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Psychosocial problems and resilience strategies of children and youth who are living in the front line zone in the East of Ukraine

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context

- Conflict began in March 2014 and has caused large- scale population displacement and widespread damage to infrastructure.
- 1 million children need humanitarian assistance (UNICEF)
- 200 000 children are living in 15 km front line zone (Gov. contr. area)
- Some 68 children have been killed and 152 children have been wounded since the beginning of the armed conflict (GoU)



internally displaced
approximately 1.7 million people.
Of them, there are about 900,000
women and 236,000 children
(GoU)



A woman with blonde hair, wearing a light blue floral-patterned dress with red trim, stands with her arms crossed in front of a severely damaged wooden house. The house's structure is exposed, with wooden beams and a partially collapsed roof. Debris, including wood planks, bricks, and insulation, is scattered on the ground. In the background, another damaged building and a brick wall are visible under a blue sky with white clouds.


Damage to housing and critical civilian
infrastructure continues to trigger
humanitarian needs
(GoU)

Women-headed households, especially those with children, are among the most likely to suffer from food insecurity to a greater extent (Humanitarian needs report)





The Ukrainian currency, the hryvnia, has lost half its value. Nationwide food price increase of 25 per cent this year (OCHA)

A young boy in a dark winter jacket and blue hat stands in a snowy, debris-strewn area. Behind him are destroyed buildings with exposed brick and wooden frames. A large tree trunk is visible on the right. The scene is desolate and shows the aftermath of destruction.

