

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder: Modern Approach to Diagnostics, Therapy, Psychotherapy and Rehabilitation

Victoria Overchuk^{1*}, Oksana Vdovichenko², Natalia Lapshova¹, Liudmyla Smokova³,
Uliana Varnava⁴, Yuliia Korotsinska¹

1. Psychology Department, Vasyl Stus Donetsk National University, Ukraine
2. Theories and Methods of Practical Psychology Department, The State institution "South Ukrainian National Pedagogical University named after K. D. Ushynsky", Ukraine
3. Department of Practical and Clinical Psychology, Odessa I.I. Mechnikov National University, Ukraine
4. Department of Social Work, Odessa I.I. Mechnikov National University, Ukraine

Abstract

After the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Russia on the territory of Ukraine, psychogenic disorders are observed in a significant part of the military servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine who have suffered as a result of participation in the armed conflict, as well as among the civilian population who have become participants or witnesses of traumatic events. The practice of organizing psychological assistance in Ukraine has shown that systematic psychological assistance is provided only to those who have been injured and are staying in military hospitals.

The purpose of the academic paper lies in identifying the main features of the selection and application of modern approaches to diagnostics, therapy, psychotherapy and rehabilitation in PTSD cases based on the results of the analysis of the viewpoints of scientists regarding the selection and application of various research approaches to the process of providing assistance in the case of revealing such disorder, as well as and the study of practical aspects of the effectiveness of working with persons with PTSD. In the process of conducting the research, an analytical and bibliographic method has been used in order to study the scientific literature on the issues of diagnosing and providing assistance for PTSD patients and a questionnaire survey of specialists in the provision of psychological assistance.

Based on the results of the work conducted, the main features of modern approaches to PTSD diagnostics, therapy, psychotherapy and rehabilitation have been analysed, as well as basic information has been prepared that can be used in the development of training programs for specialists in this field.

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Introduction

Throughout life, a person finds himself in various situations and is affected by many factors, some of which are traumatic due to their threat, intensity and unpredictability. Numerous abuses, neglect in childhood, acute interpersonal conflicts, traffic accidents, physical and sexual violence, serious illnesses – these are all traumatic events

that, unfortunately, do not exhaust the entire list, but happen in the lives of many people¹.

In order to recover from the experienced stress and return to a productive life, a person needs to live through emotional experiences and at the same time overcome disturbing patterns of perception of the world, forasmuch as the experienced threats make the one expect similar things in the future².

In most cases, environmental support, dealing with immediate threats, and mental recovery mechanisms help traumatized individuals heal over time and get rid of PTSD symptoms. Unfortunately, traumatic events also include events that affect not individuals or

***Corresponding author:**

Victoria Overchuk,
Psychology Department, Vasyl Stus Donetsk National
University, Ukraine.
E-mail: v_overchuk@donnu.edu.ua

groups of individuals, but involve entire communities, endangering and changing the lives of residents of villages, cities, regions and countries. These include natural disasters, terrorist attacks and wars, where people witness death, lose their homes, suffer torture and are forced to move to new places and start their lives over. Such events pose the greatest risk for the development, exacerbation and chronicity of stress disorders due to the suddenness of their occurrence, scale and consequences, as well as the difficulty of adapting to new conditions. The hostilities caused by Russia's war in Ukraine are just such events – the traumatic ones with a high risk of post-traumatic stress disorder among the population. Considering the above, it is relevant to study the issue of psychological support and search for effective and efficient models of treating PTSD³.

The theoretical part of the present research presents the standpoints of scientists regarding the diagnostics of post-traumatic stress disorder, classification of symptoms, the issue of rehabilitation of persons with post-traumatic stress disorder in different countries of the world, various therapeutic strategies.

The practical part of the scientific work includes an assessment of the most important directions of studying the psychological features of patients, the most effective forms and methods of psychotherapy for PTSD, the principles of the system of therapeutic effects of psychotherapy, factors that increase the risk of developing PTSD, the efficiency of using the basic traditional, as well as modern methods of work on correcting PTSD.

