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**The special features of work of the psychologists of the Ministry of
Emergencies of Ukraine during the liquidation of the house explosion
consequences in Dniepropetrovsk**

Abstract. The article shows the main stages of the work of the extreme psychologists of the Ministry of Emergencies of Ukraine during rendering an urgent psychological help to the victims of the gas explosion in a house in Dniepropetrovsk. The peculiarities of a psychologist work in the center of an emergency are shown, the victims attitude to the help rendered by psychologists of the Ministry of Emergencies of Ukraine during the liquidation is studied.

Key words: emergency, victim, urgent psychological help, psychologist of the Ministry of Emergencies of Ukraine

Background. Searching of the ways to solve problems of the organization of the psychological work with victims of accidents and tragedies is accompanied today with a range of difficulties and demands developing of a new approach [1]. It should be based on a unique conception for rendering an urgent psychological help to affected population [2]. The work experience of the psychologists of the Ministry of Emergencies of Ukraine indicates that it is an urgent psychological help rendered in the tragedy center that is the most effective in the case [3].

The latest researches analysis. The analysis of the scientific literatures showed the questions of the psychological help content was studied by O.F. Bondarenko, I.V. Doronina, A.M. Elisarov, I.A. Kornienko, N.A. Krukova, V.I. Lyssenko, A.A. Kholodova etc. The same phenomenon in the aspect of the extreme conditions was studied by F.E. Vassyluk, A.G. Karayan, M.O. Krukova, L.A. Pergamenschik, V.G. Romek, N.V. Tabarina, O.V. Timchenko, E.M. Cherepanova, S.I. Yakovenko etc.

Such scientists as D.U. Borodin, O.Ya. Varga, A.V. Gnesdilov, S. Gremling, E.G. Grinevitch, B. Dayts, V.L. Marischuk, V.L. Reshetnikov, A. Antonovsky, A. Baum, C. Benignt, R. Bryant, S. Hobfoll, F. Shapiro etc. studied the problems of the psychotherapeutic measures with victims, studied peculiarities of the individual behavior in the conditions of emergency, raised questions of stress management. But we should notice that the scientific studies were generally concentrated on studying questions that do not solve problems of urgent psychological help to the victims of emergencies.

Statement of the received results. October, 13, 2007, in the morning, domestic gas exploded in one of the houses of Dniepropetrovsk. In a result of the explosion 46 buildings, 45 from them are apartment houses were destroyed. The most affected were people living at the house № 127, Mandrikovska Street, there were 160 apartments in the houses. The explosion completely destroyed the 3^d entrance to the building (40 apartments). Only backside wall remained whole. Normal living conditions of hundreds persons were disturbed, 488 persons were urgently evacuated.

In 7 minutes after a signal of the tragedy the rescuers of the Ministry of Emergencies of Ukraine in Dniepropetrovsk region came on the spot. The image they saw at the place of the tragedy will always remain in their memory – tons of debris of disfigured concrete, moans and cries for help of those who got into a mortal trap. Without hesitation, the rescuers started their work. Long hours of intense work started. Every 30 minutes a signal “silence” made all search-and-rescue works stop for 1 minute. This signal was repeated in definite time intervals in order to the rescuers could hear the cries of the people under the debris. During first several hours the rescuers could save from the debris 17 persons.

At the beginning of search-and-rescue work a liquidation headquarters was established at the school № 76, preliminary lists of died and hospitalized were edited and hung out. The interaction of specialized services of the Central department of the Ministry of Emergencies of Ukraine (MEU) and the city ones

was organized, a temporary office of urgent psychological help was created and the psychologists were all the time on duty there.

The psychologists fixed at once the main stages and directions of rendering urgent psychological help to victims according to areas of responsibilities:

- duty outside of the house encirclement, where there was a lot of work with the relatives of victims (with people who waited the results of search-and-rescue works). The psychologists worked there 24 hours;
- duty at school, at liquidation headquarters;
- Work with relatives in morgue during the corpse identification;
- Rendering of the urgent psychological help at places where victims were settled.

The urgent psychological work was rendered directly at places of localization of victims. First – at the center of the tragedy: by medical workers, psychologists of MEU. Secondly – at the liquidation headquarters: by medical workers, psychologists of MEU, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, social and school psychologists. Thirdly – at hotels where the victims were settled: by medical workers, psychologists, representatives of the Red Cross.

