

BARNAFRID

NATIONAL COMPETENCE CENTRE CONCERNING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

REPORT

Survey of skills development and capacity building needs for professionals working with war-affected children in Ukraine



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Introduction

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine has exposed millions of Ukrainian children and youth to violence and other types of vulnerability, including various forms of war-related trauma (such as bombardments), separation from caregivers, witnessing death and injury, and forced displacement of families. Reports indicate a high prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Karatzias et al., 2023)¹ as well as anxiety and depression (Osokina, 2023)² among children and young people. Concurrently, there are known gaps in skills and capacity regarding identification, care, and support for those who have experienced violence (Goto et al., 2023)³. For instance, no evidence-based trauma interventions have been systematically implemented in Ukraine, partly due to lack of knowledge (Hook et al., 2021)⁴.

This report presents the results of a survey conducted by Barnafriid among Ukrainian professionals who work with children. The purpose of the report is to identify the need for competence development and capacity building in relation to children affected by war.

Specific objectives of the survey:

- To analyze in detail the gaps in knowledge and skills of professionals working with children who have experienced psychological trauma as a result of the war, as well as in the areas of prevention and response to incidents of violence against children.
- To determine the needs for basic and advanced training in providing psychological support to children in crisis situations, treating trauma, and preventing violence.
- To analyze available resources in Ukraine (organizations, networks of professionals) for developing relevant capacity and identify gaps.
- To identify the need for digital and scalable solutions for efficient and sustainable implementation of skills development activities.
- To assess the possibilities for sustainable implementation of effective methods in this field.
- To evaluate topics and formats of information materials on violence prevention and psychological support for children necessary for distribution to the target group.

The results of this survey can be utilized for planning support for Ukrainian professionals to enhance their knowledge and competence in working with children affected by war.

¹ Karatzias T, Shevlin M, Ben-Ezra M, McElroy E, Redican E, Vang ML, Cloitre M, Ho GWK, Lorberg B, Martzenkovskiy D, Hyland P. War exposure, posttraumatic stress disorder, and complex posttraumatic stress disorder among parents living in Ukraine during the Russian war. *Acta Psychiatrica Scand.* 2023 Mar;147(3):276-285. doi: 10.1111/acps.13529. Epub 2023 Jan 10. PMID: 36625445.

² Osokina O, Silwal S, Bohdanova T, Hodes M, Sourander A, Skokauskas N. Impact of the Russian Invasion on Mental Health of Adolescents in Ukraine. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry.* 2023 Mar;62(3):335-343. doi: 10.1016/j.jaac.2022.07.845. Epub 2022 Oct 29. PMID: 36441074

³ Goto, R., Pinchuk, I., Kolodezhny, O., Pimenova, N., & Skokauskas, N. (2023). Mental health services in Ukraine during the early phases of the 2022 Russian invasion. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 222(2), 82–87. 10.1192/bjp.2022.170

⁴ Hook, K., Kozishkurt, J., Kovalchuk, O., Goncharenko, E., Kodovbetskyi, V., Opanasenko, M., Kopytko, A., Girnyk, A., Kliuzko, K., Drainoni, M., & Bogdanov, S. (2021). Evaluating context and interest in training in evidence-based mental health care: A qualitative investigation among healthcare providers in Kyiv, Ukraine. *BMC Research Notes*, 14(1), 1–8. 10.1186/s13104-021-05786-3

How was the survey conducted?

Target group and recruitment

The survey was conducted as an anonymous digital questionnaire distributed among professionals and organizations working with children affected by the war in Ukraine. The survey link was disseminated through specialized social media groups, professional email networks, and with support from civil organizations and government agencies dealing with children and family issues.

Survey structure

The survey comprised 5 closed-ended and 9 open-ended questions. For cross-validation purposes, some key questions were rephrased and repeated.

Analysis of survey responses

The survey responses were analyzed using the following steps:

1. All responses were initially analyzed to identify main categories (n=3-7).
2. Each specific question was then assigned to the most relevant categories.
3. Responses within each separate category were summarized and analyzed. The frequency of specific topics mentioned within categories was examined to identify prioritized issues and common opinions among respondents.

A comparison of responses to questions with similar content was conducted to verify validity.

For clarity, the results were graphically represented in charts reflecting the frequency of mentions for particular topics among the total number of responses.

The sum of percentages in responses often exceeds 100% because individual responses could be assigned to multiple categories for analysis.

Results

Description of the respondents

Survey coverage area in Ukraine

As illustrated in Figure 1, the survey achieved wide distribution across Ukraine. Respondents include individuals from major cities such as Kyiv, Kharkiv, Dnipro, and Lviv, as well as from smaller hromadas (municipalities) and communities in various regions. The survey encompasses areas close to the front line in eastern Ukraine (e.g., Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts) and those relatively less affected by the conflict in western Ukraine (e.g., Ivano-Frankivsk and Lutsk). Central, northern, and southern parts of the country are also represented, including cities such as Poltava, Chernihiv, and Mykolaiv.

This broad geographic representation provides a comprehensive understanding of the diverse conditions professionals face across different regions of Ukraine.