2 February 2017, Avdeevka
8 years old Alexiy nearby his destroyed home
2500 children have been living in Avdeevka

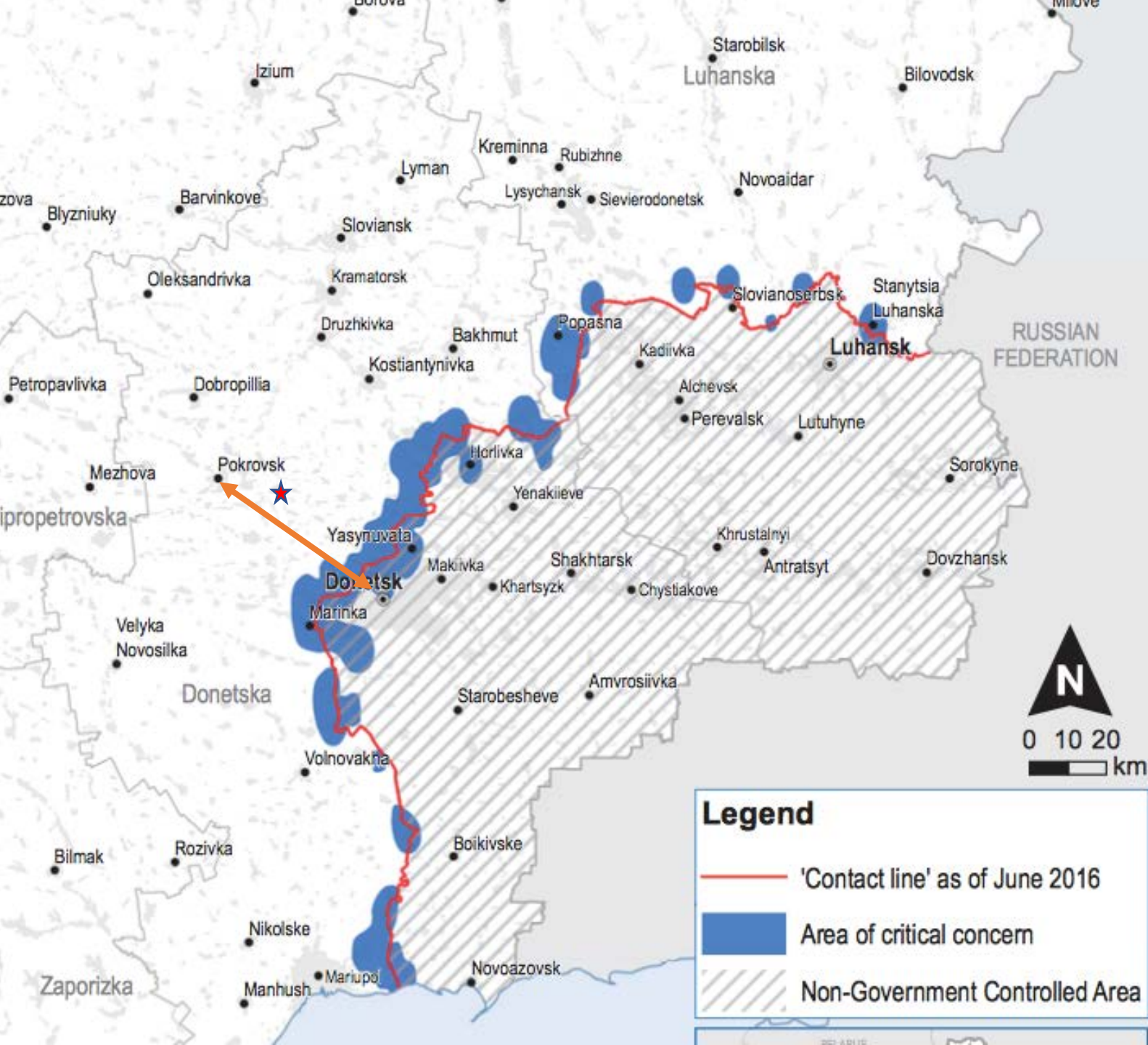


Nina Dmytrivna and her grandchildren Diana, 14 and Sasha, 6, are in the cellar of their house. They hide here in case of shelling

School provide stable, structured environment and can promote resilience

- 97% children are going to school (2013)
- Children receive food and have opportunity to socialize
- Every second school has a psychologist who supports educational process

