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MENTAL HEALTH OF VOLUNTEERS

Анотація. Волонтерство в наш час стало прикметною ознакою цивілізованого громадянського суспільства, символом гуманізованого мислення і свідомості, альтруїзму і безкорисності. В XXI столітті спостерігається справжній волонтерський бум, гуманітарні та благодійницькі прояви якого наявні практично в усіх сферах суспільного життя, а інституційні форми представлені як відносно невеликими ініціативними групами, так і потужно організованими структурами. В умовах сучасних кризових ситуацій (військові конфлікти, пандемії та гуманітарні катастрофи) роль волонтерів набуває надзвичайного значення, оскільки вони забезпечують підтримку та допомогу тим, хто цього потребує найбільше, часто працюючи в екстремальних умовах та під високим рівнем емоційного навантаження. Однак, тривала діяльність у такому середовищі може призводити до значного фізичного та психологічного виснаження, що в свою чергу впливає на ефективність виконання завдань і загальне благополуччя волонтера. Актуальність теми обумовлена зростаючою кількістю випадків емоційного вигорання, стресових розладів, депресії та тривожності серед волонтерів, що підтверджується численними дослідженнями та практичними спостереженнями. Волонтери часто нехтують власними потребами та ментальним здоров'ям, зосереджуючись на допомозі іншим, що створює додаткові ризики для їхнього психоемоційного стану. **Мета роботи.** Метою дослідження є аналіз сучасного стану наукового розуміння ментального здоров'я волонтерів як предмету психологічної науки. **Методологія.** Застосований комплекс загальнонаукових методів та спеціальних наукових підходів: аналізу та загального порівняння (вивчення стану та рівня дослідженості проблеми; розуміння наукових підходів та методологічних принципів, що застосовувались попередньо; виділення раніше невивчених аспектів; виокремлення ключових положень); систематизації та узагальнення (структурування матеріалів дослідження та підбиття підсумків і результатів роботи); синтезу (коректного порівняння і аналізу підібраної джерельної бази та вивчення передового досвіду волонтерського руху); вивчення продуктів діяльності волонтерської діяльності; системний (формування комплексного ґрунтового уявлення про предмет дослідження). **Наукова новизна.** Полягає у систематизації та узагальненні загроз і викликів ментальному здоров'ю волонтерів та обґрунтуванні стратегій їх подолання. **Висновки.** 1) волонтерська діяльність, особливо в кризових умовах, є емоційно та фізично виснажливою, включають постійний контакт із травматичними подіями, велике навантаження, відсутність чітких меж між роботою та особистим життям, а також почуття відповідальності перед тими, кому вони допомагають; 2) основними ризиками для ментального здоров'я волонтерів є емоційне вигорання, хронічний стрес, тривожність та депресія; 3) найбільш ефективними заходами збереження відповідного здоров'я визначені організація регулярних психологічних консультацій і тренінгів з управління стресом; запровадження системи підтримки всередині волонтерських організацій; розробка гнучких графіків роботи, що дозволяють уникнути перевантаження; прищеплення навичок самодопомоги та управління стресом; впровадження політики турботи про психологічне благополуччя учасників волонтерських організацій та забезпечення доступу до професійної допомоги.

Ключові слова: волонтерство, волонтерська діяльність, ментальне здоров'я, психологічне здоров'я волонтерів.

Abstract. Volunteering has become a hallmark of a civilized civil society, a symbol of humanized thinking and consciousness, altruism and selflessness. The twenty-first century has witnessed a real volunteer boom, with humanitarian and charitable manifestations in virtually all spheres of public life, and institutional forms represented by both relatively small initiative groups and powerfully organized