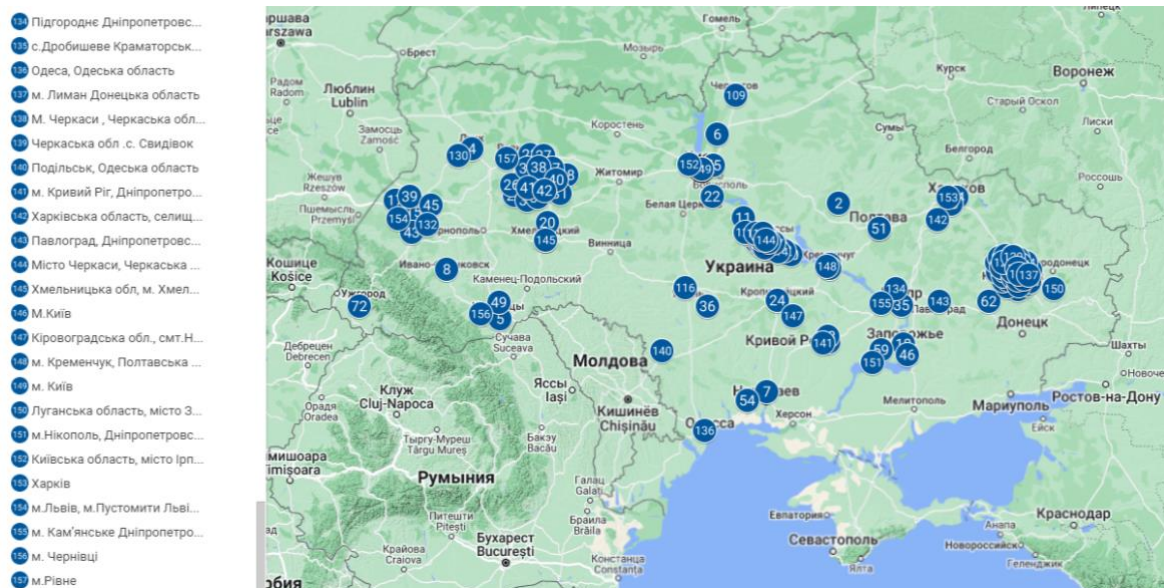


Figure 1. A geographical distribution of respondents across Ukraine.

Position of the respondents

Among the professionals who completed the questionnaires, most were practical psychologists (37%), including professionals with a narrow specialization in psychology (Figure 2). It should be noted that there are two distinct types of psychologists in Ukraine: practical psychologists, who are mainly involved in educational guidance and support the individual's psychological development, and clinical psychologists, who diagnose and treat mental conditions and disorders.

The second largest category was teaching staff (23%), which includes school teachers. Social teachers made up 14% of the respondents. Other categories included consultants who support young people (8%) and deputy directors who manage activities in social work, education, and organizations (5%). The category "Other" (13%) included representatives of public and organizations that could not be assigned to any of the other categories.

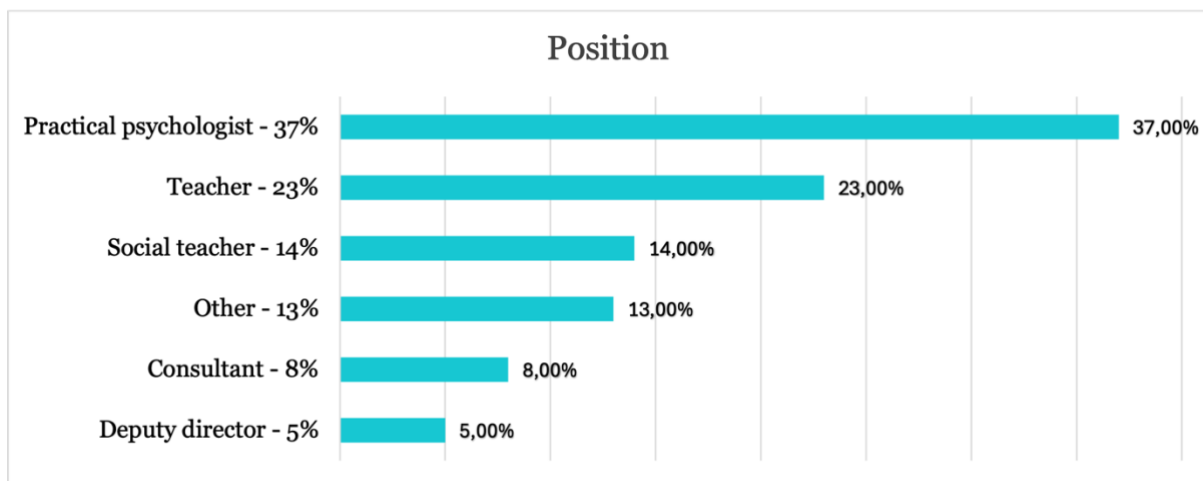


Figure 2. Distribution analysis of respondents by position

Direction of the respondents' efforts for children, young people or professionals

The vast majority of respondents (94%) reported that they work directly with children and young people (Figure 3). A significant proportion (37%) also work with relevant professionals (teachers, psychologists, social workers).

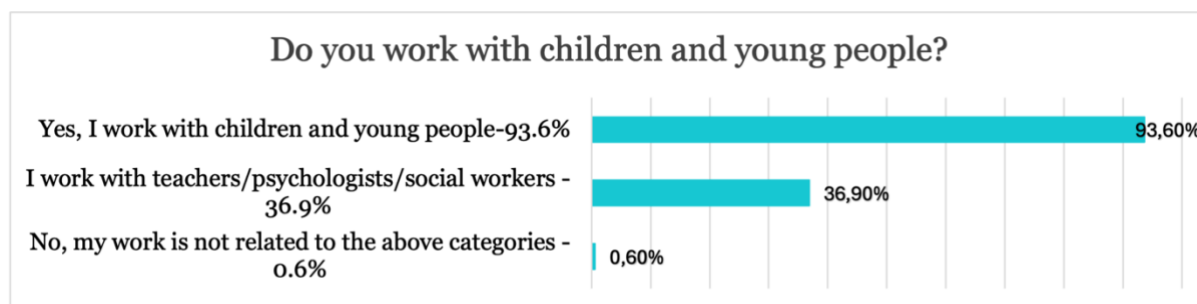


Figure 3. Proportion of Respondents Working with Children and Youth as well as with Professionals

Assessment of the current situation of children and young people

Respondents' perception of the psychosocial condition of children and youth in Ukraine during the ongoing war

The respondents' perception of the psychosocial health of children during the current war conditions was investigated with the question "How do you evaluate the psychosocial situation of children and young people in Ukraine during the ongoing war?" (Figure 4). The results show significant variation in perceptions, with a majority (56.1%) rating the situation as "Acceptable", followed by 35.0% who consider it "Poor", 7.0% describing it as "Good", and a very small proportion (1.9%) who consider it "Very Bad". None of the respondents rated the situation as "Excellent".

These results reflect a subjective assessment of the psychosocial situation of children and young people in conflict-affected areas. The answers are thus influenced by individual observations and experiences, as well as by the immediate context where the respondents work or live. The subjective nature of these perceptions underscores the complex reality of living in conflict, where day-to-day changes, such as a temporary lull in bombardments, can affect a person's assessment of the situation. For some, the perception that the situation is "Acceptable" or even "Good" may reflect an adaptation to the prevailing conditions, or a comparison with even more difficult times when bombing was more intense.

