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)
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)
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 provides a 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
- Hrodinka – 15 km near to the front line
Traumatic exposure \( n = 466 \), 8-15 years, 46.6% female
Acute stress reactions $n = 466$, 8-15 years, 46.6% female
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?

- **42** Not enough money
- **12** Fear of war
- **21** Quarrels in families
- **7** Housing
- **5** no time

“sometimes [parents] are not able to find a job. No money, parents have no money to feed children and don’t eat themselves”

can not buy products
- can not bay “cool” thing
- Family is limited in traveling, to rest
- Parents are worried
- Parents are exhausted
- Cause conflicts
What are the main problems faced by families living here in the front line zone?

- Not enough money: 42
- Quarrels in families: 21
- Housing: 7
- No time: 5
- Fear of war: 12

"Someone offended someone, someone are not able to agree what belongs to whom"
"Problems in the family, cruelty of children due to the fact that children are beaten and scolded"

Low understanding
Violence
Alcoholism
Because parents are exhausted
What are the main problems faced by families living here in the front line zone?

- 42 Not enough money
- 21 Quarrels in families
- 12 Fear of war
- 7 Housing
- 5 No time

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

Fear for exposure
Fear about relatives
Limitation in contact
What are the main problems faced by families living here in the front line zone?

- Not enough money: 42
- Quarrels in families: 21
- Fear of war: 12
- Housing: 7
- No time: 5
Younger children mentioned that home violence is a problem: “[parents] beat their children if they did something bad, because of difficulties in something”
“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)

Fear for relatives (7)

Lack of information (6)
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 became 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
Thank you!