According to the results of the study, it has been revealed that both in the opinion of psychotherapists and from the point of view of their patients, the most important directions of studying the psychological features of individuals for the purpose of diagnosing PTSD are spontaneous aggressiveness, depression, reactive aggressiveness and emotional lability (mood swings). The survey has established that both from the view point of patients and according to the standpoint of psychotherapists, individual psychotherapy is more effective than group therapy. The research also has made it possible to find out that the high-priority principles of the introducing psychotherapy into the rehabilitation system, which should be guided when developing a treatment system, are as

follows: systematicity, the complexity of the application of several methods of psychotherapy with their sequential alternation, the dynamics of the influence, as well as the phasing. In the process of surveying from among the factors that increase the risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder by both patients and psychotherapy specialists, psychological and social factors have been singled out. Psychotherapists have also attributed the gender factor to the most important factors causing this type of disorder. With the help of the conducted survey, it was possible to establish that according to the viewpoint specialists, the most popular and effective are personality-oriented psychotherapy, cognitive and rational types of psychotherapy; at the same time, patients singled out positive and personal therapy as the most effective remedy.

Studying the expediency of using the basic, most common methods of therapeutic work with persons suffering from PTSD, survey participants, who used these methods in work and treatment, were asked to evaluate the expediency and effectiveness of their application in psychotherapy.

The purpose of the research lies in determining the standpoint of psychotherapy specialists and patients who have undergone a course of PTSD treatment regarding certain aspects of the application of modern approaches to diagnostics, therapy, psychotherapy and rehabilitation of patients with PTSD.

Literature Review

Post-traumatic stress disorder has been diagnosed in a significant number of children and adults who have witnessed traumatic events. This topic is actively studied by scientists in different countries of the world⁴.

While evaluating the definition of post-traumatic stress syndrome in the scientific works of scholars and summarizing different approaches to the characterization of this concept, we can conclude that PTSD is a specific mental disorder that develops after direct or indirect exposure to an extremely stressful (traumatic) event or series of events⁵.

When studying the issues of diagnosing post-traumatic stress disorder, it should be noted that its main symptoms include intrusive memories associated with a traumatic event, stress in response to trauma-related cues and avoidance of such cues, as well as negative changes in feelings and mood⁶.

The scientific papers of scholars allow us to establish that symptoms can be classified according to four clusters: intrusion, avoidance, negative changes in feelings and mood, as well as changes in arousal and reactivity^{7,8}.

While on the subject of the diagnostic procedures for studying PTSD, currently, most researchers consider this disorder as a condition manifested by maladjustment, behavioural disorders, amnesia, increased anxiety and depressive reactions^{9,10}.

According to the official diagnostic criteria, the diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder is established in the presence of exposure to a catastrophic situation that causes suffering, the patient's experience of a stressful situation in "reminiscences", vivid memories that are repeated in a dream or when experiencing stress in circumstances that resemble the experienced trauma, avoidance by victims of circumstances that remind them of the experienced emergency situation, the patient's inability to remember some important moments of the experienced emergency event or the presence of symptoms such as difficulty of falling asleep or sleeping during the night, irritability, outbursts of anger, difficulty of concentrating, increased vigilance, pathological increased fear response¹¹. According to various authors, mental and psychological injuries caused by the negative experience of experienced stress lead to the development of stress disorders and maladaptation¹².

At the same time, although it is impossible to completely avoid psychological injuries during traumatic circumstances, with the help of psychoprophylactic measures and thanks to the identification of markers of clinical and psychopathological features, with the systematic and timely provision of psychological help to such persons, the psychological impact can be reduced¹³. Diagnostic work with persons suffering from PTSD is understood as a process in which, with the help of certain methods, in accordance with scientific criteria, signs of PTSD are examined in order to explain the motives of a person's behaviour or predict further prospects for the development of this condition in order to reduce its impact¹⁴.

The analysis of literary sources devoted to the issue of rehabilitation of persons with post-traumatic stress disorder in different countries of the world has shown that mainly the attention of

specialists is paid to various options of psychotherapy, individual and group therapy, including cognitive and functional therapy, occupational therapy, dolphin therapy, hippotherapy, etc.¹⁵. Some researchers insist on undergoing family rehabilitation and pay special attention to its positive impact in terms of achieving results. Along with this, the analysis of the scientific literature on the research topic has revealed that the issue of criteria, principles of choosing approaches to the diagnosing psychologically affected persons with PTSD, the compilation of a program for the development of their further stress resistance and maintaining the state of psychological health remains unresolved nowadays. This has intensified the need for conducting a study on the efficiency of approaches to the diagnostics, therapy and rehabilitation of persons with post-traumatic stress disorder¹⁵.