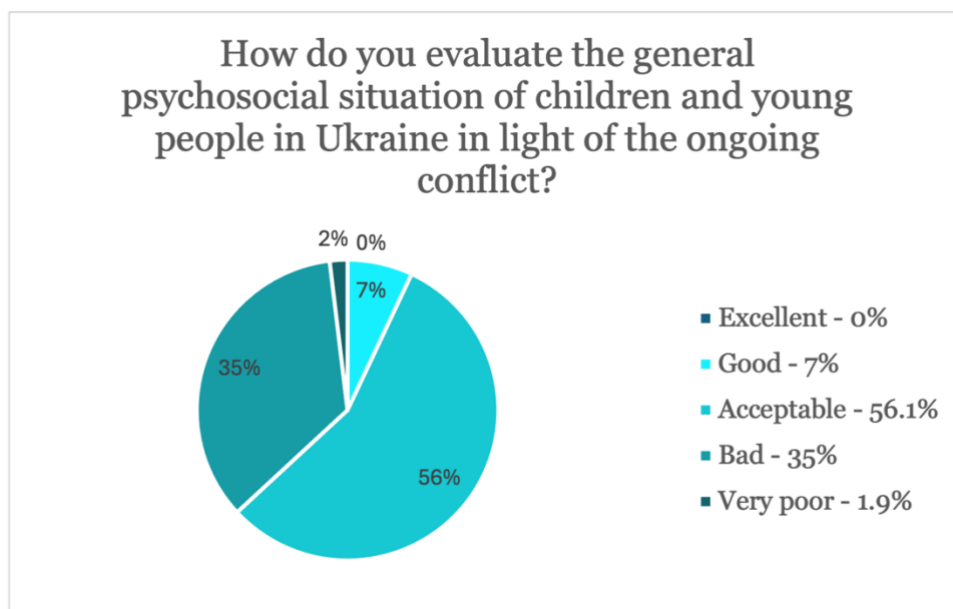


Figure 4. The respondents' perception of the children's psychosocial situation

Respondents' identification of central needs of children and young people during wartime

The respondents' perception of the need for support for children is unanimous. Psychological support, safety and communication are still the most mentioned needs (figure 5). The need for psychological support for children is estimated at 58.6% and is rated even higher than the need for safety which is in second place with 52.9%

Here are some examples of responses from the respondents:

- "The need for psychological support, many stressful situations are experienced by children"
- "The need for psychological support from adults, based on family, school and social relationships"
- "SAFETY. And the need to "feel at home", this is especially true for children who are internally displaced"
- "Children are limited in communication with their peers for a long time, this is one of the many needs in war conditions"
- "The need for quality education, security, access to the Internet"
- "The feeling of the family's financial security, support from relatives and friends"
- "Bad living and study conditions"
- "Safe learning environment. Essential needs - support, communication and face-to-face learning."

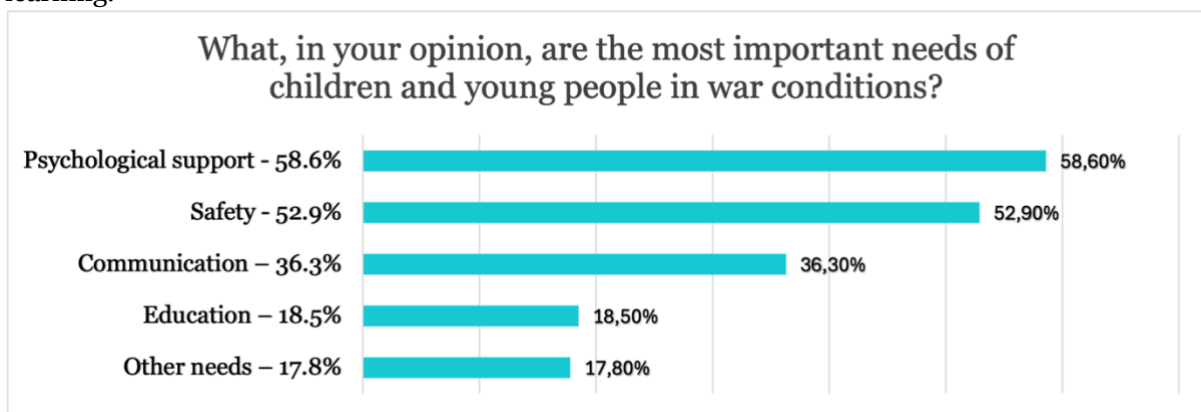


Figure 5. Priority needs for support to children and youth

The respondents' experiences of the needs brought by the war

The most common problems cited by respondents are the increase in the level of anxiety, fear and panic attacks in children (35%), as well as the deterioration of their mental health as a result of the war (Figure 6). In addition to emotional problems, difficulties with adaptation and socialization are often noticed due to a change of residence, forced displacement and separation from family and friends. The expression of aggression and deviant behavior in children in war conditions is also quite common. Socialization problems mean that the children lack contact with peers and other children via spontaneous play, sports, leisure activities, etc.

In the open-ended answers, among other things, increased mental illness, violent thoughts and limited social interaction emerged:

- "Children who often asked for help have elements of social phobia, anxiety, panic attacks and misunderstanding what is happening to them. I remember a case when a client asked with shame that a military father spends a lot of money on me, but the basis of this question was a difficult desire to separate, which is important for a transitional age, and fear of father, the consequences of war, etc."
- "Increased anxiety, panic attacks occur"
- "Fear of loud noises, inability to control oneself (to get out of a state of panic)"
- "Deterioration of mental health in a certain percentage of young people"
- "PTSD, depression, poor emotional state"
- "Adjustment difficulties in a state of instability and uncertainty"
- "Children have become more aggressive"
- "Manifest ideas about violent conflict resolution"
- "Limited access to socialization/social interaction?"

