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ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЯ СІМЕЙНОЇ ВЗАЄМОДІЇ В УМОВАХ ВІЙСЬКОВОГО ЧАСУ

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THE TRANSFORMATION OF FAMILY INTERACTIONS IN TIMES OF WAR
Kostiu Svitlana, Ferenci Angelina

This article investigates the transformation of family interactions under wartime conditions, with a focus on the psychological and socio-contextual determinants of family system functioning during periods of acute stress and uncertainty. The study synthesizes contemporary theoretical approaches to understanding family dynamics in crisis situations and examines how war-related stressors influence the restructuring of interpersonal roles, communication patterns, and emotional connectivity within the family unit. Particular attention is paid to the mechanisms of psychological adaptation, including coping strategies, resilience formation, and emotional regulation processes that emerge in response to prolonged exposure to traumatic circumstances. The findings demonstrate that war significantly alters the stability and functionality of family systems, leading to both the disruption of traditional relational structures and the emergence of adaptive interaction patterns. The study underscores the critical role of psychological support systems and adaptive resources in maintaining family cohesion and promoting functional adjustment in conditions of prolonged societal instability.

Keywords: family interaction, wartime conditions, psychological adaptation, family system functioning, interpersonal dynamics, emotional regulation, coping mechanisms, resilience, trauma exposure.

Family crises can be either normative - related to the natural stages of the family life cycle (the birth of children, children reaching adolescence, the «midlife crisis» of spouses, the «empty nest», etc.) - or non-normative, caused by sudden, unpredictable events (war, loss of a family member, forced migration, serious illness, economic crisis, etc.). Particularly devastating for a family is the overlap of several crisis factors simultaneously, as is observed, for example, during war (when traumatic losses, separation, material hardships, and threats to life and health converge).

The military events of 2022 - 2025 have demonstrated that Ukrainian families often display a high level of adaptability and mutual support in critical circumstances, which help them weather difficult times. Thus, research into the psychological and social aspects of family functioning in times of crisis is highly relevant in both scientific and practical terms. On the one hand, there is a need to gain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of destructive changes in the family system under the influence of a crisis. On the other hand, it is important to identify factors of family resilience and

effective strategies for overcoming crisis situations in order to develop effective family support programs.

The events of recent years have put the institution of the Ukrainian family to the test. Many families have been separated. Ukrainian scholars have devoted their work to the study of family relationships and family issues, including: H. Bevz, O. Bondarchuk, S. Vaskivska, O. Vyshnevsky, P. Hornostay, M. Korolchuk, Z. Kiyanitsa, Z. Kisarchuk, V. Kostiv, N. Pov'yakel, V. Postovyi, O. Protas, O. Stoliarchuk, I. Trubavina, and others. Particular attention should be paid to a detailed and thorough examination of how families function during wartime. Ukrainian families face numerous challenges that negatively impact their daily lives. It is clear that war has an extremely negative impact on all family members: both older and younger generations.

In her work, L. I. Slyusar emphasizes the unprecedented impact of full-scale war on Ukrainian families: the war crisis has led to mass population displacement (over 7 million people have become internally displaced or refugees) and the separation of thousands of families, which intensifies stress levels [2]. She also notes that in wartime, the family's ability to fulfill basic social functions - educational, economic, and protective - is disrupted, requiring the family to adapt quickly and redistribute roles. This is compounded by the psychological trauma of war: the loss of loved ones, the destruction of homes, and combat operations, which lead to high levels of anxiety, grief, and post-traumatic distress among military families. At the same time, Ukrainian families demonstrate examples of exceptional resilience and cohesion in the crisis - as evidenced by research on the phenomenon of family resilience.

War is a multifaceted term. It is a «socio-political phenomenon, an extreme form of resolving socio-political, ideological, economic, territorial, ethno-national, religious, or other conflicts between states, peoples, nations, governments, communities, or paramilitary groups, carried out through organized armed struggle».

The following groups are vulnerable due to the war: families who have been most severely affected by the war (having lost family members, their homes, property, or access to basic services); families with children living in de-occupied territories, frontline areas, territories under constant shelling, etc.; families with children who suffer

most from the lack of basic utilities (electricity, water supply, heating, etc.); families with children who are internally displaced. Family interactions represent a core component of the family system, reflecting patterns of communication, emotional bonding, role distribution, and mutual support among its members. In conditions of war, these interactions undergo significant transformation due to increased psychological stress, uncertainty, and exposure to traumatic events. From a systemic perspective, the family is considered a dynamic structure that continuously adapts to external stressors, including armed conflict and forced displacement [1].