Materials and methods

A practical study of modern approaches to diagnostics, therapy, psychotherapy and rehabilitation of patients with PTSD was carried out by interviewing 374 people, namely, psychotherapists practising in medical institutions of Kyiv, Lviv, Ternopil and Ivano-Frankivsk regions of Ukraine, and their patients. The survey was conducted by means of a questionnaire using the Typeform service. In the course of the survey, the respondents were asked a number of questions regarding the main aspects of applying the latest approaches to work with patients suffering from PTSD. Survey participants were asked to express their standpoint on each question in percentages from 0 to 100%.

Results

In order to determine the condition of a person diagnosed or assumption of suffering from PTSD, a study of the psychological features of patients has been carried out. Both in the opinion of psychotherapists and from the view point of their patients, the most important directions of studying the psychological features of individuals for the purpose of diagnosing PTSD are as follows (Figure 1).

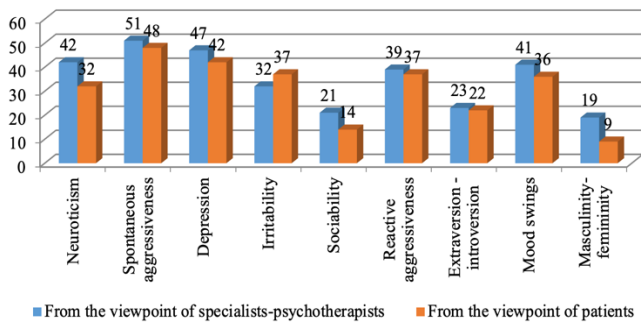


Figure 1. The most important directions of studying the psychological features of patients for the purpose of diagnosing PTSD, % Source: it has been developed by the authors.

As it can be observed from Figure 1, both psychotherapists and their patients consider spontaneous aggressiveness, depression, reactive aggressiveness, and mood swings to be the most important directions of such research. The main therapeutic forms of work with patients suffering from PTSD are individual and group psychotherapy. Individual psychotherapy is carried out in the form of counselling using the techniques of rational, cognitive-behavioural psychotherapy, and in the case of pronounced somatic - vegetative manifestations - hypnosuggestively. Group psychotherapy is usually carried out in the form of open groups. Survey participants were asked to define their point of view regarding the feasibility of using these types of treatment (Figure 2).

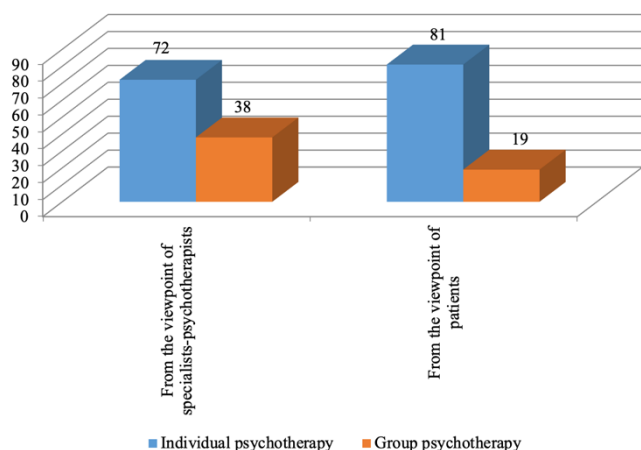


Figure 2. The most effective forms and methods of psychotherapy in PTSD treatment, % Source: it has been developed by the authors.

Both from the view point of patients and according to the standpoint of psychotherapists, individual psychotherapy is the most effective

remedy. Treatment of PTSD involves the selection of optimal means in each direction, taking into account the most important principles (Fig. 3).

As it can be observed from Figure 3, the high-priority principles of the introduction of psychotherapy into the rehabilitation system, which should be guided when developing a treatment system, are as follows: systematicity, the complexity of the application of several methods of psychotherapy with their sequential alternation, the dynamism of the influence, as well as phasing.

