



NEW REPORT UNDERSCORES HIGH RATES OF POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS IN UKRAINE'S CHILDREN

Highly Effective Six-Day Rapid Assessment and Referral Program Helping Ukraine's "Children of War" Traumatized by Three Years Russian Occupation and Attacks on Civilians

UCAP leaders worried that Trump policy waivers will further demoralize the country's children

March 14, 2025 – Today, The Ukraine Children's Action Project (UCAP) released a new report detailing the effects of Russia's three-plus-year war on Ukraine's children.

Prior to Russia's 2022 invasion, the child population of Ukraine was approximately 7.5 million. Since then, some 5 million children have been displaced, about half escaping to safety in Western Ukraine and another 50% now living outside the country. Massive disruption, loss of social connections, and grieving lost loved ones in the war has resulted in high levels of psychological trauma in children. UNICEF (2025) has estimated that at least 1.5 million Ukrainian children and youth have been traumatized by persistent war.

Within months of the invasion, Ukraine Children's Action Project (UCAP), working with Sincere Heart, a Ukrainian non-governmental agency, began a program in Lviv for children and their mothers impacted by war. It includes a 6-day Recovery Camp providing respite from combat regions, stress management activities for children and their mothers, screening children for mental health treatment needs, and online follow-up groups for mothers. Preliminary results from this program were published in the American Medical Association's journal *JAMA Open* on March 14.

Key findings from the UCAP program include:

- During its first 23 months of operation, the Recovery Camp served 1,291 children (average age, 9.3 years) and 963 mothers.
- Half (49.9%) of these children lived in proximity to active war zones.

- One-third (33.3%) lost their home.
- Nearly one-fourth (23.2%) had a close relative fighting in the war.
- All were screened using a traumatic stress screening instrument validated for use in Ukraine during the war.
- One-third (33.9%) of the children had elevated post-traumatic distress or symptoms consistent with diagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
 - The most frequently reported symptoms were almost constant difficulty concentrating, nervousness or restlessness, and sleep problems.
 - More than half of these children (53.4%) were successfully referred to mental health professionals for evaluation and treatment.
- Despite the brief intervention, three-fourths (75.0%) of mothers reported that their children had improved psychosocial functioning, including 69.0% reporting the children were enjoying activities again.

Findings were collected between September 2022 and July 2024 based on screenings and interviews with mothers at Recovery Camps in Lviv. Information regarding traumatic events comes from the CATS-2 screening instrument. Interviews with Ukrainian mothers were open-ended, non-structured so they were able to express their experiences in their own words.

“Severe psychological stress is to be expected among children who live in a country under assault,” said Irwin Redlener, M.D., co-founder of UCAP. “The massive invasion by Russia and unrelenting violence experienced by Ukraine’s youngest citizens has been especially tough. Displacement, the interruption of educational continuity and the loss of “normalcy” in childhood is compounded by the fear of constant missile and drone attacks throughout the country, including communities at great distance from the active battlefields and Russian occupied territories.”

“The scale and prevalence of pediatric psychological trauma in Ukraine and surrounding regions, is stunning,” said Karen Redlener, M.S., co-founder of UCAP. “We’ve seen children in classrooms too traumatized to make eye contact with their teachers or verbalize at all. It was clear that trauma is widespread.”

There are many challenges for Ukraine. Officials must deal with enormous numbers of children who need evaluation and management, along with shortages of trauma-specialized therapists. Optimizing mental health screening and intervention programs is also needed.

Khrystina Dudashvili, Recovery Camp founder and director said, “We consistently find that between 30-35% of children in each six-day camp are documented as likely having PTSD. Once that is identified, we refer them to appropriate mental health professionals.”

After participating in the camp where necessary referrals are made, **75% of mothers report improvements in their children**. Dudashvili said that this program has provided a successful short-term, low-cost model of care for traumatized children. It’s ready to be replicated and brought to scale.

According to Dr. Redlener, “Because the number of children traumatized by war in Ukraine is so large, it is essential to identify short, effective programs, like Recovery Camps, that can be replicated and scaled up quickly to meet the growing need”. We need to treat this crisis for Ukraine’s children like an emergency.”

Redlener continues, “And I am worried that the more Donald Trump’s policies waiver and seem to align with Putin’s goals in the war, the more Ukraine’s children and families will feel demoralized and abandoned.”

As more children develop war-related traumas, UCAP will continue supporting Recovery Camps in Lviv along with its other programs in the region. To learn more about how UCAP is supporting Ukraine visit: <https://ucap.help/>

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