



Physical-culture and sports activity as an element of the socio-psychological re-adaptation of combat veterans

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Abstract

Objective of the study to identify the types of physical culture and sports activity in the socio-psychological readaptation of combat veterans.

Methods and structure of the study. The scientific work on the basis of the Plekhanov Russian University of Economics included the following stages: analysis of the scientific literature; questionnaire survey (n=279); interviewing of psychologists working with this target group (n=10).

Results and conclusions. The empirical data showed the existence of psychological problems of the ex-combatants (through body language) and the unwillingness of many to turn to specialists for psychological help from the position of "I am strong, I will cope on my own," as well as an active desire to take part in physical activity. Combat veterans (CV) perceive physical exercise and sports as a "normal" activity, but avoid formal psychotherapeutic programmes. The interpretation of the results points to the possibility of involving CV in the restoration of mental health through physical activity with the inclusion of special exercises for psychoregulation and the working-through of negative emotions by means of the techniques of body-oriented psychotherapy.

For the successful re-adaptation and creative resocialisation of veterans, an ecosystem approach is necessary in the interdisciplinary interaction of specialists (physical-culture and sports coaches, psychologists, doctors), the raising of their qualifications, and supervision.

Keywords: veterans, physical culture, sports, mental health, socio-psychology, analysis.

Introduction. Modern military conflicts under the conditions of extreme combat actions leave consequences both for the psychological state and for the physical state of combatants, which are prolonged upon the return from war and the transition to peaceful conditions of life [1, 3].

At present, various mechanisms of the re-adaptation and resocialisation of combat veterans (CV) into the peaceful community are being developed, from clinical-psychological help to ex-combatants to the formation of adequate social expectations in the Russian community in relation to this target group. Specialists point to the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach (the synthesis of medicine, psychology, and physical culture) to the questions of the socio-psychological re-adaptation of CV, and to the search for new approaches, including types of activity ensuring

their successful and creative resocialisation [2, 6].

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Methods and structure of the study. The study on the basis of the Plekhanov Russian University of Economics included the following stages: analysis of the scientific-methodological literature; questionnaire survey of combat veterans (n=279); interviewing of psychologists working with this target group (n=10); formulation of conclusions.

Results of the study and discussion. Socio-psychological re-adaptation acts as a process of restoring the ex-combatant's ability to successfully adapt in society through the return of the veteran's psyche to a state of "normal adaptedness" to the conditions of peacetime [3].



Under the conditions of military actions, a restructuring of the nervous system, the psyche, and behaviour occurs in combatants; combat reflexes are formed (special muscle groups are trained) according to the “fight, flight, freeze” scheme; and under the conditions of combat stress factors prolonged in time and intensity, a breakdown of the adaptation mechanisms may occur, including at the psychological level (anxiety, excitability, aggression) [1, 2].

At the biopsychic level, there are two types of reaction to combat stress: the inhibitory type is characterised by general muscular tension (stiffness of posture and movements) and the slowed course of mental processes; the excitable type is manifested in extraversion, the hypertrophy of motor manifestations, and the rapid change of decisions taken [6].

The interdisciplinary approach to the system of the psychoregulation of veterans through the synthesis of scientific knowledge in medicine, psychology, and physical culture actualises the use of physical exercises on the basis of body-oriented psychotherapy (BOP) for the working-through of the suppressed emotional states experienced in combat life [5]. BOP, based on the two-way connection between the brain and the body (through the body one can influence the brain and emotions), includes a group of psychotherapeutic methods, is oriented towards the study of the body (psychological needs and problems are manifested in the body) and the teaching of ways of resolving psychological problems through special exercises. Among the main methods of BOP, effective both in the recovery after psychological traumas and for personal growth, is distinguished the method of W. Reich, including techniques (exercises) for the working-through of mental defences (psychological clamps) that form muscular clamps (muscular armour) [7].

For veterans, the development of programmes is necessary with the inclusion of special physical exercises for the correction of the mental state after combat psychotraumas, the strengthening of health, and the preservation of the skills of military physical training: modern fitness technologies and elements of traditional Eastern practices (yoga, wushu, capoeira, etc.) [5].

In the conducted interviewing, 87% of the psychologists emphasised that, when working with veterans, they regularly encounter the dominance of the bodily manifestations of trauma over verbalised experiences: “ex-combatants cannot say what is happening to them, but their body (stiffness in the shoulders, shal-

low breathing, flinching at loud sounds) speaks the language of trauma, which we are learning to listen to”.