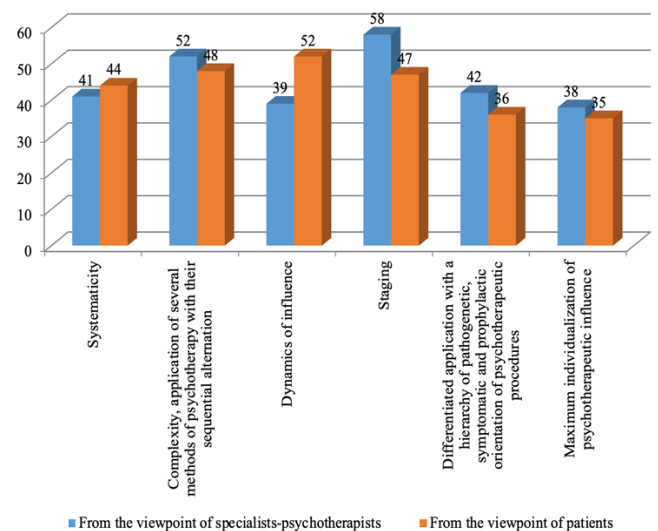


Figure 3. The high-priority principles of the introduction of psychotherapy into the rehabilitation system. Source: it has been developed by the authors.

An important issue in the diagnostics of PTSD lies in revealing the factors that increase the risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (Figure 4).

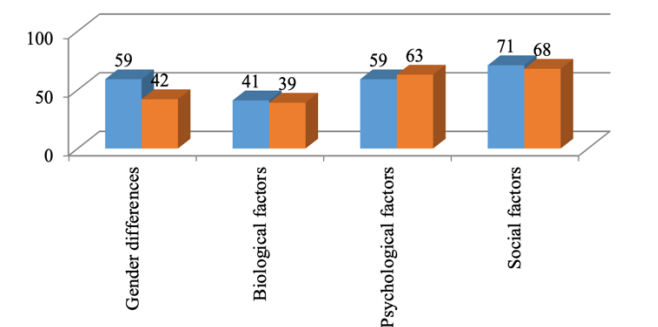


Figure 4. Factors that increase the risk of developing PTSD, % Source: it has been developed by the authors.

Both patients and psychotherapy specialists single out psychological and social factors to be the most significant ones. Psychotherapists have also attributed the gender consideration to such factors. From among the more traditional methods of work, the following methods of psychotherapy are distinguished, namely (Figure 5).

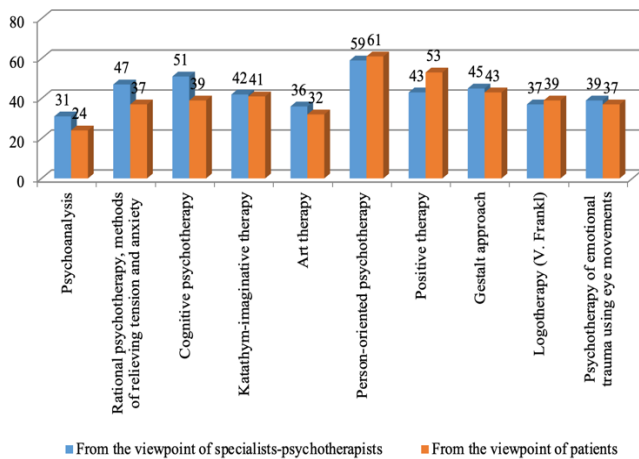


Figure 5. Effectiveness of basic methods of psychotherapy in PTSD treatment, % Source: it has been developed by the authors.

As it can be seen from Figure 5, the most popular and effective methods, from the viewpoint of specialists, are as follows: personality-oriented psychotherapy, cognitive and rational types of psychotherapy; along with this, patients single out positive and personal therapy. Currently, a number of new methods of therapeutic work with persons suffering from PTSD are used. Survey participants who used these methods in work and treatment were asked to evaluate the expediency and effectiveness of their using (Figure 6).

