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PSYCHOLOGICAL REHABILITATION OF MILITARY PERSONNEL THROUGH MINDFULNESS PRACTICES: CURRENT TENDENCIES AND EFFICIENCY

The **purpose** of the article is to evaluate the efficiency of mindfulness practices in the psychological rehabilitation of military personnel and war veterans in the context of the current war in Ukraine and to determine the possibilities for their integration into Ukrainian rehabilitation programs.

Methods. The methods used include reviewing international and national studies, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses on the effectiveness of mindfulness interventions (MBCT, MBSR, MBAT) in working with military personnel and war veterans. An analysis of Ukrainian practical initiatives and rehabilitation center programs was conducted, including using online platforms and mobile applications for mindfulness training.

Results. Studies have shown that it reduces symptoms of PTSD, anxiety, and depression and improves emotional regulation, self-awareness, and social integration in war veterans. Combining mindfulness with cognitive-behavioral and body-oriented therapy makes rehab programs more effective.

Conclusions. In Ukraine, mindfulness practices are actively implemented through non-governmental organizations, war veteran funds, and specialized centers, ensuring the accessibility and individualization of programs for different categories of patients. Its main advantages are accessibility, safety, and flexibility in group and individual formats. Further research should focus on adapting programs to the Ukrainian context, using digital technologies, evaluating long-term effects, and developing a system for training specialists to implement mindfulness practices in rehabilitation work effectively.

KEY WORDS: *Mindfulness, PTSD, war veterans, psychological rehabilitation, MBCT, MBSR, self-regulation, psychological support.*

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Problem statement

The current military situation in Ukraine highlights the problem of psychological rehabilitation of military personnel who experience significant psychological stress during combat operations. According to international and national research, prolonged exposure to combat zones is associated with a high risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety, somatic disorders, as well as increased aggression and social maladjustment. There is a growing number of cases where military personnel returning from the front-line experience difficulties in interpersonal relationships, loss of life orientation, and professional motivation, which creates an additional challenge for the mental health care system.

It is important to emphasize that the psychological consequences of combat experience have both an individual and a social dimension. Untimely provision of adequate psychological assistance can lead to a decrease in the level of social integration of war veterans, an increase in conflict within families, and negatively affect the process of post-war recovery of society. Therefore, the search for effective methods of psychological support for military personnel is one of the key tasks of modern practical psychology.

In this context, innovative approaches that combine scientific validity and practical effectiveness are gaining increasing attention. One such method is mindfulness—purposeful, non-judgmental awareness of the present moment. Unlike traditional psychotherapeutic techniques, which focus on analyzing past

experiences or predicting the future, mindfulness helps to focus on the present, developing the ability to self-observe, accept, and reduce automatic reactions to stressful stimuli. It makes it an up-and-coming tool for working with military personnel, who often experience excessive anxiety, flashbacks, and heightened emotional reactivity.

Using mindfulness in the rehabilitation of war veterans not only reduces the intensity of PTSD symptoms and anxiety but also promotes the formation of new adaptive behavioral strategies, restores a sense of internal control, and harmonizes relationships with the social environment. Therefore, mindfulness practice can become an essential component of comprehensive psychological support programs for military personnel in Ukraine.

The purpose of the article is to evaluate the effectiveness of mindfulness practices in the psychological rehabilitation of military personnel and war veterans in the context of the current war in Ukraine, to identify the key principles of their application, and to explore the possibilities for their integration into the system of rehabilitation centers.

Research methods include a review of international and domestic studies, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses of the effectiveness of mindfulness interventions (MBCT, MBSR, MBAT) in working with military personnel and war veterans; analysis of Ukrainian practical initiatives, rehabilitation center programs, and mobile/online platforms for conducting mindfulness training.

Results

Several empirical studies have confirmed the efficiency of mindfulness-based programs in working with military personnel and war veterans. For example, the study Treatment Engagement and Outcomes of MBCT for War Veterans with Psychiatric Disorders showed that after completing an eight-week MBCT course, war veterans with various mental disorders demonstrated a significant reduction in the number of psychiatric hospitalizations, indicating an increase in their psychological stability and ability to self-regulate [7].

Similar results were obtained in a pilot study, A Pilot Study of Group MBCT for

Combat Veterans with PTSD, where group intervention based on MBCT contributed to a noticeable improvement in symptoms according to the CAPS clinical scale. In particular, there was a decrease in emotional avoidance and negative cognitive changes, including feelings of guilt and self-blame, which are typical for people with combat experience [5].