structures. In today's crisis situations (military conflicts, pandemics, and humanitarian disasters), the role of volunteers is of paramount importance, as they provide support and assistance to those who need it most, often working in extreme conditions and under high levels of emotional stress. However, prolonged activity in such an environment can lead to significant physical and psychological exhaustion, which in turn affects the effectiveness of the tasks and the overall well-being of the volunteer. The relevance of the topic is due to the growing number of cases of emotional burnout, stress disorders, depression and anxiety among volunteers, which is confirmed by numerous studies and practical observations. Volunteers often neglect their own needs and mental health, focusing on helping others, which creates additional risks to their psycho-emotional state. **The purpose of the study.** The purpose of the study is to analyze the current state of scientific understanding of the mental health of volunteers as a subject of psychological science. **Methodology.** A set of general scientific methods and special scientific approaches was used: analysis and general comparison (studying the state and level of research of the problem; understanding of scientific approaches and methodological principles that have been used previously; highlighting previously unexplored aspects; highlighting key points); systematization and generalization (structuring the research materials and summarizing the results and results of the work); synthesis (correct comparison and analysis of the selected source base and study of best practices of volunteers). **Scientific novelty.** It consists in systematizing and summarizing the threats and challenges to the mental health of volunteers and substantiating strategies for overcoming them. **Conclusions.** 1) volunteer activities, especially in crisis conditions, are emotionally and physically exhausting, including constant contact with traumatic events, heavy workload, lack of clear boundaries between work and personal life, and a sense of responsibility to those they help; 2) the main risks to the mental health of volunteers are emotional burnout, chronic stress, anxiety and depression; 3) the most effective measures for maintaining appropriate health are the organization of regular psychological counseling and stress management trainings; introduction of a support system within volunteer organizations; development of flexible work schedules to avoid overload; instilling self-help and stress management skills; implementation of a policy of care for the psychological well-being of volunteer organizations' members and ensuring access to professional assistance.

Keywords: volunteering, volunteer activity, mental health, psychological health of volunteers.

Stating the subject of the study. Statement of the problem. In the twenty-first century, volunteering as a social institution and socio-cultural phenomenon has become a firm part of society. According to a sociological study by the Gallup Institute (a US research institution that has been studying public opinion since 1935), conducted in 2008, 65% of the world's population participated in volunteer activities in various fields [Jones, 2023]; as of 2022 more than 100 million people in Europe work as volunteers, three out of ten Europeans consider themselves volunteers, about 80% of citizens consider the institution of volunteering an integral part of European democracy, and investments in volunteering are investments in social cohesion [Say & Malynovska, 2022]; volunteer organizations currently operate in more than 80 countries [Mirko & Ladonko, 2023]. At the international level, the public recognition and importance of volunteering is documented in the 2001 World Declaration of Volunteerism as a promotion of solidarity, humanism, and justice at the national and global levels; focus on promoting a healthy family and nation; the all-round development of people through the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, the development of creative potential; complementing the activities of other sectors to ensure public welfare, and it is also noted that volunteerism is the foundation of civil society, bringing the need for peace, freedom, security and justice into people's lives [UNGA Resolution, 2023]. The most famous and powerful examples of volunteering in the world are the humanitarian activities of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the Peace Corps (USA). In fact, it can be argued that from the mid-nineteenth century, when the French writer and journalist Jean-Henri Dunant formulated and voiced the principles of volunteerism, to the present day, it has covered almost all spheres of public life and reached unprecedented proportions. Its key focus is to eliminate social abuse by supporting the most disadvantaged categories of the population; ensuring a decent existence for citizens who, due to objective circumstances, are unable to take care of themselves; "filling in" the shortcomings of state social policy, primarily through prompt response and providing effective targeted social assistance that meets the needs and demands of a particular person; dissemination of humanistic and altruistic ideas and attitudes in society as a practical embodiment of the idea of social service [Volunteer movement, 2015; Chaika, 2017]. Obviously, these facts and circumstances have led L. M. Salomon and H. K. Anheier, having conducted a comprehensive analysis of the non-profit (third) sector of the economy in 22 countries, to the conclusion that today there is a "global social revolution", the essential core of which is the overactivation of organized private volunteer activity, which

is explained by the growth of self-determination of the individual in the context of the information revolution and the crisis of the state [Salamon & Anheier, 1998].

The specifics of volunteer activities and their wide geographical scope result in different, sometimes difficult and dangerous conditions for their implementation: irregular schedules, the risk of contracting various diseases, frequent significant physical and psycho-emotional stress, staying in areas of armed conflict and direct combat operations, etc. These factors have a direct impact on the mental health of volunteers. Given the high social significance of volunteering in modern conditions, the latter is increasingly in the focus of scientific attention. However, there is still a lack of comprehensive psychological research on this topic in the national science.