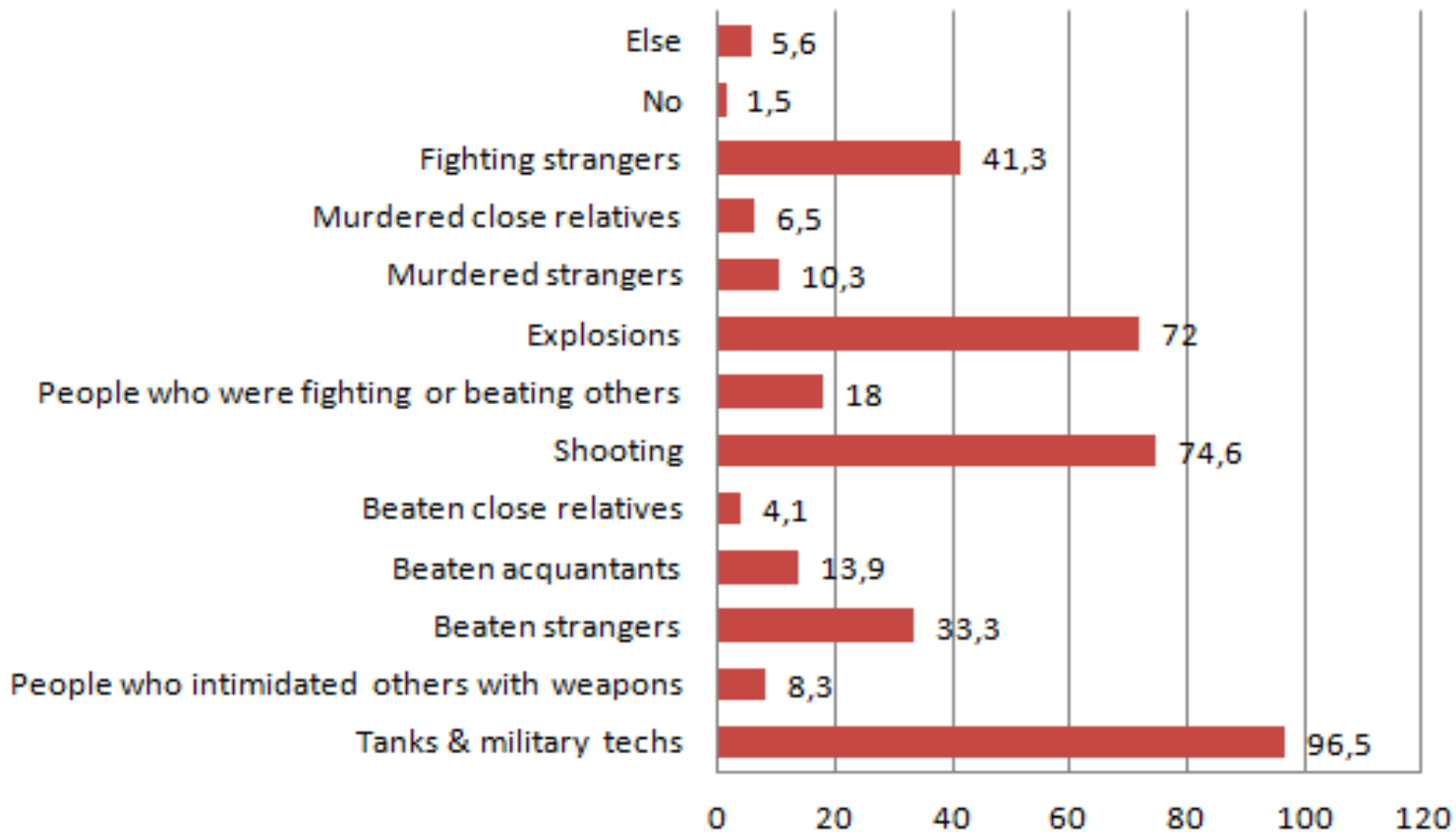




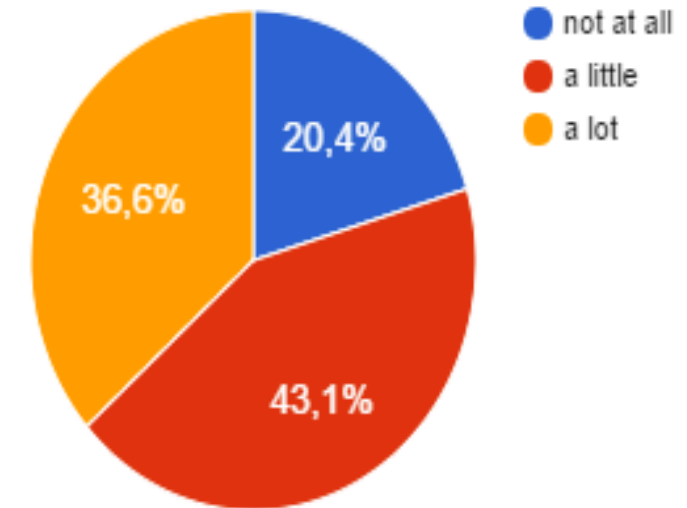
- Pokrovsk – 57 km from Donetsk
- 64,000 residents and 23,000 officially registered IDPs
- Hrodivka – 15 km near to the front line

Traumatic exposure n = 466, 8-15 years, 46.6% female

Did you experience any aversive events?