The following groups remain particularly vulnerable: families with children with disabilities; large families; single parents with children; families with children under the age of three. The aggressor country's full-scale invasion has triggered a wave of both mass marriages and mass divorces, separations of spouses, family breakups, and children being separated from their parents. The actual termination of marital and family relationships is not always promptly documented by a corresponding court decision. During wartime, issues such as domestic violence tend to escalate. Under the influence of traumatic events and unstable living conditions, pent-up aggression is directed toward the weaker and more vulnerable members of the family: women, children, the elderly, and animals.

Contemporary family systems theory emphasizes that stressors such as war disrupt the equilibrium of the family system, forcing a reorganization of roles and interaction patterns. According to Bowen's family systems approach, heightened anxiety within the system leads to changes in emotional reactivity and differentiation of self among family members, which directly affects communication quality and relational stability [2]. From a psychological stress perspective, war represents a chronic traumatic context that activates coping mechanisms at both individual and family levels. Lazarus and Folkman's transactional model of stress and coping explains that individuals and families evaluate war-related stressors as threats that exceed available coping resources, leading to emotional strain and adaptive behavioral changes [3]. In such conditions, families often shift toward either problem-focused or emotion-focused coping strategies, depending on perceived controllability of external circumstances.

Empirical studies on trauma and war exposure indicate that prolonged insecurity and violence significantly weaken emotional bonds within families while simultaneously increasing dependency and mutual support as a survival mechanism [3]. This dual effect suggests that war can both destabilize and reinforce family cohesion depending on the availability of psychological and social resources. Attachment theory provides additional insight into these processes. Bowlby's framework suggests that stress intensifies attachment behaviors, leading to increased need for proximity, reassurance, and emotional regulation through close relationships. In wartime conditions, however, disrupted attachment figures (due to separation, migration, or loss) may lead to heightened anxiety, emotional dysregulation, and interpersonal conflict within the family system.

Recent research also highlights the role of resilience as a key protective factor in maintaining functional family interactions under extreme stress. Walsh defines family resilience as the ability of the family system to withstand and recover from adversity through shared belief systems, organizational flexibility, and communication processes [1;2]. War conditions often accelerate the development of adaptive resilience strategies, including role flexibility, collective problem-solving, and enhanced emotional support. Additionally, socio-psychological studies emphasize that wartime conditions alter communication patterns within families, often increasing emotional intensity and reducing rational dialogue. This is associated with heightened levels of fear, uncertainty, and survival-oriented thinking, which reshape interpersonal dynamics and decision-making processes [3].

Thus, the transformation of family interactions in times of war should be understood as a multidimensional process influenced by systemic, cognitive, emotional, and socio-environmental factors. While war introduces significant stress and disruption, it also activates adaptive mechanisms that may contribute to the reorganization and resilience of the family system.

The vast majority of them are women and children. And these numbers are rising [1]. Thus, we can conclude that the war has altered virtually every aspect of life for Ukrainians - the labor market, the infrastructure of populated areas, the healthcare

system, and the education sector - transforming some of Ukraine's developed cities into deserted and devastated territories. The number of civilian casualties is rising. Millions of people are suffering from shelling and the consequences of infrastructure destruction, living in constant stress and uncertainty [2]. The war has brought destruction not only to the country as a whole but also to families; it has exacerbated pre-existing family problems, caused geographical separation between spouses and children, and intensified financial difficulties, psychological and emotional distress, and family relationships. During wartime, the family remains a pillar of values, a source of support and hope for the future.

Extreme factors, such as war, have an unpredictable impact on a person's psychological state and behavior. The family environment is particularly affected by this impact, as it encompasses the emotions and experiences of all family members. Research and the practice of psychologists confirm that only a comprehensive approach involving the entire family can overcome these difficult circumstances. Rehabilitation programs in many countries exist thanks to government support and funding, which differs significantly from the conditions in Ukraine. In our country, most of the costs of mental health care for veterans and their families fall on the families themselves, which is not always feasible from a financial and psychological standpoint. Therefore, it is important for Ukrainian service members and their families to improve their mental health skills and engage in self-education to know how to recover from extreme situations. It is also necessary to strive to implement programs at the state level aimed at supporting service members and their families.

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