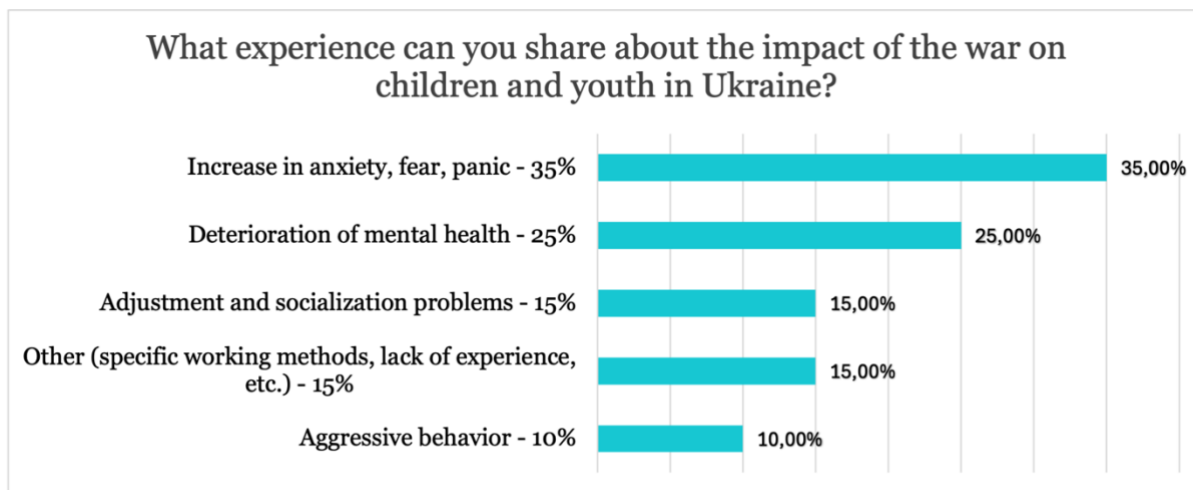


Figure 6. The impact of war on the psyche of children and young people

Proposals for measures to improve the situation with children and young people

Perceptions of measures and initiatives needed in the area

The respondents believe that psychological support for children and young people are the most important areas, 35% of the respondents think that support is needed in the form of training, consultations and participation in group activities, 20% call for material help for families, 15% emphasize the importance of security such as shelter and safe evacuation, 10% think that opportunities for recreation and development are important factors for the children's well-being (figure 7).

In the open-ended question answers, the following examples emerged:

- "Creation of suitable conditions for rest and development"
- "Art groups for the release of emotions"
- "Psychological courses, communication groups."
- "Working with children in crisis situations"
- "Reduce the load on education due to canceled homework."
- "Psychological support groups for parents and their children, teaching healing skills",
- "Trainings, consultations for parents and teachers."
- "Psychological counseling and correction"
- "Classes in penitentiary groups"
- "Create support groups"
- "Seminar for psychologists on practical psychological support and help for children and their parents"
- "Psychological counseling, material support for temporarily displaced children, construction of comfortable and safe shelters"

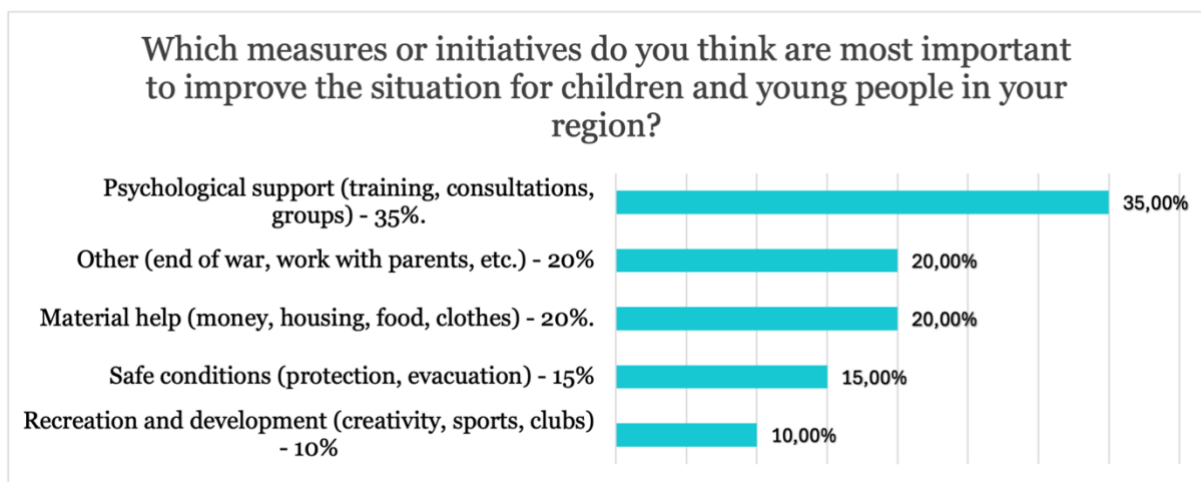


Figure 7. Priority measures to improve the situation of children and young people in their region

The respondents' suggestions for effective interventions to strengthen the psychosocial well-being of children and young people

Respondents answered questions about efforts to improve children's psychosocial well-being (Figure 8). They provided suggestions on how to enhance children's psychosocial situation by answering the questions: "How can children's psychosocial situation be improved?" and "Which measures do you consider most effective?"

The respondents highlighted the importance of psychological support, with 35% suggesting that help should be offered in various forms, including individual and group consultations, as well as training. Twenty percent of respondents emphasized the importance of safety for children as a foundation for their development and communication. Fifteen percent suggested that psychological relief could be offered through art, sports, and games. Ten percent of respondents highlighted the need for training for parents and teachers.

In response to open-ended questions, answers described both direct interventions for children and the needs of professionals:

- "Psychological support: Training, seminars"
- "Trainings, seminars"
- "Education of professionals who work with children and families"
- "Psychological training of teachers and children"

Respondents emphasized the importance of safety and security for children in their responses such as:

- "Safe living conditions to communicate with peers"
- "Measures to relieve stress: Art therapy, art summer camp"
- "Individual work with young people, correctional groups"
- "Organization of recreation for children and young people in the form of summer/winter camps".

