select the proper method of action); communication effectiveness (to what extent was the communication clear and empathetic); and emotional equilibrium (steady behaviour under stress). Data were coded during the experiment using the standardised questionnaire of the Crisis Intervention Self-Efficacy Scale. The result of the statistical analysis is illustrated in Fig. 2.
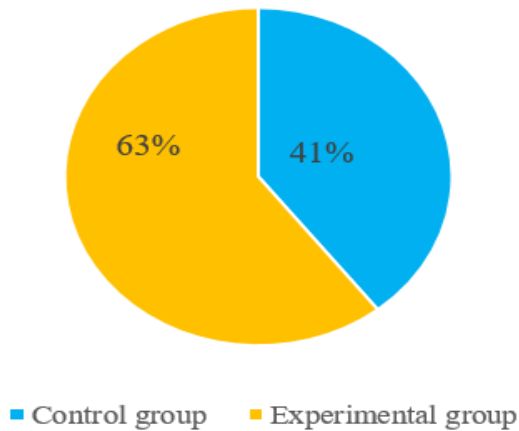

Figure 2. *Results of the 'Crisis Scene' exercise*

The comparative analyses of the collected data revealed a progressive trend, where students who completed the class cycle were found to be more self-assured, by as much as 22%, regarding their ability to cope with emergencies. Not only was flexible communication behaviour noted for improvement, but also a quicker decision-making process and less situational anxiety while handling victims. *Breathing under Pressure* workshops were organised to incorporate other skills in the self-regulation of emotions.

An example would be the few short exercises that had only a short time for decision-making, during which loud sounds served as outside distractions, adding to the pressure of time. Among the Participants were breathing techniques, such as '4-7-8' or square breathing. And then, studies brought the realisation to the participants about the physiological and emotional changes caused; genetic assessment of efficacy, depending on psychophysiological stress levels (heart rates, subjective stress assessment), self-regulatory abilities, control of emotional reactions, sustained attention, concentration, and maintenance of cognitive activity under stress. It is worth noting, however, that this endpoint technique enabled the experimental measurement of the indices before and after the prolonged exercise events.

The experiment gives virtually no hopeful results from self-reports of stress levels or psychophysiological stress indicators, such as heart rate change before and after performing the exercise. This focus on the sample of the remaining 80% of participants shows a characteristic: those with a more than 20-30% lowered post-exercise psychophysiological stress level typically also manifested improvements in concentration of attention, as well as the ability to self-control toward which the exercise contributed to.

The results showed significant positive outcomes: 80% of participants reported a reduction in psychophysiological stress levels of 20-30%, along with improvements in attention, concentration, and self-control abilities. The "Ethical Dilemma" activity offers an engaging learning experience for psychology trainees, specifically

designed to foster their ethical awareness. Script Giants offered snapshots, sometimes real, sometimes imagined, of actual or fictional professional cases that involved ethical dilemmas. One of the examples put forth by fellow students included that of an unwilling patient in military treatment who would not be compliant with psychological treatment. Other examples described professionals suffering emotional exhaustion from long exposure to traumatised clients. While discussing in groups, possible justified alternatives were sketched based on ethical principles, namely, respect, confidentiality, and professional accountability.

However, these factors were considered in terms of ethical sensitivity (the criterion required the recognition of the moral dimensions of the situation), morally analysing ability (the criterion concerns the rational justification of decisions made), and professional responsibilities and tolerance toward the given circumstances. The above citations were measures taken according to the standard Ethical Sensitivity Scale. The measure compared before-and-after results to be revealed under selected academic disciplines. The data are compiled in Fig. 3.
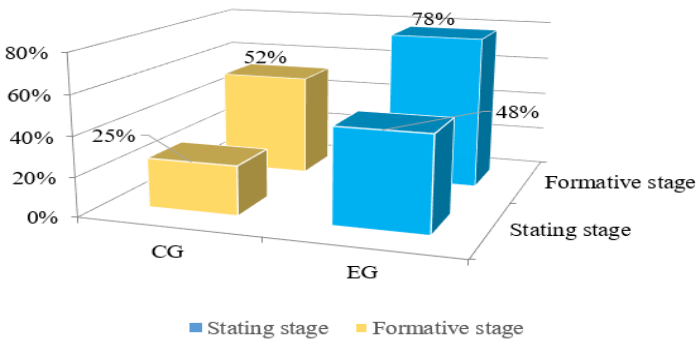

Figure 3. *Results of the exercise 'Ethical Dilemma'*

That would prepare good future psychologists to tackle whatever crisis comes their way; however, they must also develop their emotional resilience, ability to control themselves, and ethical competency in decision-making in complex and hazy situations. This information will be used to create a new framework for comparing a trained cohort with a cohort that has not been introduced to the new curriculum. Approximately eight to twelve weeks after completion, assessments would be administered to evaluate the effectiveness of the training. These assessments would measure qualities such as self-confidence, ability to cope with stress, and comprehension of ethics through various methodologies. Thereafter, statistical methods would be applied to determine whether the training had any demonstrable impact.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

Training of psychologists is currently an academic issue which has ceased to be an immediate necessity for human beings, given the crises and military challenges confronting higher education institutions. This was indeed sharpening, on a macro level, the therapeutic skills, judgment, and emotional resilience of those who are the custodians of mental health, tending through accountability to the social construction of a cadre of professionals who contribute to the psychological well-being of the societies to which they belong.