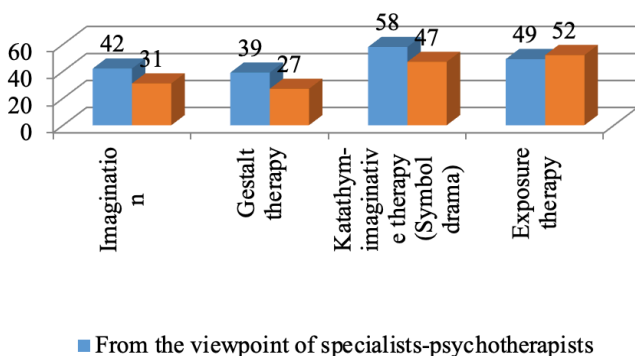


Figure 6. The efficiency of modern methods of work applied for PTSD correction, % Source: it has been developed by the authors.

Discussion

As the results of the survey have shown, from the point of view of patients, symbol drama and exposure therapy are the most effective of these types of treatment. Specialists - psychotherapists, in addition to the specified types of therapy, have singled out imagination as an effective form of work in PTSD treatment¹⁶.

Therefore, as evidenced by the results of studying the scientific literature on the issue of diagnostics and therapeutic work with persons suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, patients with PTSD need systematic and consistent treatment, which includes psychopharmacological therapy, psychotherapy and rehabilitation measures. The system of such work should be implemented universally and in stages¹⁷.

As it has been noted in the study of Van Gelderen, Nijdam, Haagen and Vermetten¹⁸, psychological correction is a mandatory and most important part of the rehabilitation process for PTSD patients. Restoring the patients' pre-morbid level of functioning requires the creation of additional resources of their "I", necessary to overcome existing and future stresses.

The above-mentioned is supported by Wagenmans, van Minnen, Sleijpen and Jongh¹⁹; the scholars distinguish therapeutic strategies that can achieve the goals as follows: - facilitating the adaptation of types of therapy to the person's abilities (one of the most important aspects of the treatment process is creating a positive attitude towards therapy); -the formation of a positive attitude towards symptoms (this means that the patient perceives his disorders as normal for the experienced situation, thereby preventing further traumatization by the fact of the presence of these disorders); - reduction of avoidance (forasmuch as the rehabilitator's desire to avoid everything related to psychological trauma prevents him from processing his experience); - changing the attribution of meaning (the goal of this strategy is to change the meaning that the rehabilitator attributes to the suffered psychological trauma, thus, creating a feeling of "control over the trauma").

The majority of specialists have recommended the mandatory use of a complex of psychotherapeutic methods in order to overcome the relevance of psychological traumatic experiences. In some cases, PTSD is

caused by a unique combination of stressors, with not only adverse but also positively coloured effects of stress being attributed. The development of PTSD depends on the subjective importance of these factors and the subjective attitude towards them. Sometimes, in those cases when it is not possible to eliminate the psychological traumatic influence, it is possible to change the attitude towards it, increase tolerance and deactualize it²⁰.

Psychological correction is a mandatory and most important part of the rehabilitation process for people suffering from PTSD²¹. Restoring the psychological level requires the creation of additional personal resources necessary to deal with current and future stressors²².

As Ridout, Spofford, Wout, Unger, Philip & Shea¹⁶ emphasize, the purpose of forming a complex of measures for the rehabilitation of people with post-traumatic stress disorder lies in choosing such types of work with the patient that will free them from emotionally saturated, intrusive memories of traumatic stress, help them return to an active life and control their own emotional reactions.

Taking into account that the type of trauma, reactions and their intensity, as well as the need for helps that can be different in all individuals, four therapeutic strategies can be distinguished that make it possible to achieve the goal set in PTSD treatment.

Conclusions

Therefore, the analysis of the scientific literature on the research topic has proven that the most important condition for preventing the development of post-traumatic symptoms is the preservation or rapid recovery and harmonization of the state and social sphere of the person, which is greatly facilitated by the attitude of others and a high-quality therapeutic complex aimed at the treatment of post-traumatic disorder. When evaluating the types of therapeutic assistance, the conducted research has made it possible to establish that the most popular and effective remedies, from the viewpoint of specialists, are personality-oriented psychotherapy, cognitive and rational types of psychotherapeutic work; while patients have singled out positive and personal therapy.

As the results of the survey have shown,

according to the standpoint of patients, symbol drama and exposure therapy are the most effective of the newest types of treatment. Specialists - psychotherapists, in addition to the mentioned types of therapy, have singled out imagination as an effective form of work in PTSD treatment.

Declaration of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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