Interesting results were also demonstrated in a study involving Iranian war veterans of the Iran-Iraq War — Influence of Adjuvant MBCT on Symptoms of PTSD in Iranian war veterans [3]. The use of MBCT as an adjunct to standard drug treatment

(citalopram) contributed to a significant reduction in post-traumatic symptoms, anxiety, depression, and stress compared to the control group, which received only pharmacotherapy.

Systematic reviews and meta-analyses confirm these findings. For example, the Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis: Efficacy & Acceptability of MBIs for War Veterans [2] summarizes the results of a series of clinical trials proving the efficiency of mindfulness-based interventions in reducing the manifestations of PTSD, depression, and anxiety, as well as in improving the overall quality of life of war veterans. A more narrowly focused analysis — Military-related PTSD and Mindfulness Meditation: A Meta-analysis [14] — also demonstrated a statistically significant effect of mindfulness practices on reducing the intensity of PTSD symptoms in military personnel and war veterans.

Thus, the results of international studies confirm the feasibility of integrating mindfulness approaches into psychological rehabilitation programs for individuals with combat experience, making this technique a promising direction for application in the Ukrainian context.

In the context of the war in Ukraine, the issue of psychological support for military personnel, war veterans, and their families is particularly relevant. Several initiatives aimed at integrating mindfulness practices into rehabilitation programs are noteworthy in this context.

One notable project is the Mind & Life Initiative, which implements the Mindfulness-Based Attention Training (MBAT) program for “high-demand, high-stress cohorts” — groups with high levels of stress and strain, including military personnel, first responders, and their families. The program includes training and research to improve psychological resilience and prevent burnout [8].

The Ukrainian Mindfulness Association (UMA) [13] plays an important role. It is a non-governmental organization that brings certified MBSR, MBCT, and MSC instructors together. The association organizes training, conducts seminars, and serves as a platform for implementing scientifically based mindfulness practices in education, healthcare, and rehabilitation (ngo-uma.com).

In addition, veterans' funds and non-governmental organizations in Ukraine are

actively integrating elements of mindfulness into their rehabilitation programs. Such initiatives usually combine mindfulness training, physical practices, psychoeducational modules, and group support. Information about the events held and their results can be found in the foundations' reports and on their social media pages [10,9].

The first works highlighting the Ukrainian context also appear in the scientific field. In particular, studies published in publications such as *Frontiers* concern sleep quality, anxiety levels, and psychological well-being in war veterans and military personnel with disabilities. In addition, the Ministry of War Veterans of Ukraine and the War Veteran Fund “Side by Side with War Veterans” publish analytical reports that reflect the need to implement modern approaches to psychological support, including mindfulness practices [1,11].

Thus, an environment for the development and scientific justification of mindfulness-oriented interventions is already being formed in Ukraine, which is of great importance for the psychological rehabilitation system for military personnel and war veterans.

Mindfulness is a psychological concept and technique that involves purposeful, non-judgmental awareness of the present moment. It originates from Buddhist meditative traditions, but in the 20th century, it was adapted to clinical psychology and psychotherapy. The most well-known programs are MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction), developed by J. Kabat-Zinn, and MBCT (Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy), which integrates cognitive-behavioral therapy with mindfulness practices.

Psychological support for war veterans is critical due to the high level of psycho-emotional stress and the risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Among modern methods of psychotherapeutic assistance, mindfulness occupies a special place, based on several key principles: purposefulness, non-judgment, and focus on the present moment.

Based on a review of psychological and pedagogical literature, we can identify the main principles of mindfulness [2,4]:

1. *Purposefulness* involves conscious concentration on specific thoughts, feelings, or events in a safe environment. For war veterans,

this allows them to reduce the re-experiencing of traumatic memories and manage emotional reactions. Mindful breathing or body scanning practices help train attention and self-regulation, reducing symptoms of hyperarousal and anxiety. This principle helps war veterans consciously focus on specific thoughts, feelings, or actions in a safe environment. For example, during mindfulness practice, a war veteran may concentrate on breathing or bodily sensations. It helps reduce the constant re-experiencing of traumatic memories and improves control over emotional reactions. The psychological mechanism of influence lies in training attention and self-regulation, which helps reduce the symptoms of hyperarousal and excessive anxiety characteristic of PTSD. For example, breathing meditation or mindful body scanning, where the war veteran observes muscle tension, heat, or cold sensations, without trying to change them.