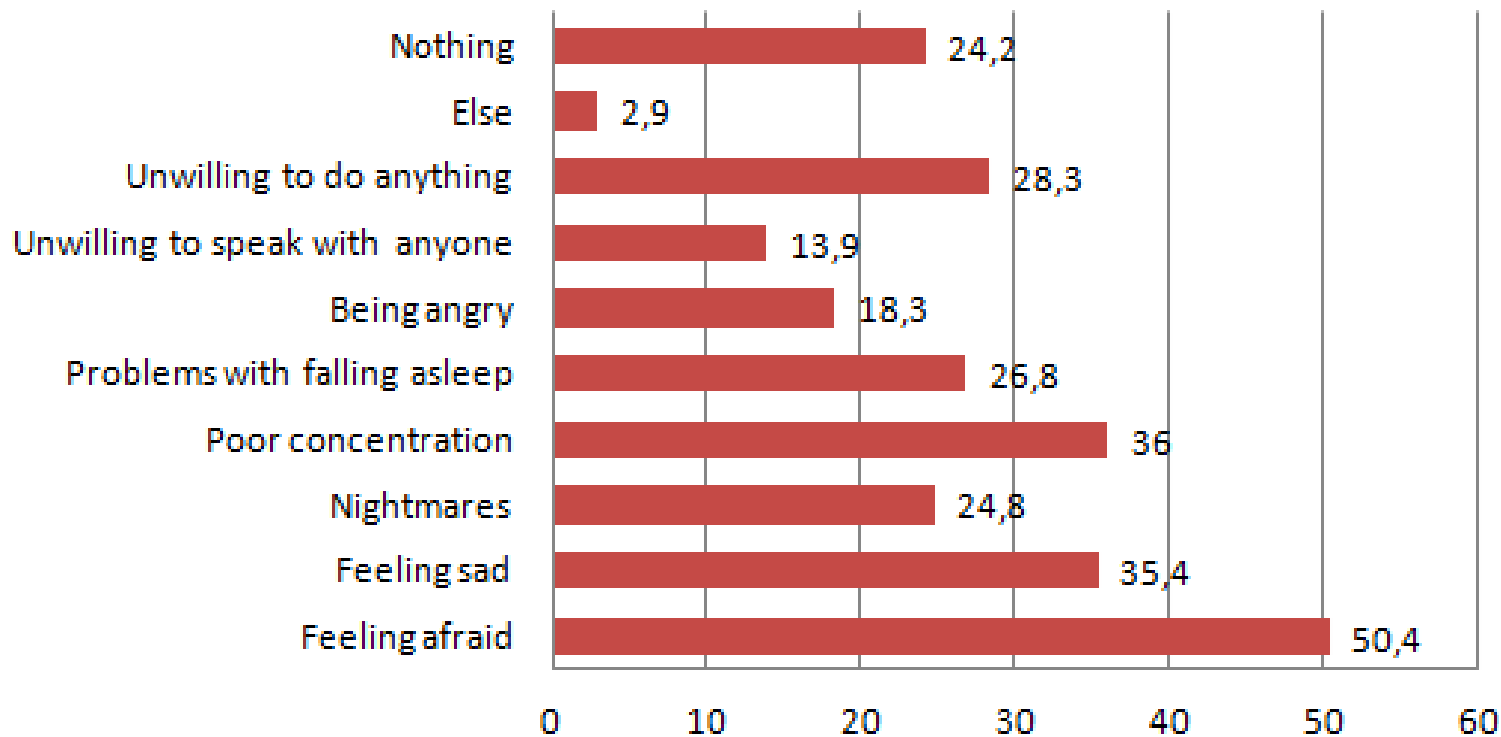


Have you been distressed by these events?