Besides, another category of victims was rescuers who worked at the tragedy center. Work with rescuers provided first of all:

- time for rest,
- possibility to discuss the situation, analyze the events;
- maintaining of the fighting spirit, installation for further work;
- emphatic support, encouragement with word

We should note that the main psychotherapeutic measures with rescuers were held when they were out of the tragedy zone, during the so called restorative period.

Turning back to the rendering of urgent psychological help we will underline its main principles:

- urgency;
- closeness to a tragedy place;

- expectation that normal life will be restored, actual problems will be solved;
- unity and simplicity of psychological impact.

At the emergency center the psychologists made primary express-diagnostics of actual states of people, before rendering help. The specialists said that they fixed extra high inner stress, symptoms of neurotic behavior, nervous breakdown among the relatives of victims. Some people were simply demoralized and emaciated, - they seemed to be completely indifferent to everything happening around them, they were moaning monotonously, - people were deeply stricken by the tragedy. In such difficult conditions the extreme psychologists could establish effective psychological contacts, watch for mental and physical state of the victims and render effective urgent psychological help.

As we know from the world practice of the cases of mass people death, some victims could have hallucinations. Some relatives of the inhabitants of the destroyed house also had hallucinations (mother of one girl who was still under debris, stated that she heard moans and cries for help of the daughter from the debris). From time to time cried, she had hysterics, nervous trembling and then long apathy.

The announcement of a body finding was conducted with the presence of a psychologist. The relatives who were at the state of acute emotional shock were given an urgent psychological help.

At the hotel, where the victims were settled there was organized an office of urgent psychological help and the civic practical psychologists were there all the time. The victims had the symptoms of general psychomotor agitation, pronounced negativism of psychological trauma, dominance of acute negative emotions of grief, fear, anxiety, aggression, nervousness, hopelessness etc. The affective state in this situation had a disorganizing impact on intellectual activity of victims and their relatives this made the adaptation processes difficult or impossible. Intense negative emotions blocked adequate perception of the reality and prevented from right evaluation of a person's actions in such conditions and from making right decisions. Near the school not far from the tragedy place there were organized a

special place where people could sublimate their grief. The search-and-rescue works were still being conducted and the tragedy place was fenced. At this sublimation place there were tables covered with red cloths. Any person could come there, put flowers near a list of dead, people could put there a photo of their dead close person, or bring some toys. It was a terrific coincidence, but the most of dead were children. Later this place will become holy for many citizens of Dniepropetrovsk, every day people will come there to honour the memory of victims, to put flowers and wreaths.

From the first days of the tragedy many specialists took part in rendering psychological help to victims, they were: psychologists of MEU, civil psychologists, representatives of social, medical and educational organizations of Dniepropetrovsk.

A special attention the psychologists paid to rendering urgent psychological support to relatives who had to recognize corpses in morgues and during funeral.

But as it often occurs people always believe in miracle. Several days the citizens of Dniepropetrovsk and psychologists searched a girl because her relatives asked about it. This request was grounded on a story of a journalist who seemed to see a little girl in a night dress, barefooted with a domestic animal – a hamster. Unfortunately this information turned out to be false. At the last day of search-and-rescue work the rescuers took from the debris a crippled body of the girl. This case indicates at another important direction of the psychologists work during an emergency – prevention and struggle with rumors.

Persistent journalists who without any confusion aimed their cameras at persons in grief also provoked the growing of negative psychological states at victims. And this in its turn provoked too violent negative emotional releases at victims.

During search-and-rescue work practical psychologists fixed a very strong reaction of the victims at responsible officials. The negative emotions were accompanied with accusations of the persons responsible for the tragedy. The

methods of “informational therapy” were used in this period. One of their aims was to stop rumors and panic.

We should indicate that important part in organization and rendering help was done by the organization committee and by the Minister N.I. Shufritch, Vice-minister V.I. Telichko, they organized settling people in hotels, paid primary financial help, they did all possible that people could take the rest of their properties from the destroyed house.