The above makes the issue of mental health of volunteers relevant and the article addresses it in the context of the psychological aspect.

Stating the aim of the study. The purpose of the study is to analyze the current state of scientific understanding of the mental health of volunteers as a subject of psychological science. Within the framework of this goal, the following tactical tasks have been set: 1) clarification of the concepts of “volunteering”, “volunteer activity”, “mental health” as a prerequisite for systematizing and generalizing the scientific problem; 2) identification and justification of criteria and indicators for assessing the mental health of volunteers; 3) study and analysis of the results of applied (empirical) research on the mental health of volunteers; 4) generalization of the results of scientific research on the problem.

Literature review. It is traditionally believed that the general principles and theoretical and applied foundations of the institution of volunteering were laid down in the nineteenth century by J.-A. Dunant (France) and T. More (England). They substantiated the “classical” features of volunteering (voluntariness, non-profitability and public benefit) and laid the foundations of the concept of social service.

The international history of volunteering and the peculiarities of the volunteer movement as a phenomenon of modern society have been studied by foreign and Ukrainian scholars M. Bostancioglu, R. Kolosova, M. Furlan, K. Hadzhi-Mitseva, G. Chenin, O. Shchekova, D. Eberly and others. Thanks to them, the genesis of the institute of volunteering has been studied quite thoroughly, and the volunteer movement itself has been analyzed through the prism of social, cultural and economic approaches.

The study of volunteering as a socio-cultural phenomenon was carried out in the works of I. Bekeshkina, M. Deichakivskyi, N. Ivchenko, F. Stupak, O. Shatokhina, O. Yaremenko and a number of others; socio-cultural and socio-economic aspects of volunteering were studied by O. Bezpalko, I. Gryga, N. Zaveriko, I. Zvereva, V. Kratinova, G. Laktionova, T. Lyakh, V. Nazaruk, I. Pinchuk, Y. Polishchuk, M. Tymenko, S. Tolstoukhova, as well as G. Cascelli, R. Crowe, R. Lynch, S. McCarley, M. Nuland.

The institute of volunteering has been studied as a kind of charity and a way of self-determination of the individual by A. Camus, R. May, E. Mounier, G. Allport, C. Rogers, J.-P. Sartre, V. Frankl, E. Fromm, I. Yalom, as well as E. Balashov, N. Dudko, M. Zakharchuk, O. Kyrychuk, M. Kornev, O. Kryvokon, O. Kulichenko, S. Maksymenko, N. Pyontkovska, M. Tropina, V. Tatarenko and others.

Volunteerism as a form of social inclusion and social activity has been studied by M. Tropina, K. Khomenko, I. Karpova, I. Lytvynenko, E. Siryi and O. Sira.

The modern Ukrainian experience of volunteering has been studied by O. Glavnyk, O. Karpenko, H. Krapivina, T. Lyakh, I. Pinchuk and some other domestic scholars.

The nature and essence of mental health from a multidisciplinary perspective have been studied by R. Vynnychuk, T. Kosteva, G. Nikiforov, O. Tkachyshyn, F. Filatova and others.

Mental health from a medical point of view was studied by I. Fedorenko, I. Krakowska, V. Kovalev, N. Chaika and a number of others, who propose to consider it from the standpoint of diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders, the impact of stress on the emergence of psychosomatic diseases; from a socio-psychological point of view - by O. Antonenko, I. Golovin, M. Kramarenko and others, supplementing the scientific and theoretical basis of research with applied methods of diagnosis and recovery.

As a phenomenon of the human psyche, mental health is substantiated in the works of foreign researchers A. Ellis, A. Maslow, G. Allport, F. Perls and Ukrainian scientists I. Dubrovina, N. Pavlyk, E. Pomytkin, A. Shevchenko and some others.

Despite the fact that the phenomena of volunteering and mental health as separate subjects of scientific knowledge have been studied in modern science quite thoroughly and diversely, there is still a significant lack of separate theoretical and psychological works on the mental health of volunteers in the modern Ukrainian scientific discourse.