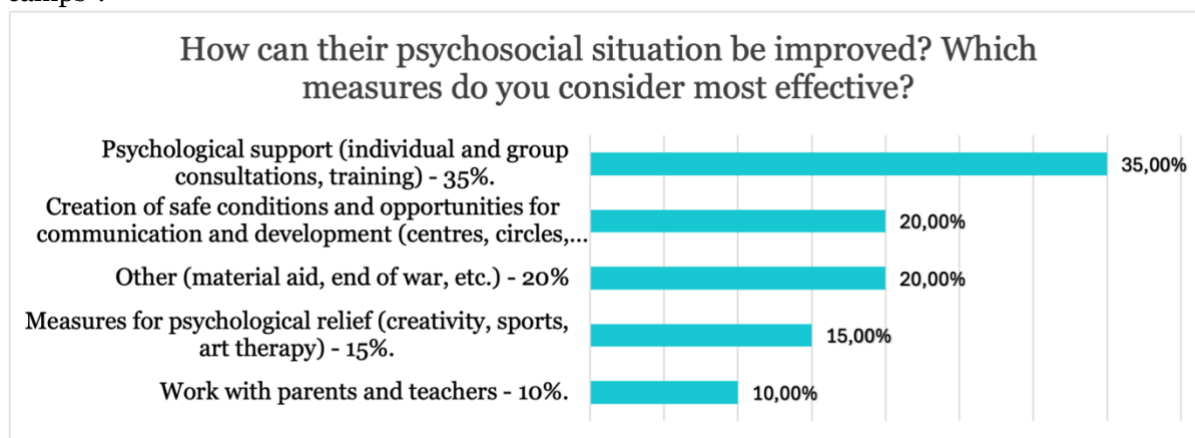


Figure 8. Suggestions for efforts to improve children's psychosocial situation.

Priority educational subjects aimed at children according to the recommendations of professionals

The most prioritized subjects for training are psychological support and care (41%), and work with trauma and PTSD (24%) (Figure 9). 19% of respondents would like to gain practical skills and become familiar with specific technologies, and 15% of responses related to other relevant topics.

The open answers mentioned:

- "Psychological support in war conditions"
- "Psychological and educational support". under martial law"
- "Psychological help and emotional support of participants in the educational process: practical exercises for help"
- "PTSD and repeated psychotrauma"
- "Features of the condition of children who have experienced traumatic events. Forms and methods of social and psychological work"
- "Working with aggression, anxiety, fear, childhood trauma, loss",
- "Modern effective methods for emotional stress relief and behavioral disorders"
- "Recovery exercises, self-help methods"
- "Interactive methods, e.g. art therapy"
- "Organization of interesting distance learning"
- "Organization of interesting and creative distance education"
- "Motivation of young people to active decision-making"
- "Relationships between parents and children and relationships with peers"

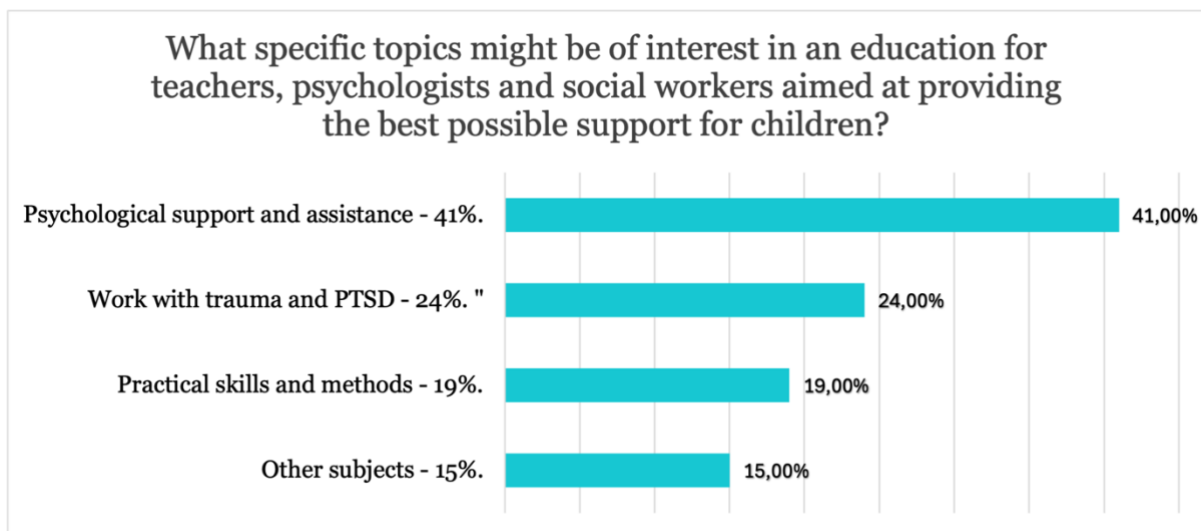


Figure 9. Priority educational content for children and young people

Challenges and support needs for professionals working with children and young people

Respondents' identification of key challenges for staff working with children

The challenges faced by staff working during the war are illustrated in Figure 10. Nearly half of the respondents (48%) reported experiencing emotional burnout. Other significant challenges included extensive and complex problems with children (42%), lack of resources (26%), and dangerous working conditions due to the war (24%).

The following were mentioned in the open-ended responses:

- "Most people suffer from burnout, as it is very difficult to work under constant anxiety"
- "High levels of anxiety, intense negative emotions (sadness, anger and aggressive tendencies, etc.), phobias, depression, fear, exhaustion, fatigue"
- "The biggest challenge is the lack of shelters or safe places for events"
- "Air raid sirens disrupting the training process"