Psychologising in crises should, indeed, involve multiple modalities whose extension would go beyond merely conveying technical implementation abilities in what really lies in those general orientations – emotional stabilities, ethical sensitivity, and empathy. Also, decision-making in uncertainty and extreme duress. Crucially, this brings together theory and application, as well as the practice and supervision of specific subject skills. This would require understanding how the mind responds under duress and in uncomfortable situations, ultimately underscoring for students the importance of respect, accountability, and discretion.

Training methods-virtual simulation, role-play, case study discussion, and crisis intervention techniques-lead to the concrete realities of future professional practice. Such instruments help students sharpen their self-control and view crisis events as immediate learning opportunities where a clear and empathetic way of communication can be modelled. Supervision serves as vital emotional and professional support until beginners have begun to establish a professional identity. This reflective approach complements the learning cycle by applying knowledge in real-life situations, thereby building the confidence and maturity of aspiring specialists.

Future training programs in psychology would greatly benefit from digital learning, simulators, interdisciplinary modules, and new models of supervision. It will cover training on crisis preparedness, psychological first aid, and maintaining ethics in various team environments. Consequently, these professionals will, in effect, be

teaching both in school and in more extensive contexts; they will assist the vulnerable-from the internally displaced children of veterans displaced by war, who will bear the burden of war, to those who have experienced loss and any kind of violence. Most importantly, psychology needs to be examined in the light of more cultural than ethical and values-related contexts.

It is also crucial to adapt training programs in psychology, as these often rely on the education policies of nations. Such strategies are important because they cultivate a new generation of professionals equipped with compassion and flexibility to adapt to change, all within a strong ethical framework. By making this possible, mental health becomes a part of everyday life, the need for which is especially pronounced in places such as Ukraine, where prevailing conditions, which have really torn apart the existing social norms, have thrown everybody into stark relief against the need for healing and recovery.

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ОРГАНІЗАЦІЯ ПСИХОЛОГІЧНОЇ ДОПОМОГИ В УМОВАХ КРИЗИ ТА ВІЙСЬКОВИХ ВИКЛИКІВ: ПРОБЛЕМИ ПІДГОТОВКИ МАЙБУТНІХ СПЕЦІАЛІСТІВ

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У статті досліджуються теоретичні та практичні аспекти організації психологічної допомоги в умовах криз і військових викликів, які визначають нові вимоги до професійної підготовки фахівців у галузі психології. Підкреслюється, що сучасна соціально-військова ситуація в Україні зумовлює потребу у психологах, здатних ефективно діяти в умовах підвищеного стресу, невизначеності та масового травматичного досвіду населення. Метою дослідження є теоретичне обґрунтування організаційних і педагогічних умов, необхідних для формування готовності майбутніх психологів до кризового втручання. Проаналізовано міжнародні та вітчизняні підходи до підготовки фахівців з кризової психології, зокрема у контексті бойових дій, вимушеного переселення, втрат і посттравматичних наслідків. У статті визначено основні структурні компоненти професійної готовності майбутнього психолога: когнітивний (знання про кризові процеси та психотравму), операційно-поведінковий (уміння надавати першу психологічну допомогу, здійснювати консультування в екстремальних умовах), емоційно-вольовий (стресостійкість, емпатійність, саморегуляція) та етичний (повага до клієнта, дотримання конфіденційності, відповідальність). Емпірична частина статті представлена результатами впровадження практико-орієнтованої моделі навчання, яка включає симуляційні вправи («Кризова сцена», «Дихання під тиском», «Етична дилема»), спрямовані на розвиток стресостійкості, професійної етики та здатності до швидкого прийняття рішень у кризових ситуаціях. Отримані результати підтверджують підвищення рівня впевненості студентів у власній професійній ефективності, покращення навичок саморегуляції та зростання етичної чутливості. Обґрунтовано необхідність модернізації системи підготовки психологів у закладах вищої освіти шляхом інтеграції міждисциплінарного підходу, впровадження сучасних освітніх технологій (онлайн-курсів, симуляційних лабораторій, супервізії) та розвитку системи підтримки молодих фахівців. Зроблено висновок, що формування професійної готовності майбутніх психологів до роботи в умовах криз і війни є не лише педагогічним завданням, а й соціальною потребою, що визначає рівень психологічної безпеки суспільства загалом.

Ключові слова: *психологічна допомога, криза, військові виклики, професійна підготовка, стресостійкість, освітні технології, психолог-спеціаліст.*