Research methodology. The research of the subject matter of this article was carried out using a set of general scientific methods and special scientific approaches: analysis and general comparison (to

study the state and level of research of the problem; to understand the scientific approaches and methodological principles used previously; to highlight previously unexplored aspects, as well as to identify key provisions); systematization and generalization (for structuring research materials and summarizing the results and findings); synthesis (for correct comparison and analysis of the selected source base and study of best practices in volunteerism); study of volunteerism products and systemic (for forming a comprehensive and thorough understanding of the subject of research).

Summary of the main material. For a deeper and more systematic understanding of the scientific problem raised, it is necessary to analyze and clarify the essence of its basic categories - “volunteer” and “mental health”.

The concept of “volunteer” (from the French *volontaire* - “voluntary, volunteer”, derived from the Latin *voluntarius* - “voluntary”, “acting of one's own free will”, derived from *voluntas* - “will”, which is derived from the verb *volo* - “want”) in the broadest socially widespread sense means an individual who voluntarily of his/her own free will, desire and beliefs on a voluntary, gratuitous basis devotes his/her time and efforts to helping people and/or animals in difficult circumstances and in need of support [Horsham et al., 2024; Nichol et al., 2024].

An in-depth study of the genesis of this concept [Lough, 2015; Boretska et al., 2024; Drapushko & Iliuk, 2023] allows us to identify a number of historical stages in its evolution from its inception to modern understanding:

1) *the formation of the concept in the ancient period (II century BC - III century AD):* the formation in ancient Rome of the idea of a volunteer as a person who acts of his or her own free will, without coercion (participation in religious rites, military service, participation in public works, etc.);

2) *the concept gained a religious character in the Middle Ages (VI - XIV centuries):* it was used to refer to people who devoted their lives to charitable activities or service to the church (monks or lay people who cared for the sick, helped the poor or were engaged in missionary work);

3) *identification of the concept with voluntary participation in social and military initiatives in the eighteenth century:* most often at that time in Europe and the New World, military volunteers were considered and called volunteers (for example, during the Napoleonic Wars and the War of Independence in North America);

4) *the evolution of the concept as a form of charity in the nineteenth century and its social institutionalization:* the formation of a stable substantive connection between volunteering and charity and social movements (public initiative associations to solve acute social problems, help the poor, fight for women's rights, etc.), which resulted in the emergence in 1863 of the world's first volunteer organization - the Red Cross, which attracted volunteers to help victims of wars and disasters;

5) *global scaling of the volunteer movement in the twentieth century:* qualitative growth of the volunteer initiative during the two world wars, pandemics and natural disasters of the second half of the twentieth century, the recognition of the institution of volunteering at the official international level contributed to the flourishing of this socio-cultural phenomenon and its legalization and legitimization in the civilized world; since the 1970s, the term “volunteering” has been actively used in international circulation, and the International Volunteer Association began to hold World Volunteer Conferences every two years;

6) *volunteering as a manifestation of humanitarian will and exemplary civic initiative in the twenty-first century:* volunteering covers almost all spheres of public life.

Thus, the genesis of the concept of “volunteer” covers the history of mankind lasting more than 2,000 years and its meaningful transformation from the idea of a person acting on his or her own free will to the understanding of a person characterized by selflessness, high social responsibility and social initiative. Nowadays, volunteering is a symbol of humanity, solidarity and readiness for selfless assistance. Derived from the concepts of “volunteer” and “volunteering” are the definitions of “volunteer activity” (voluntary, socially oriented, non-profit activity carried out by individuals - volunteers by providing various types of volunteer assistance), “volunteer movement” (a form of civic activity that is an organized social movement to provide selfless assistance to those in need) and “volunteer initiative” (a public initiative to provide volunteer assistance in solving a specific socially significant and acute problem), which are actively used by both public opinion and modern scientific thesaurus.

A general interpretation of the social institution of volunteering at the international level is provided by the UN - a contribution to the well-being of neighbors and society as a whole, made outside of one's own career on the basis of selflessness and gratuitousness [Anheier & Salamon, 2001]. It is in this interpretation that we will continue to understand this concept here and in the future.