2. *Non-judgment* means accepting one's experiences without criticism or self-blame. For war veterans who often feel guilt or shame due to traumatic experiences, this principle allows them to observe emotions and thoughts as facts without falling into negative judgments. It helps reduce internal tension and develop a kind attitude toward oneself. Non-judgmental observation of one's own experiences is crucial for war veterans who may feel guilt, shame, or self-blame due to traumatic experiences. This principle helps to accept emotions and memories as they are, without criticism. The psychological mechanism involves reducing internal self-criticism and emotional stress, which lowers the risk of developing depression and anxiety. An example of application is keeping an emotion journal, where a war veteran describes his feelings and thoughts simply as facts, without evaluating them as "good" or "bad."

3. *Present moment focus*. Focusing on the present moment helps break the cycle of rumination and anxious anticipation. Concentrating on present sensations, sounds, breathing, or movements allows war veterans to become more aware of their reactions, accept them, and cope with stress more effectively, improving their adaptation to civilian life. For war veterans, focusing on the "here and now" helps break the cycle of re-experiencing traumatic events. Instead of concentrating on past traumas or worrying about the future, the war veteran focuses on

present sensations, sounds, breathing, or surroundings. The psychological mechanism reduces rumination and anxiety activation and develops a conscious response to stressful situations, improving adaptation to civilian life. For example, short mindful walking practices where the war veteran focuses on the sensations of his feet on the ground, his breathing rhythm, and the surrounding sounds. Therefore, mindfulness combines the development of attention, emotional stability, and cognitive flexibility, making it a promising and scientifically sound tool in the psychological rehabilitation of military personnel and war veterans in modern challenges.

Mindfulness practice implements several psychological mechanisms of influence. It promotes emotion regulation, reduces impulsive reactions and emotional hyperactivity, develops self-awareness, allows one to recognize automatic reactions and cognitive patterns, and reduces stress by activating the body's relaxation responses and increasing psychological resilience.

Empirical studies confirm the efficiency of mindfulness in working with war veterans and military personnel. For example, participation in an eight-week MBCT course demonstrated a reduction in the number of psychiatric hospitalizations among war veterans with various mental disorders. Group MBCT interventions for war veterans with combat PTSD contributed to a reduction in symptoms on the CAPS clinical scale, a decrease in emotional avoidance, and cognitive negative changes such as self-blame. The additional use of MBCT alongside standard treatment (SSRI) in war veterans of the Iran-Iraq War showed a significant reduction in PTSD symptoms, anxiety, and depression. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses confirm that mindfulness interventions are effective in reducing symptoms of PTSD, depression, and anxiety, as well as improving the quality of life of military personnel and war veterans.

In the Ukrainian context, mindfulness is also beginning to be actively implemented in psychological rehabilitation programs. For example, the Mind & Life Initiative is implementing the Mindfulness-Based Attention Training (MBAT) program for high-stress groups, including military personnel, rescue workers, and their families. The Ukrainian Mindfulness Association (UMA)

organizes training programs and certification courses for MBSR, MBCT, and MSC instructors. In addition, several veteran foundations and non-governmental organizations in Ukraine are integrating mindfulness practices into their rehabilitation programs, combining them with physical practices and psychoeducational modules. Scientific research, publications in *Frontiers in Psychology*, and reports from the Ukrainian Ministry for War Veterans confirm the efficiency of such approaches and emphasize their relevance for the psychological support of Ukrainian military personnel.

Mindfulness is often integrated with other psychotherapeutic approaches. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) combined with mindfulness (MBCT) allows you to recognize automatic negative thoughts characteristic of PTSD and reduce their impact on your emotional state. For example, a war veteran can consciously observe the thought "I am responsible for the death of my comrade" and gradually reconsider its realism, reducing the level of guilt and anxiety.

Another direction is body-oriented therapy, which focuses on the relationship between bodily sensations and emotions. Conscious observation of physical sensations, such as tension in the shoulders or chest, combined with breathing practices, helps to reduce somatic manifestations of anxiety and hyperarousal.

The combination of mindfulness with CBT and body-oriented therapy creates a synergistic effect, promoting better control of PTSD symptoms, the development of self-observation and self-regulation, the integration of traumatic experiences into a safe context, and an improvement in the quality of life of war veterans.