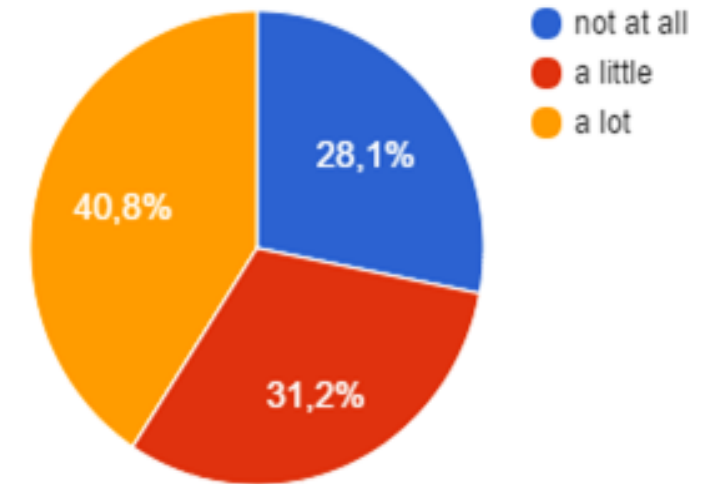


Acute stress reactions n = 466, 8-15 years, 46.6% female

What did you experience after witnessing the aversive events?



How much do you feel able to deal with your problems yourself?



Research was conducted within the UNICEF project that was aimed to support mobile psychosocial teams in front-line zone.

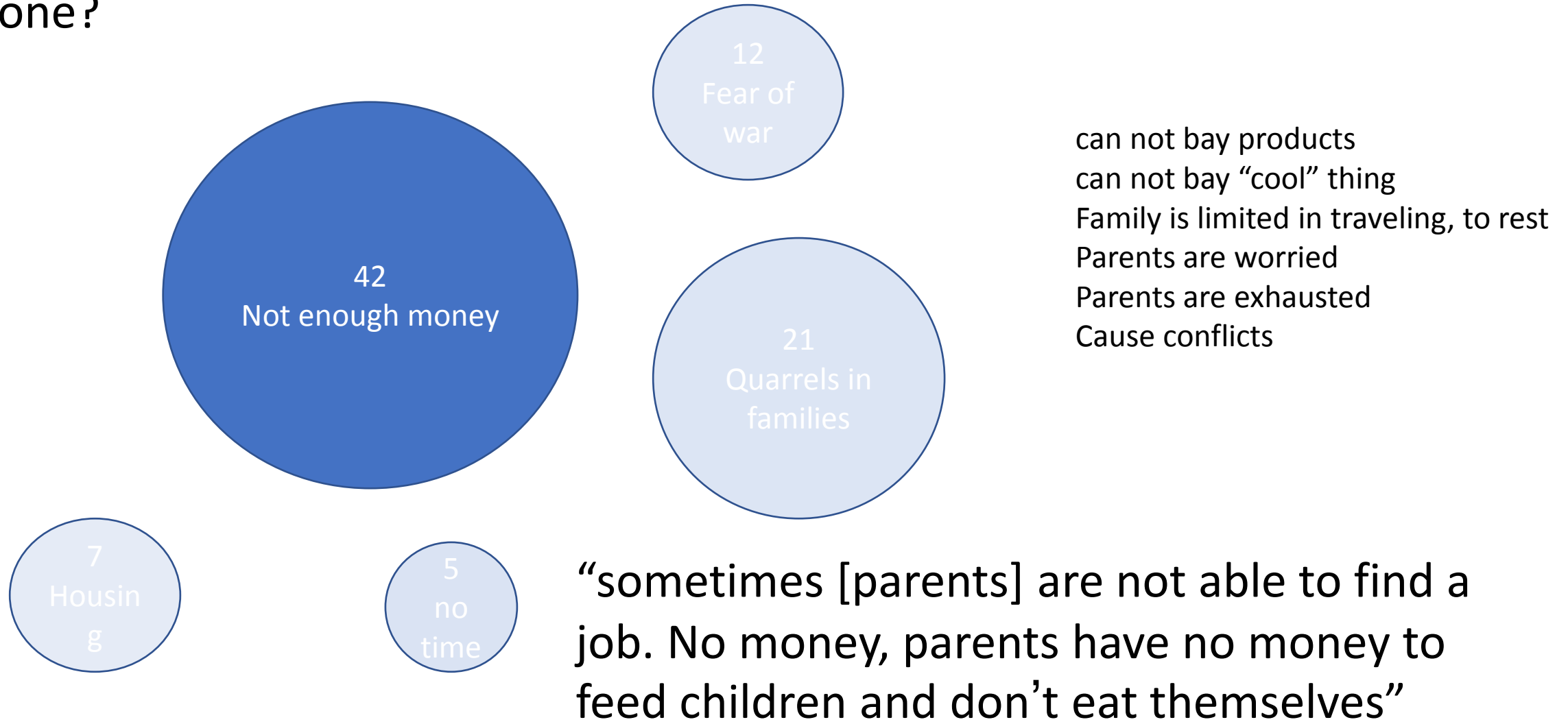
Main research goals:

- Provide in-depth understanding of every-day life context of children;
- study local words and expressions used by children for describing their psychosocial problems and resilience strategies;
- develop recommendations for psychosocial programs;
- support development of resilience measure for children.

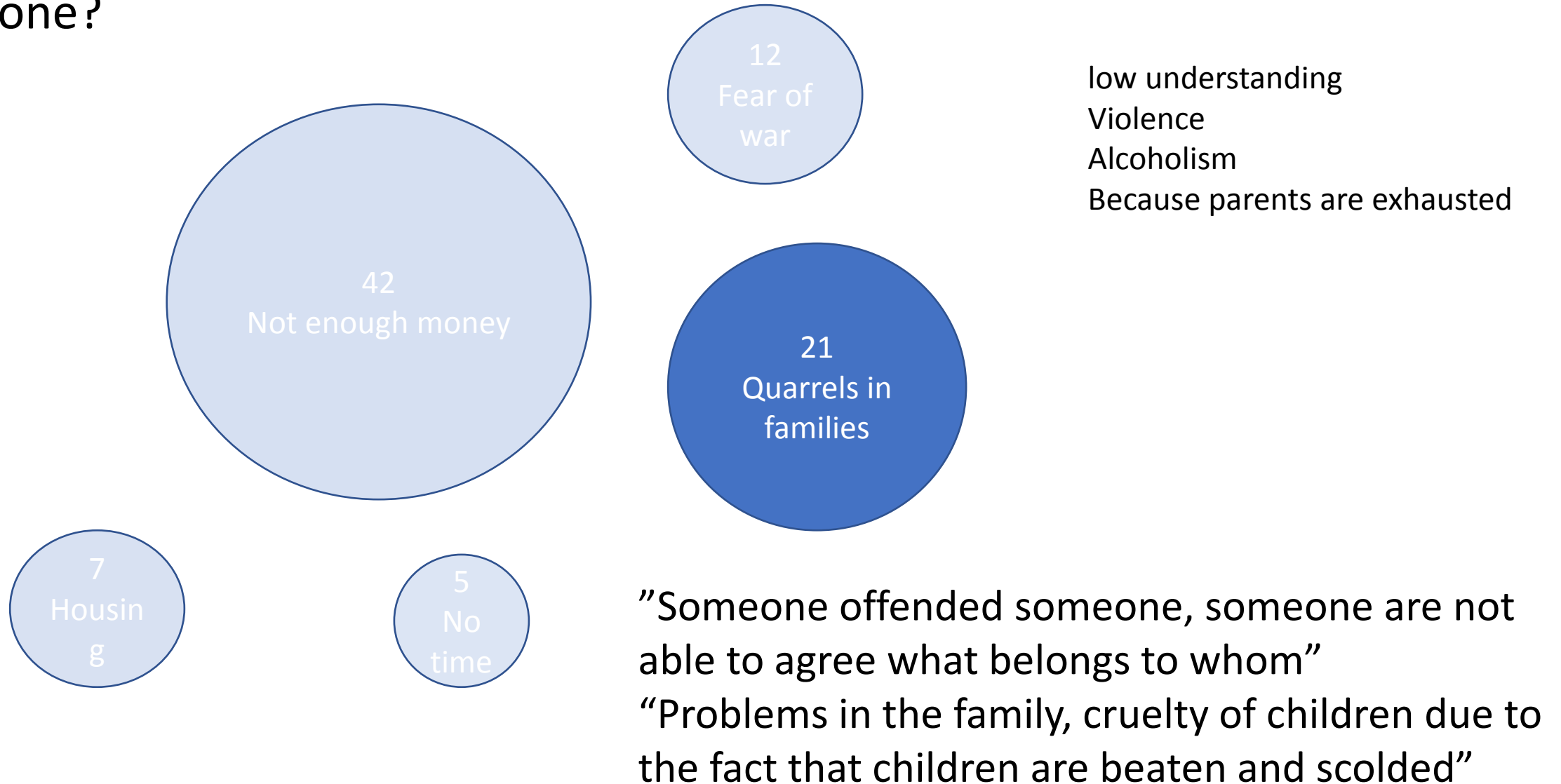
Methodology

- 67 structured free list (FL) interview's with children
 - 9-11 year old (n=29)
 - 12-14 year old (n=21)