The specialists indicated the positive dynamics of the socio-psychological re-adaptation of CV who regularly engage in physical activity. Veterans perceive physical exercise and sports as a “normal” activity, but avoid formal psychotherapeutic programmes. At the same time, one and the same sport may have an opposite effect in veterans depending on the character of the trauma: for one group, boxing helped to “release aggression in a safe way,” while in another it provoked anger and aggression after training. The choice of the type of activity is determined not by physical capabilities, but by the character of the traumatic experience (veterans with a trauma connected with enclosed spaces avoid training in closed halls).

According to the results of the questionnaire survey of combat veterans (116 people aged 35+, 82 respondents – 45+, 28 – 55+, 46 – 25+, 7 – under 25), it was recorded that 191 (69%) of the veterans did not turn for psychological help for various reasons (Figure 1). Among the other reasons for the ex-combatants’ refusal, distrust and financial problems were indicated, which confirms the statements of the psychologists about the unwillingness of CV to participate in psychotherapeutic programmes.

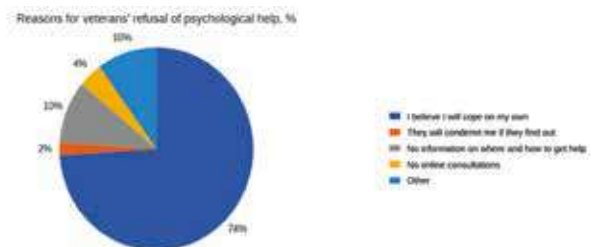


Figure. 1. Reasons for combat veterans’ refusal of psychological help

In identifying the priorities in physical-culture and sports pursuits, a high activity of the veterans in the choice of activities was noted (Figure 2).

Among the other motor activity, they indicated sports (alpine skiing; equestrian; shooting; mountain, hiking, and auto tourism) and types of physical activity (rock climbing, hunting, fishing), on the one hand – activity close to them in military life, and on the other – types of activity aimed at the reunification of the emotional state with nature.

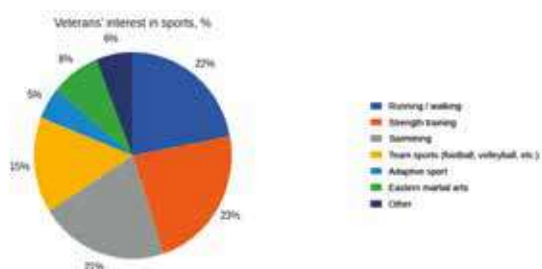


Figure 2. Priority types of physical activity for combat veterans

The results of the surveys showed the existence of psychological problems of the ex-combatants (through body language) and the unwillingness to turn to specialists for psychological help from the position of “I am strong, I will cope on my own,” as well as an active desire to take part in types of sports activity, offering individual requests in physical-culture and leisure activity.

These results point to the possibility of involving veterans in the restoration of mental health through physical activity with the necessary inclusion of special physical exercises for psychoregulation by the method of W. Reich (elements of breathing gymnastics, fitness, Eastern practices), and the possibility of working through negative emotions by means of meditative techniques and techniques of working with the “muscular armour.”

However, while noting the interdisciplinary interaction of specialists as an important component of the socio-psychological re-adaptation of CV, 73% of the psychologists pointed to the absence of systemic cooperation between specialists: “I recommend that the veteran take up swimming, but I do not know how the coach works with his fear of water, and the coach does not inform me that during training the client experiences panic attacks.”

We support the scientific position of I.V. Manzheley on the necessity of consolidating the efforts of specialists in interdisciplinary and interdepartmental interaction relying on the ecosystem approach for the effective socio-psychological re-adaptation and creative resocialisation of combat veterans [4].

Conclusions. Thus, for the development and implementation of physical-culture and sports programmes using the techniques of body-oriented psychotherapy, new standards of the training of specialists working with veterans are necessary.

Effective in this context is also the creation of interdisciplinary teams (psychologist + coach + doctor) that not only accompany the veteran at all stages of re-ad-

aptation, but also develop standardised programmes of physical activity taking into account the type of the trainees’ reaction to combat stress, physical limitations, and the stage of re-adaptation, and are also interested in joint additional education in this sphere.

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