The work in this direction was conducted in several stages. First, after expert assessment of the condition of a building the inhabitants of 1st entrance were allowed to enter in their apartments (accompanied with specialists of MEU and police) and to take documents and values. The next stage was to restore constructive stability of the building and then the inhabitants were permitted to take warm and value stuff from their apartment. In this situation people were reserved and understanding. They said that they did not want to risk their lives and the lives of rescuers because of some stuff.

On October-November of 2007, in Dniepropetrovsk the scientific research laboratory of extreme and crisis psychology of the National University of the Civil Defense of Ukraine carried on a research that covered all the victims of a house № 127, Mandrikovskaya Street. The aim of the research was a detection of dysfunction of a representation of conception “I” and environment that could be reason for deviations at cognitive, emotional, behavioral levels of the victims and also their evaluation of the role of mass media in this situation, their attitude to urgent psychological help rendered to them.

The victims were interviewed in order to find out the appraisal of the activity of the organizations that took part in rendering psychological, medical and social help.

The specialists-psychologists used such methods as documentations analysis, expert assessment method, content-analysis, questioning, interviews, observation methods (table 1).

Table 1.

Division of the responses to the interview

Variant of a response	Victims the inhabitants of the 3 rd entrance %	Victims the inhabitants of the 1 st , 2 nd and 4 th entrance %
<i>What do you think, was the psychologist help effective, timely for you and members of your family or not?</i>		
Certainly effective and timely	25,0	24,3
Rather effective and timely	29,3	43,2
Rather ineffective	7,6	17,0
The absolutely vain	2,2	2,4
It is difficult to answer	35,9	13,2
Total	100,0	100,0
<i>If you didn't ask for the help the psychologist, what were the reasons?</i>		
I don't see any need in it	64,1	30,9
I don't believe in the real help of the psychologist	27,8	8,6
I find difficulty in choosing an expert	1,0	0,5
I don't know where it is necessary to address	4,1	6,1
There is no opportunity	5,5	3,0
It is difficult to answer	14,4	12,6
They won't help my grief	14,1	4,0
There is no need and desire at the moment	0,7	–
Further communication is necessary	0,7	–
Relatives addressed	0,3	–
I doubt qualification of psychologists	0,3	–
I don't need such help	–	1,0
Total	100,0	100,0
<i>What form of social and psychological help could be the most effective for you at present time?</i>		
Individual consultations of the psychologist	49,4	13,3
Group social and psychological occupations	7,4	41,6
Family consultation and other actions	24,3	15,9
Another	11,9	12,8
difficult to answer	7,0	16,4
Total	100,0	100,0

Taking into consideration a difficult psychoemotional state of the respondents, the main method of interview was an oral questioning with responses fixation on the paper. According to the specification of the emergency and in order to gain the aim of the research (that was to develop practical recommendations in order to perfect the activity of psychological protection services of the Central department of MEU in regions during the organization and rendering urgent psychological help to victims of emergencies of anthropogenic nature) the respondents were divided into two categories. The first category was composed of the inhabitants of the 3rd entrance whose apartments were completely destroyed by an explosion, who lost all their properties and also their relatives. The quantity of respondents in this category was 101 persons (49 inhabitants of the 3d entrance and 52 relatives of the victims). The second category they were inhabitants of the 1st, 2nd and 4th entrances whose apartments and stuff remained safe. They composed a control group of respondents (143 persons). Thus the total quantity of randomized respondents was 244 persons.

When selecting the respondents we considered the police data according to which 448 persons were recognized as victims of a gas explosion in the house № 127, Mandrikovskaya Street in Dniepropetrovsk. That is why, as we noticed above, the questions concerning the psychological help for victims were asked only this category of respondents. The responses were divided in two main groups according to features cited above.

Conclusions. At the end we would like to note that the actual situation where the psychologists of MEU had to work and gain their experience during the liquidation of the gas explosion consequences in Dniepropetrovsk can be characterized as acute, critical, touching the life important needs and values of the rescuers and civil population.

The main factors that made the situation worse were: uncertainty of situation; fear that the victims are tricked; that the solution of actual problems can last for a long time; poor social and psychological protection; sense of guilt; of helplessness. Thus the aim of the rendering of urgent psychological help was the

maintaining of psychical and psycho physiological health and work with newly appeared due to crisis situation negative emotional experiences.

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