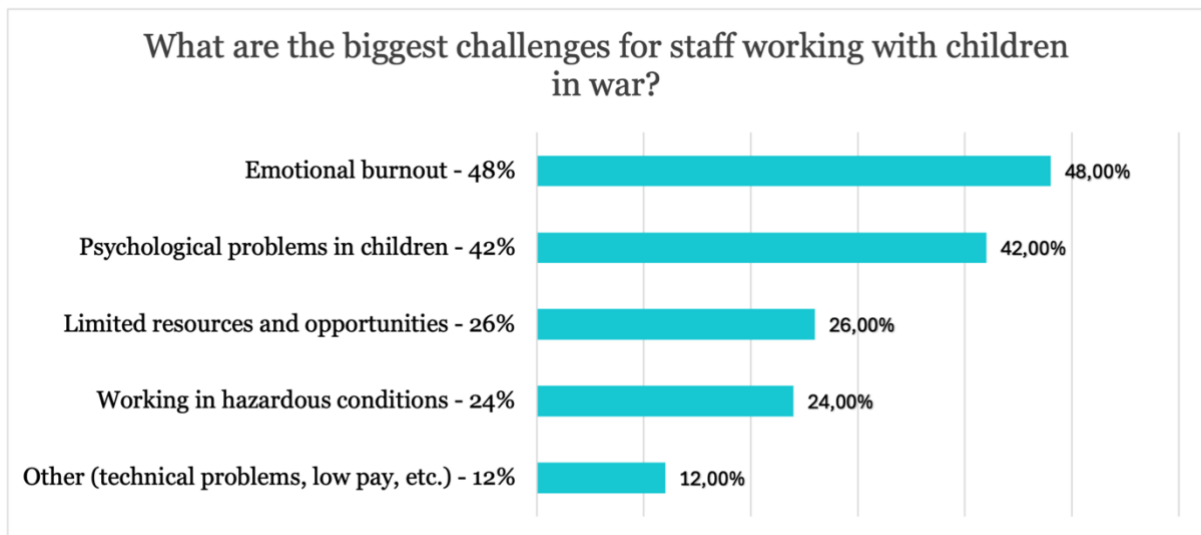


Figure 10. Biggest challenges experienced by professionals

Professionals' support needs

Respondents identified various forms of support needed (Figure 11). The most frequently requested types of additional support for employees were psychological support and supervision (74%), training and professional development (32%), equipment support (26%), and opportunities for rest and relaxation (22%).

More than 70% of respondents recognized the need for psychological support for employees. A significant proportion noted the importance of opportunities for training and professional development, as well as material support.

In the open-ended responses, additional forms of support were mentioned:

- "Public employees lack supervision or individual support, leading to burnout and potential harm to children due to their work"
- "Practical psychologists themselves also need support, resources, and more practical advice (games, exercises, classes for children in this category)"
- "Employees are exhausted due to the large number of requests and the general situation in the field. I strongly recommend regular supervision and activities to improve professional and personal competence"
- "Methodical support (inter- and supervision) is important to prevent secondary traumatization of the consultant"
- "Support in that direction is important, as well as quality rest. Methodological support (inter- and supervision) is also crucial"
- "In my opinion, additional support can be provided through guidance or intervention groups, where professionals can get advice on how to act in specific situations with clients and take care of their psycho-emotional state to avoid transferring personal problems onto the client"
- "Employees are also exhausted due to the large number of requests and the general situation in the field, they are, so I strongly recommend regular supervisory and supervisory activities, events to improve professional and personal competence"
- "Important and methodical support (inter- and supervision) to prevent secondary traumatization of the consultant."
- "That's why support is important in that direction, as well as quality rest. Methodological support (inter- and supervision) is also important"
- "In my opinion, additional support can be provided when creating guidance or intervention groups, where you can get advice on how to act in this or that situation with the client and take care of your psycho-emotional state so as not to transfer your personal problems on the customer's shoulders".

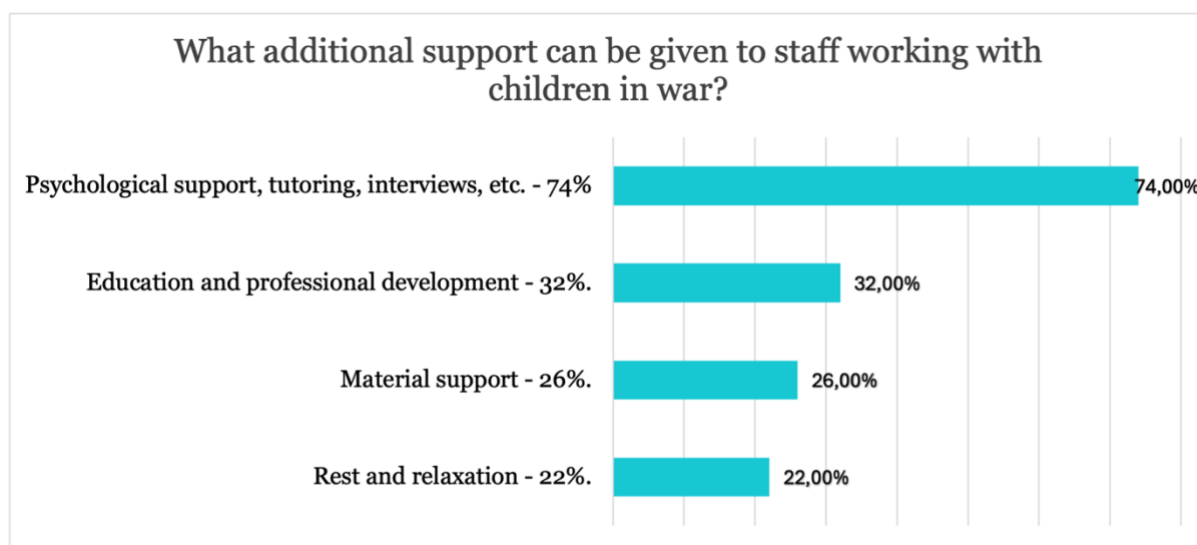


Figure 11. Support that professionals need

Priority training topics for professionals supporting children, based on their views

The most prioritized topics to address are work with trauma and PTSD (40%) and psychological support and care (28%) (Figure 12). 20% of respondents are interested in acquiring practical skills and learning methods and techniques in psychosocial support.

In the open answers, the following was highlighted:

- "Working with trauma, loss, aggression. Rehabilitation of children"
- "Working with children's psychotrauma. Working with loss and grief"
- "Psychological support for children during war"
- "Psychological help and rehabilitation of the individual in crisis situations"
- "Modern effective methods of emotional stress relief, behavior correction"
- "Self-regulation methods"
- "Physicality, body work (massage), work with families and children"
- "Decreased motivation and unstable psycho-emotional state in children"
- "Professional burnout"