 - 15-17 year old (n=17)
- 30 interviews with key informants (KI)
 - School psychologists
 - Social pedagogues
 - Psychotherapists
- 4 focus group discussions (FGD)
 - 2 – children,
 - 1 – parents,
 - 1 – psychologists

What are the main problems faced by families living here in the front line zone?



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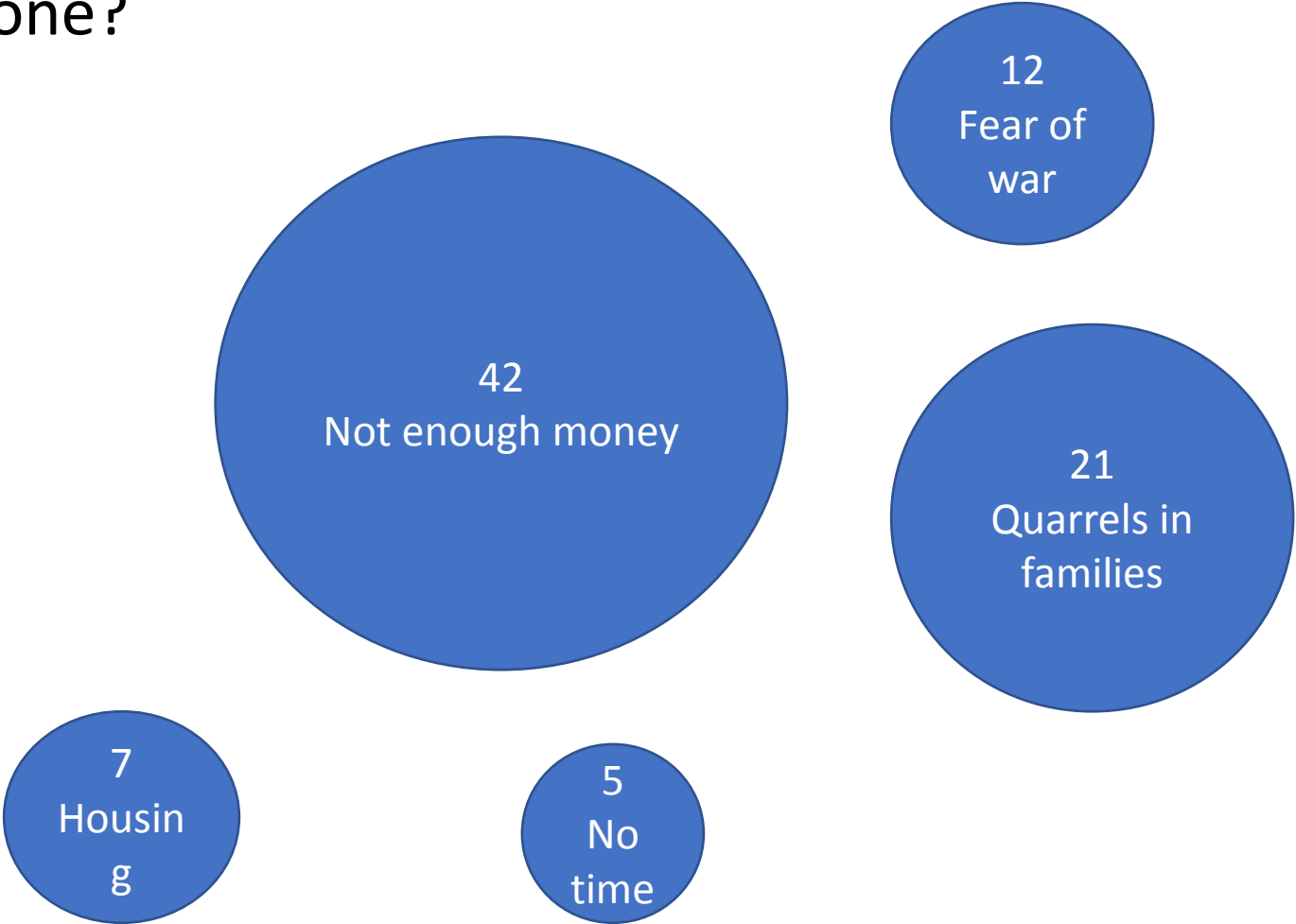
What are the main problems faced by families living here in the front line zone?