The introduction of mindfulness practices into the system of rehabilitation centers in Ukraine has significant potential to improve the efficiency of psychosocial and psychological support for patients, particularly war veterans and individuals who have experienced traumatic events. Mindfulness promotes the development of awareness, emotional regulation, and stress resistance, which is especially important in the context of rehabilitation after physical and psycho-emotional trauma.

Practices of mindful observation of thoughts, feelings, and bodily reactions allow

patients to reduce anxiety, depressive symptoms, and internal tension. At the same time, integrating mindfulness into rehabilitation programs supports the development of self-observation and self-regulation and increases motivation for recovery and adaptation in the social environment.

The potential for implementing such practices is also linked to the possibility of using modern technologies: online platforms, mobile applications, and virtual training courses make mindfulness practices accessible to a broader audience and allow them to be adapted to patients' individual needs. The potential for implementing mindfulness practices in rehabilitation centers is primarily linked to modern technologies. Online platforms, mobile applications, and virtual training courses make mindfulness practices accessible to a broader audience and allow them to be adapted to patients' individual needs.

Online platforms such as Coursera, Udemy, or specialized psychological support programs offer structured mindfulness courses with video lessons, audio exercises, and progress tracking. It makes learning accessible to patients regardless of their location or physical abilities.

Mobile apps such as Calm, Headspace, or Insight Timer offer a wide range of meditation, breathing exercises, and short mindfulness practices that patients can do daily. It is essential for war veterans or people with limited mobility, as they can independently maintain their mental and emotional state between in-person rehabilitation sessions.

Virtual training and interactive programs using VR (virtual reality) technology allow you to create a safe environment for mindfulness practices, even for patients with severe traumatic memories. For example, VR can simulate natural landscapes, calm interiors, or guided meditations, which help patients feel present in the "here and now" and reduce anxiety levels. There are two well-known mindfulness training programs for military personnel: Mindfulness Mind Fitness Training (MMFT) and Mindfulness-based Mind Fitness Training (MMFT). These programs aim to develop mental resilience and reduce stress among military personnel by using mindfulness practices in combination with

physical exercise and psychological support.

In addition, combining mindfulness with classical psychotherapeutic approaches, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy or body-oriented methods, creates a synergistic effect, increasing the efficiency of comprehensive rehabilitation.

In Ukraine, there is also growing interest in introducing mindfulness into rehabilitation programs for war veterans and people who have experienced traumatic events. Modern technologies allow these practices to be adapted to patients' specific needs and ensure their availability at any time. Thus, introducing mindfulness into the system of rehabilitation centers in Ukraine is a promising direction that can improve the quality of psychological care, increase patients' adaptive resources, and ensure a more comprehensive approach to their recovery. Among Ukrainian rehabilitation initiatives involving mindfulness, the Psychological Support psychological rehabilitation center stands out, actively implementing mindfulness techniques in its rehabilitation programs for military personnel. In particular, group and individual mindfulness training sessions are conducted to reduce stress and anxiety, improve emotional regulation, and restore the psycho-emotional state of war veterans. At the "Vidrodzhennia" rehabilitation center, mindfulness practices are integrated into comprehensive recovery programs, including physical therapy, art therapy, and social adaptation. Mindfulness classes help participants focus on the present moment, reducing stress levels and improving quality of life. The Institute of Psychology and Psychotherapy conducts training courses and workshops for psychologists and psychotherapists, focusing on the use of mindfulness in working with military personnel and civilians who have experienced traumatic events.

Mindfulness practices have several significant advantages that make them promising for use in the psychological rehabilitation of war veterans. First, they are accessible: no complex equipment or special conditions are required to conduct them. Classes can be organized in rehabilitation centers, online, or at home. It allows for a wide

range of patients to be reached, including those with limited mobility or who live in different regions of Ukraine. The flexibility of the session formats—group sessions, individual consultations, or short online practices—ensures that they can be adapted to the needs of each specific patient.

Secondly, mindfulness practices are characterized by the absence of side effects. Unlike pharmacological methods or some intensive psychotherapeutic procedures, they are based on the safe observation of one's thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations. It allows war veterans to gradually reduce stress, anxiety, and PTSD symptoms without risk to their physical or mental health.

Thirdly, mindfulness can be effectively applied in both group and individual formats. Group sessions promote the development of social support, mutual understanding, and communication skills among war veterans, creating a sense of community and security. Individual practices allow for the psycho-emotional characteristics of a particular patient to be taken into account and exercises to be selected according to their needs.

