**Коломієць Н. А.,**

*кандидат педагогічних наук, доцент,*

*доцент кафедри виховних технологій та педагогічної творчості,*

*Уманський державний педагогічний університет імені Павла Тичини*

*E-mail: kolomiets\_nauka@i.ua*

**CHILDREN AND WAR: TRAUMATIC FACTORS OF WAR**

*У статті розкривається тяжкий досвід війни українських дітей. Визначено травматичні фактори війни, які негативно впливають на формування якостей особистості, змінюють загальні закони розвитку дитячої психіки.*

*The article reveals the difficult war experience of Ukrainian children. The traumatic factors of the war have been determined, which negatively affect the formation of personality qualities, change the general laws of the development of children’s psychological health.*

*Ключові слова: дитинство, українські діти, російська агресія в Україні, наслідки військових дій, травматичні фактори війни.*

*Key words: childhood, Ukrainian children, russian aggression in Ukraine, consequences of military actions, traumatic factors of war.*

***«Our children are our greatest treasure. They are our future. Those who abuse them tear at the fabric of our society and weaken our nation»***

**Nelson Mandela**

Childhood is the most fun and memorable time in anyone’s life. It’s the first stage of life which the children enjoy in whatever way they like. Besides, this is the time that shapes up the future. It’s the golden period of life in which the parents can teach children everything.

But currently we have other terrible realities that make the whole world shudder. Ukraine has been resisting Russian aggression for more than 180 days. One of the most difficult problems in all cases of armed conflict is the problem of ensuring the protection of the civilian population, including children, who suffer the most. As of August 20, 2022, 363 children were killed and 718 were injured as a result of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation [4]. Many children lost their parents. It is hard to imagine a greater trauma for a child than being separated from parents at a young age, not knowing where they are, and losing protection in the brutal conditions of war. Currently, Ukrainian children are in shelters, basements, camps for forcibly displaced persons, awaiting evacuation from the conflict zone, suffering from hunger and thirst, enemy bullets and rockets.

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A huge number of Ukrainian children are currently under occupation or have been forcibly taken out of Ukraine by the Russians. Their voices are now suppressed by the occupiers. Numerous facts of abduction of Ukrainian children by the occupiers have been recorded. Thus, according to the information of the head of the Luhansk regional administration, S. Gaidai, dated August 22, 2022, local residents report repeated cases of disappearance of children aged 14 to 18. They are detained until their identities are established. The procedure does not last 72 hours, as usual, but until the child is picked up by the father or brother, who are faced with a choice: if not the child, then who will go to the front instead? [2]. Unfortunately, the fate of tens of thousands of Ukrainian children who were forcibly taken from their parents’ custody today is unknown.

On the other hand, two million children left Ukraine in search of safety abroad. More than 1.1 million children arrived in Poland, and hundreds of thousands – in Romania, Moldova, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic [3].

The childhood of Ukrainian children ended with the beginning of the war. These children received the hard experience of war and its merciless manifestations: shelling, injuries, deaths and devastation... They know such words as "bomb shelter", "mark", "anti-aircraft missile system", "anti-tank missile system", "silent mode", etc. Children who, with unchildlike professionalism, can distinguish the caliber of a projectile and the direction of its flight only by sound. Children who clearly know what to do in case of shelling, how to evacuate correctly, where bomb shelters are located and what to take with you.

Rhetorical questions are: "Do they have a childhood?", "What do they feel?", "How does it affect their mental health?", "How to make their life fulfilling?". All these questions are currently relevant areas of scientific research, because children are our future. This is the health of the nation.

Unfortunately, Ukrainian children cannot avoid the consequences of the military actions of the occupiers. It has been established that children, regardless of age group, after experiencing a difficult life situation, experience traumatic factors that affect the formation of the child’s personality qualities, change the general laws of the development of the child’s psyche, the sequence of the formation of structural components of the personality, shift crisis periods, etc.

First of all, war is an experience of death. If a child under normal conditions becomes aware of the concept of "death" and its irreversibility before the age of 9, then in war conditions this awareness occurs much earlier. The received traumatic experience immediately leads to the realization that death is the end of life, and it cannot be returned. Under the influence of the traumatic experience of death in the conditions of hostilities, a sharp jump in the restructuring of ideas about human existence occurs in the child’s mind, and the fear of death arises.

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Second of all, war is cruelty, violence and heartlessness. A tired individual, protecting his psyche, becomes more indifferent both to his own suffering and to the suffering of others. Over time, they become an integral part of a person’s life, the norm, and do not bring significant emotional upheavals. But at the same time, if these events do not "break" the child, they harden his strong-willed qualities: fortitude, strength, purposefulness, etc.

Third of all, the war completely destroys or significantly changes the usual style of life. For the normal harmonious development of a child’s psychological health and the formation of his personality, a "hard and clear" platform is needed, which in the first years of life is represented by the regime of the day, week, general lifestyle of the family. It is this clarity that enables the body to function in a normal rhythm, and the psyche to develop consistently. The chaotic nature of the war regime leads to inconsistency in the formation of certain components and constituents of the personality, its ideas about the surrounding world.

Next, war is a cycle of negative emotions (grief and suffering). War carries a general atmosphere of grief, loss, disappointment, desolation, etc. A person becomes less emotionally expressive (personality seems to put on a mask of sadness, indifference, etc.).

Also, war is a change in the laws of "humanity". In times of war, the laws of society (the so-called "rules of the game", "rules of life") are eroded. From the general societal level, they move to a more personal level (everyone chooses for himself the moral and ethical line through which he cannot cross). In children, there is a strong polarization of views (the division into "good" and "bad"), the sense of justice increases. It can be said that the outlook on life becomes very one-sided. Some familiar everyday things acquire a new meaning, a new meaning and form their own attitude, understandable only to those who have experienced the horror of the events.

Last but not least, war is destruction. A solid picture of devastation and crushed buildings and homes; burnt villages, forests, fields; the decline of agriculture, industry, etc. do not allow the individual to develop. After all, without stability and an elementary material base for a normal life, the human body does not allow the psyche to form, develop and form something new, more complex in nature [1].

Based on the situation of military events, the child is left with a significant "baggage" of psychological problems: in physical health – as a result of intense and prolonged exposure to negative stress factors; in communication and relations with society; in the field of meaning-life orientations (life, life of loved ones, stability, etc. comes to the fore); with the presence of a significant number of fears, etc.

Children are the flowers of our life! And it’s not just a nice phrase. Children are the most important treasure of our society, which must be protected. The world community, international organizations that were created to preserve peace and prevent

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war, are powerless against the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This means that the mechanism of protection and maintenance of peace does not work and must be fixed. Now in Ukraine, ruins, broken families, crippled human destinies, and destroyed lives remain at the sites of hostilities. Grief from loss, pain and despair of the Ukrainian children of the war will never go away, but will remain in their hearts even after the victory. If the Russian aggression in Ukraine will not be stopped, there will be even more child deaths, even more children will become orphans, today – on Ukrainian territory, and tomorrow – wherever the bloody hand of the russian occupiers reaches. Ukraine calls on the international community to immediately force russia to stop the war in Ukraine and bring the perpetrators to justice for the crimes committed. We have to speak loudly about our trouble so that the whole world hears what is happening now in Ukraine with Ukrainian children.

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