Fear for exposure
Fear about relatives
Limitation in contact

“we can not visit my grandmother, frightened by explosions, tanks, military vehicles, people with weapons in the city”

What are the main problems faced by families living here in the front line zone?





Younger children mentioned that home violence is a problem: “[parents] beat their children if they did something bad, because of difficulties in something”

For youth – alcoholism in families is a problem

“Bad for children who see it, they are unhappy with their parents, children are ashamed of their parents”

KI interviews guide

- Selected 2 categories from FL data
 - **"Quarrels within families"**
 - **"Fear of war"**
- To each category we ask KI to describe:
 - Perceived causes of the problem
 - The symptoms and signs of the problem
 - Effects of the problem on individuals, families, and communities
 - Actions people take to address the problem
 - Difficulties in receiving help with the problem

KI – What are causes of the quarrels in families?

Lack of understanding (9)

Instability and lack of money (19)

betrayal and infidelity of a spouse (8)

Low psychological culture and reluctance to communicate with each other (8)

KI – What are causes of the fear of war?

Proximity to front-line zone (12)

Mass media information (19)

Lack of information (6)

Fear for relatives (7)

How would you describe children who are feeling and growing up well despite many problems they may be facing?

Happy – 32

Open, friendly,
kind and
smiling





Help others – 16

They help other in difficulties

They can help elderly people, people, strangers



Can communicate – 17
Can easily establish a contact
Can easily speak
Are open

Optimistic – 13

**They are trying to
forget awful things
and look into the
future positively**

**They are thinking
about good things**





Persistent, motivated – 12

They have a life goal.
They can have a goal and
achieve it, nothing will
disturb those. They want
to be the first



Friends & Family support – 11

They are supported by family, they are supported by friends

Parents saying those that everything will be good

Ukrainian children have developed different resilience strategy that help those overcome distress well:

- Active prosocial coping strategies
- Emotional coping and problem-solving
- Helping behaviour
- Support by family and friends

Family conflicts and economic difficulties are playing more important role for Ukrainian children than war itself

- It is important to follow up, how the conflict will influence families
- develop multi level intervention with emphasizing on prosocial behaviour and parenting
- Support interaction between school, children, and family and study interplay between those actors to understand how resilience strategies could become changed during the time
- Develop/adapt context driven resilience measures/approaches

Contextual approach really matters

- We should be open minded and learn from local communities before we start with intervention
- Qualitative methods allows go quickly, scientifically and systematically



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Thank you!