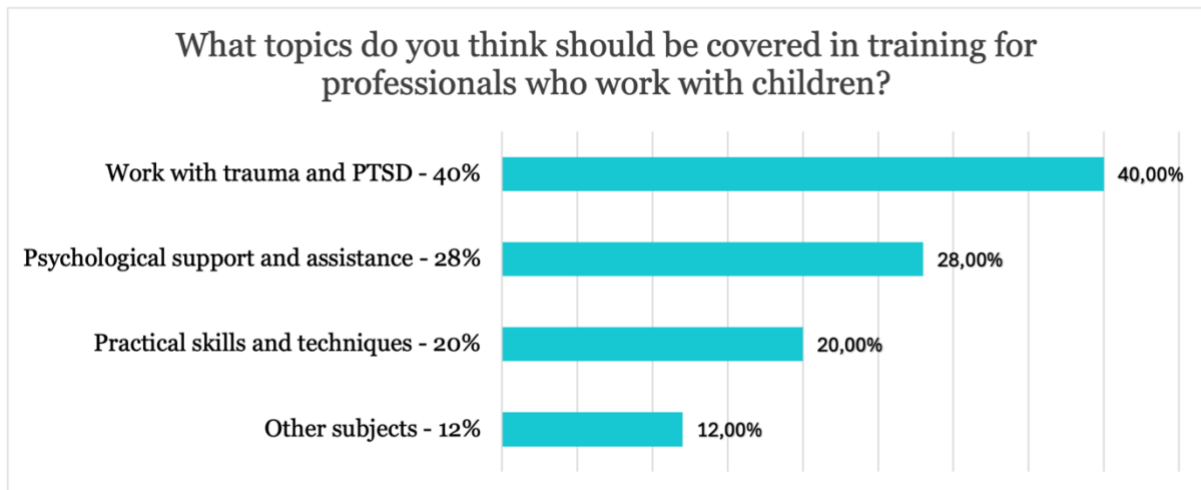


Figure 12. Priority training subjects for professionals

Respondents' views on the relevance of Barnafriid's existing educational themes for professionals.

Among the training courses that Barnafriid has already prepared in the past, the following training courses were requested (figure 13):

- "Injuries and their consequences: post-traumatic syndrome and ways to overcome it" - 79%
- "Protection of children from sexual violence and violations of children's rights. Signs and symptoms. Support and help" - 49%
- "Working with children in crisis situations: psychological support and rehabilitation" - 89.2%
- "Ensuring children's rights and dignity: international standards and practical approaches" - 45.2%
- "Working with children who have lost faith in the future: support and rehabilitation" - 80.9%
- "A child in trauma: detection of violence and its consequences. Signs and consequences. Reaction and help of professionals" - 63.7%

According to the results of the analysis, the topics are related to work with children in crisis situations (89.2%), work with children who have lost faith in the future (80.9%), and topics related to trauma and their consequences (79%).

The topics of protecting children from sexual violence (49%), ensuring children's rights (45.2%) and working with abused children (63.7%) were less popular, but also relevant.

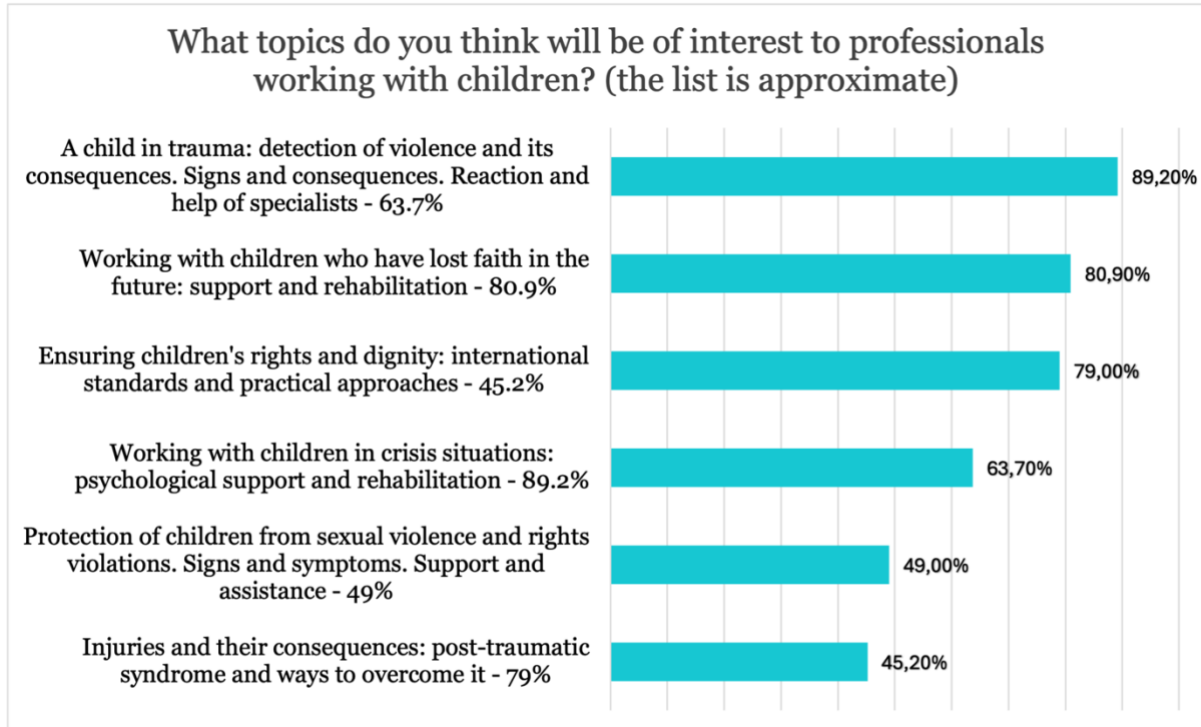
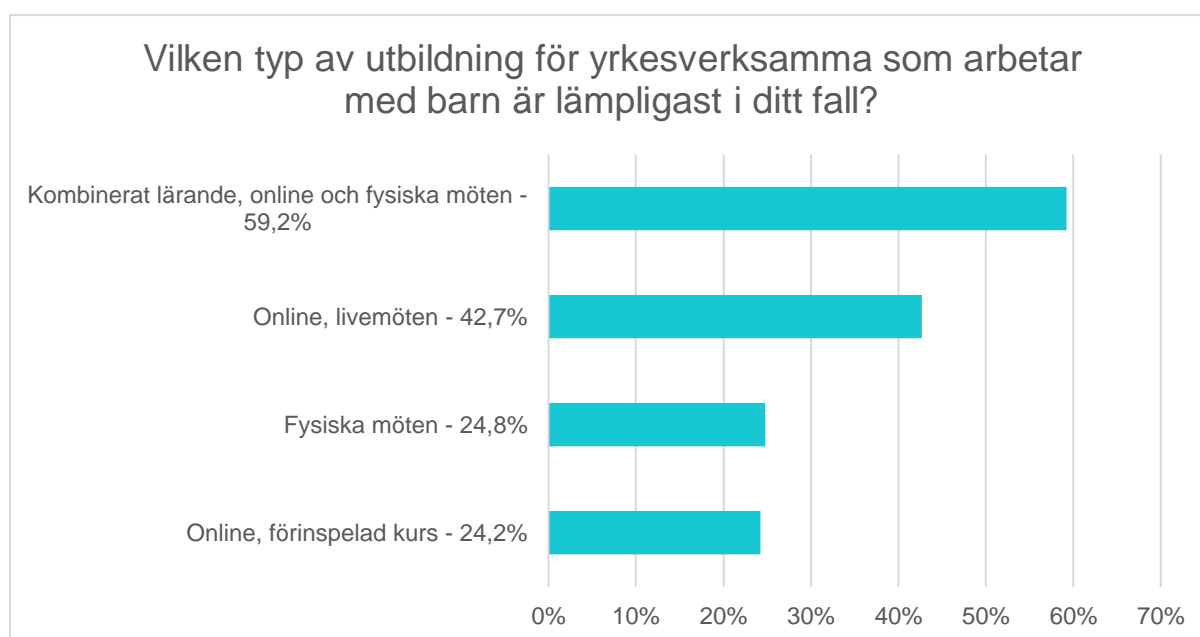