According to the UN Volunteers Program (the UN Volunteering Unit), the number of volunteers worldwide as of 2023 was 970 million, which is equivalent to more than 125 million full-time employees, and the value of volunteer work is equal to USD 1.348 trillion. The United Nations Volunteers, 2023) [The United Nations Volunteers, 2023]. With such impressive figures, volunteering is, without exaggeration, becoming the locomotive of the non-profit (third) sector of the global economy, which further actualizes the scientific appeal to the institution of volunteering in general and to the mental health of volunteers in particular as a source of additional economic value.

An analysis of the latest scientific works of foreign and domestic scholars on the problem of mental health [Kalashnykova, Rudenko & Rudenko, 2024; Mental health, 2005; Dubych, 2024] allows us to identify, in our opinion, a number of key features and characteristics of this phenomenon:

- mental health is a multidimensional (quintessentially the results of psycho-emotional, psychophysiological, social, economic and other influences on a person) and complex (studied within the framework of subject areas and at the intersection of medicine, psychology, sociology and social work, economics and other branches of scientific knowledge) phenomenon that reflects the mental state of an individual (mental consciousness, from Latin *mens* or *mentis* - any spiritual process or phenomenon);

- mental health is considered as a phenomenon, as it has no analogues and/or similar phenomena in the objective world;

- in the modern scientific discourse, there is a steady tendency to identify mental health with mental health, the main components of which are considered to be the absence of mental disorders, normality; a person's stay in different states of mental well-being; individual autonomy; the ability to successfully influence the social and natural environment, adequately perceive reality, underlying trends in the development, growth and integrity of the individual;

- mental health is based on the mentality of the individual (a stable and characteristic way of thinking, emotional response and perception of the world around him or her; a set of psychological characteristics that determine how a person perceives the world around him or her, how he or she interacts with others, how he or she treats challenges and problems, and how he or she responds to stressful situations);

- most often, the criteria of mental health include positive well-being of a person, which is expressed by a state of joy and self-satisfaction in everyday life and allows to effectively cope with stress and other critical situations; flexibility and adaptability of a person to changing conditions of the present and the ability to solve life problems and establish favorable interpersonal relationships with others; emotional stability, which allows for effective management of the emotional and volitional sphere of the individual; self-determination of the subject of life, in which the latter has a conscious focus on his or her own values and beliefs; ability to communicate effectively with others, resulting in favorable relationships; ability to self-realization and self-development of one's own identity;

- unlike other characteristics of the mental and psycho-emotional state of a person, mental health is assessed subjectively, as it reflects, first of all, the degree of integration of a person into society and the benefits or harm that a person can bring to society.

In today's world, volunteering plays an important role in providing support and assistance to people in difficult life circumstances. At the same time, the volunteers themselves work in crisis conditions, often subjected to significant physical and psychological stress, which can adversely affect their mental health. Prolonged contact with traumatic conditions, psycho-emotional tension, a high level of personal responsibility and a lack of resources for recovery pose serious challenges to their psycho-emotional well-being. Despite the high social significance of the volunteer movement, the problem of the mental health of volunteers is often ignored both at the level of society and the volunteer organizations themselves. Many volunteers neglect their own needs, which can lead to emotional burnout, depression and loss of motivation. Lack of systematic support and preventive measures can lead to a decrease in the effectiveness of volunteering and, in extreme cases, a complete loss of interest in relevant activities.

As evidenced by the study of specialized sources [McDermott & O'Neill, 2021; Savychenko et al., 2024; Melnichenko, 2023; Ganoe, Roslida & Sihotang, 2023], the main risks provoking mental health problems of volunteers should be reasonably considered:

- 1) *emotional burnout* (occurs due to prolonged work in conditions of high stress without proper rest), the symptoms of which are fatigue and apathy, reduced performance, emotional detachment and loss of motivation and enthusiasm for work;

2) *chronic stress* (provoked by activity in conditions of uncertainty, constant pressure and the need for quick decision-making), manifested in forms of sleep disorder, increased anxiety, depression and even psychosomatic diseases;

3) *feelings of guilt and helplessness* (feeling insufficiently done or that they cannot help everyone who needs it), psychological symptoms of which are self-blame, loss of self-confidence, a constant feeling of emotional burden, which over time can cause deep experiences and adversely affect the mental health of the volunteer);