At the same time, introducing mindfulness into rehabilitation programs faces specific difficulties. One of the main problems is the lack of qualified specialists—trainers and psychologists with certification and experience in mindfulness. It limits the possibility of large-scale use of programs in different regions of Ukraine [10].

Another difficulty is the need to adapt programs to Ukrainian realities. Many existing methods were developed abroad and do not consider the specific cultural, social, and psychological context of Ukrainian war veterans. For practical work, it is necessary to adapt materials, considering linguistic characteristics, the available resources of rehabilitation centers, and the psycho-emotional needs of patients.

Additional difficulties are associated with limited program funding, the need to train specialists, and integrating mindfulness into existing comprehensive rehabilitation programs, which requires coordination between specialists of different profiles.

Conclusion and further research prospects

Therefore, mindfulness practices contribute to reducing symptoms of PTSD,

anxiety, depression, and psycho-emotional stress among veterans. They form adaptive

behavioral strategies, improve emotional regulation, self-observation, and social integration. Integrating mindfulness with cognitive-behavioral therapy and body-oriented methods enhances the effectiveness of comprehensive rehabilitation. In Ukraine, such practices have begun to be actively implemented through public initiatives, veteran funds, and specialized rehabilitation centers. At the same time, the use of online platforms and mobile applications ensures wide accessibility and individualization of programs.

Mindfulness is a promising and scientifically proven tool for the psychological rehabilitation of military personnel and veterans in Ukraine. Its key advantages are

accessibility, safety, and flexibility in group and individual formats. The main implementation challenges are a lack of certified specialists, the need to adapt programs to the Ukrainian cultural and social context, limited funding, and the need for integration into existing rehabilitation programs. Further research prospects include: developing adapted mindfulness programs for Ukrainian veterans; integration of digital technologies (VR, mobile applications); assessment of the long-term effects and synergistic impact of combined therapeutic approaches; introduction of a system for training certified trainers and psychologists; analysis of the impact on the social adaptation and quality of life of veterans.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript. Furthermore, the authors has fully adhered to ethical standards, including those related to plagiarism, data falsification, and duplicate publication.

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ПСИХОЛОГІЧНА РЕАБІЛІТАЦІЯ ВІЙСЬКОВОСЛУЖБОВЦІВ ЧЕРЕЗ ПРАКТИКИ MINDFULNESS: СУЧАСНІ ТЕНДЕНЦІЇ ТА ЕФЕКТИВНІСТЬ

Мета статті - оцінка ефективності практик mindfulness у психологічній реабілітації військових та ветеранів в умовах сучасної війни в Україні та визначення можливостей їх інтеграції в українські реабілітаційні програми.

Методи. Використано методи огляду міжнародних і вітчизняних досліджень, систематичних оглядів та метааналізів щодо ефективності mindfulness-інтервенцій (МВСТ, МБСТ, МВАТ) у роботі з військовослужбовцями та ветеранами. Проведено аналіз українських практичних ініціатив та програм реабілітаційних центрів, включаючи використання онлайн-платформ і мобільних додатків для проведення mindfulness-тренінгів.

Результати. Дослідження показують, що mindfulness-інтервенції зменшують прояви ПТСР, тривожності та депресії, покращують емоційну регуляцію, самоспостереження та соціальну інтеграцію ветеранів. Поєднання mindfulness із когнітивно-поведінковою та тілесно-орієнтованою терапією посилює ефективність реабілітаційних програм. В Україні практики усвідомленості активно впроваджуються через громадські організації, ветеранські фонди та спеціалізовані центри, що забезпечує доступність та індивідуалізацію програм для різних категорій пацієнтів.

Висновки. Mindfulness є перспективним та науково обґрунтованим інструментом психологічної реабілітації військовослужбовців і ветеранів. Основні переваги — доступність, безпечність та гнучкість у групових та індивідуальних форматах. Подальші дослідження мають зосередитися на адаптації програм до українського контексту, використанні цифрових технологій, оцінці довготривалих ефектів та розробці системи підготовки фахівців для ефективного впровадження практик mindfulness у реабілітаційній роботі.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА: Mindfulness, ПТСР, ветерани, психологічна реабілітація, КТУ, ЗСУ, саморегуляція, психологічна підтримка.

Конфлікт інтересів

Автори заявляють, що конфлікту інтересів щодо публікації цього рукопису немає. Крім того, автори повністю дотримувалися етичних норм, включаючи плагіат, фальсифікацію даних та подвійну публікацію.

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