Figure 13. Desired educations

Desired format for training courses

The answers indicate a clear preference for combined learning methods (figure 14). A majority, 59.2%, prefer a combination of online and physical meetings, indicating a strong interest in a flexible and hybrid learning format. Online training in the form of live meetings is also popular, with 42.7% of respondents seeing this as the most appropriate format for their needs. Pre-recorded online courses and exclusively face-to-face meetings rank almost equally, with a slight advantage for face-to-face meetings (24.8%) over pre-recorded online courses (24.2%). These findings highlight the importance of flexibility and accessibility in training formats to meet the changing needs of professionals working with children.



Figur 1 Preferred training format

Need for knowledge dissemination and training infrastructure

Based on the respondents' answers, the creation of a National Knowledge Center, which would consolidate all courses on psychological support and rehabilitation in crisis situations for professionals, parents, and children, is of greatest interest (73.2%) (Figure 15). This indicates a strong desire for a centralized resource hub.

The proposal to create a dedicated platform for training professionals is also popular (56.7%), suggesting a significant need for specialized professional development resources.

While of lesser but still substantial interest, the creation of separate platforms for parents (38.9%) and children (35%) is also supported. This indicates recognition of the importance of tailored resources for different stakeholder groups.

These findings highlight the perceived value of comprehensive and specialized knowledge dissemination infrastructure to support various aspects of psychological support and crisis intervention.

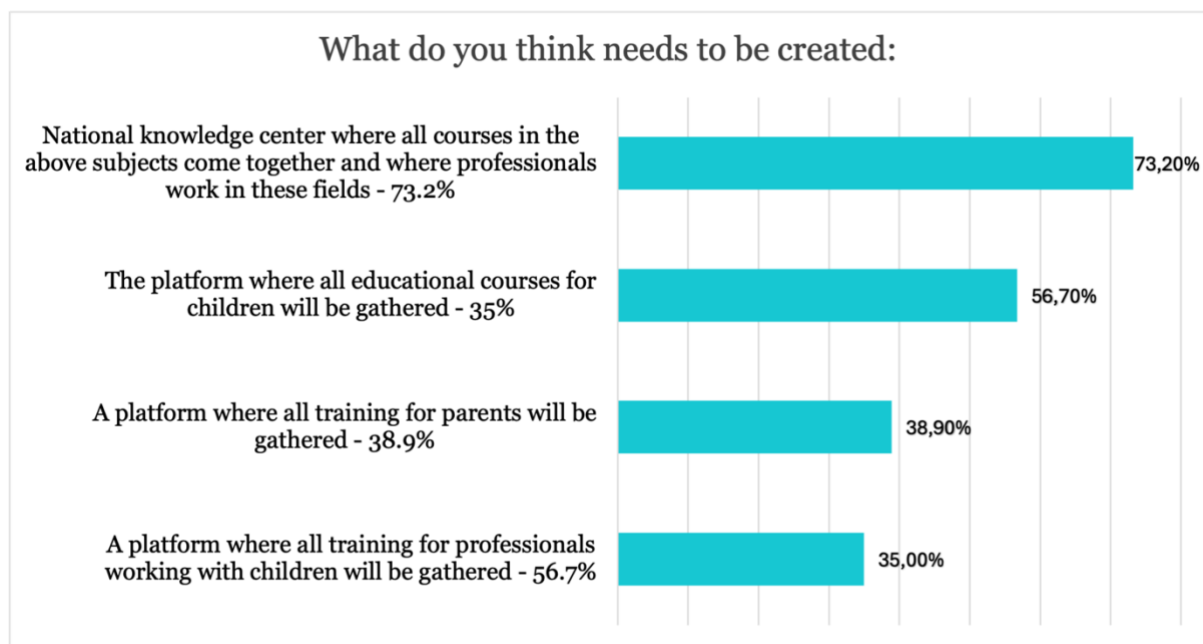


Figure 14. Desires regarding knowledge dissemination and education infrastructure.

Conclusions

This report demonstrates that children and young people in Ukraine have significant psychosocial support needs. The most pressing and prioritized needs for children remain psychological support, safety, and opportunities for communication and learning. To improve the situation, respondents recommend expanding psychological support services for children, creating safe conditions for their development, and providing opportunities for social interaction. Children in Ukraine also require access to safe meeting spaces.

Many professionals working with children experience burnout and are burdened by dealing with children's psychological trauma and heavy workloads. They also face resource shortages and dangerous working conditions.

There is an urgent need to organize training, psychological support, and guidance for these professionals. Demand exists for training initiatives and support, particularly regarding psychological trauma, psychological assistance, and rehabilitation of children in crisis situations.

A centralized information and methodological resource in the form of a national knowledge center is in demand for consolidating and disseminating best practices in these areas. Creating a systematic approach to collecting and disseminating best practices for addressing children's psychological trauma through a specialized platform would be beneficial. Furthermore, establishing regular communication and feedback channels with professionals in the field would be appropriate to continuously assess and respond to evolving needs.