4) *social isolation* (intense involvement in volunteer activities often leads to a decrease in social contacts outside of work), which can be expressed in distance from family and friends, lack of opportunity to share their emotions, difficulties in maintaining a balance between personal life and work, and can also increase feelings of loneliness and emotional exhaustion);

5) *lack of professional support*, including lack of access to qualified psychologists, lack of support programs and training in stress resistance skills and insufficient understanding of the importance of self-help and preventive measures);

6) *physical exhaustion* (high physical activity, lack of sleep, malnutrition and lack of regular rest negatively affect the health of volunteers, which in turn increases emotional exhaustion and reduces stress resistance);

7) *information glut* (a constant stream of negative information and the need to process a large amount of data creates additional cognitive pressure), which can lead to rapid fatigue, decreased concentration and increased anxiety.

All of the above risks require a comprehensive approach to resolution, including the introduction of psychological support programs, preventive measures and self-help tools (Table 1).

Table 1

Risks and threats to the mental health of volunteers and strategies to overcome them

Risks	Threats	Coping strategies
Emotional burnout	Excessive load, lack of rest	Regular rest, time management
Stress and anxiety	Uncertainty, lack of resources	Relaxation practices, meditation, sports
Social isolation	Lack of support, insufficient communication	Organization of meetings, community support
Physical fatigue	Intensive work, high physical activity	Proper nutrition, balance of work and rest
Motivational burnout	No visible results	Setting achievable goals, recognition of contribution
Financial pressure	Volunteering without pay, expenses	Search for grants, financial literacy
Psychological discomfort	Difficult conditions, negative news	Psychological support, consultations
Balance of life and work	Too much time for volunteering	Clear planning, definition of boundaries
Feeling powerless	Lack of global influence	Small steps, evaluation of local achievements
Self-esteem and self-awareness	Comparison with others, doubts	Develop self-awareness, support mentors

Source: compiled by the author on the basis of [12-18; 20]

Conclusions. The study of mental health of volunteers is an urgent scientific problem both to increase the effectiveness of volunteer activities and to ensure the sustainability of the volunteer movement as a whole. The integration of psychological support into the volunteering system will contribute to the creation of a healthy environment in which volunteers can help others for a long time without compromising their own well-being. The study identified the main challenges and risks to the mental health of volunteers, and suggested ways to preserve and strengthen their psycho-emotional well-being.

Thus, based on the results of studying the raised scientific problem, the following conclusions can be formulated.

1. Determining the impact of volunteering on mental health: Volunteering, especially in crisis settings, is emotionally and physically exhausting, and key factors that negatively affect the mental health of volunteers include constant contact with traumatic events, heavy workload, lack of clear boundaries between work and personal life, and a sense of responsibility to those they help.

2. The main risks to mental health exist in forms of emotional burnout, chronic stress, anxiety and depression, and the lack of proper psychological support can lead to reduced motivation, increased fatigue and a desire to stop volunteering.

3. Preventing burnout and maintaining the mental health of volunteers are critical to ensuring their effectiveness, and therefore the most effective measures are the organization of regular psychological consultations and training on stress management; introduction of a support system within volunteer organizations (supervisors, mutual assistance groups, etc.); development of flexible work schedules to avoid overloading, recommendations for volunteer support; instilling self-help and stress management skills (e.g. relaxation techniques, mindfulness and time management); volunteer organizations should implement a policy of caring for the psychological well-being of their participants, providing access to professional assistance and creating a friendly working environment.

The practical significance of the study. The results obtained can be used by volunteer organizations, community initiatives and psychologists to develop programs to support the mental health of volunteers. Implementation of integrated approaches will reduce stress, increase work efficiency and ensure long-term involvement of volunteers in socially significant projects.

Prospects for further research. Further study and improvement of the mental health criteria of volunteers will allow a deeper understanding of potential risks and threats, and therefore develop more effective and efficient mechanisms for preventing and overcoming them. In addition, it is quite promising to continue the study of the mental health of volunteers precisely in the psychological plane, since there is a wide arsenal of adaptive tools for the prevention, correction and therapy of mental disorders of subjects of the volunteer movement.

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