# CHAPTER 3 THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF MODERN PSYCHOLOGY

## SOCIAL SUPPORT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSISTANCE FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL AND THEIR FAMILIES THROUGH ONLINE COUNSELING

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#### Citation:

Melnychuk, D., Zhalinska, I., Voinalovych, I., & Sapon, D. (2024). Social Support and Psychological Assistance for Military Personnel and Their Families Through Online Counseling. Public Administration and Law (4(20),35-44. Review, https://doi.org/10.36690/2674-5216-2024-4-35-44

Received: November 22, 2024 Approved: December 28, 2024 Published: December 30, 2024



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**Abstract.** The problem of improving mental health, ensuring psychological stability and readiness to perform assigned tasks is a priority in the system of moral and psychological support of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and should aim to maintain a high level of combat readiness of units and subdivisions. A large proportion of servicemen in the combat zone have severe stress disorders, and sometimes they cannot and do not know how to cope with the states and feelings they experience. This has a direct impact on the military's immediate environment. The purpose of the article is to conduct a differential analysis of contemporary practices in consultative psychology, to obtain and scientifically interpret empirical data as a prerequisite for identifying the characteristics and determining the priorities of online counseling within the system of psychological rehabilitation and social support for military personnel and their families. This study employs a structured and systematic methodology to explore the potential and implementation of online counseling as a form of psychological and social support for military personnel and their families. The methodological framework integrates theoretical analysis, empirical research, and practical application to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject. The study is based on the world experience of psychological counseling, as well as the results of an empirical study, which made it possible to identify and characterize the psychological needs of military personnel, to determine the priority steps to meet them with the tools of psychological practice. It is substantiated that psychological counseling of servicemen has a number of features, which are primarily related to the specifics of military service, conditions of stay, constant danger and threat to life. The necessity and expediency of developing and implementing the latest forms and programs of psychological counseling are proved. The article substantiates the need to organize online psychological counseling in view of the involvement of military personnel in performing tasks in combat areas and the remoteness from qualified psychological assistance - one of the few available.

**Keywords:** social support; psychological assistance; online counseling; combat operations; mental disorder; military personnel; requests; expectations.

JEL Classification: D91, H55, M14 Formulas: 0; fig. 0; tabl. 1; bibl. 16

**Introduction.** Participation in combat, whether through direct contact with the enemy or exposure to the destructive factors of weaponry and military equipment, is a powerful psychotraumatic factor for the human body. This leads to functional disorders, the development of pathological reactions, and the emergence of somatic and mental illnesses. Nearly one in five combatants suffers from neuropsychiatric disorders, and among the wounded, this number rises to one in three. Therefore, the development and effective implementation of online counseling programs should be considered an important element of the psychological support and rehabilitation system, which will contribute to the improvement of the mental health of military personnel and their families. Online counseling is an effective form of social support and psychological assistance that can be applied even under unfavorable conditions, without specific equipment and comfort. Moreover, the high rehabilitation potential of this type of psychological assistance is associated with its accessibility, the absence of any special requirements for the client, and equal opportunities for everyone. This and other factors highlight the importance of online counseling in the system of psychological rehabilitation and support for military personnel and their families.

Literature review. The field of psychological rehabilitation and support through counseling tools has garnered considerable attention from both domestic and international scholars. Ukrainian researchers, including Blinov (2011, 2013, 2014), Bulakh, Vilyuzhanina (2013), Vorobyova, Khayrulin, Khomych, Kisarchuk, Kolesnichenko, Kuzmenko, Matsehora, Titarenko, Tkach, and Tsymbalyuk, have made significant contributions to counseling psychology. Their works have advanced a problem-oriented approach, focusing on the genesis of psychological issues caused by uncertainty and external determinants. This approach has been instrumental in identifying factors that exacerbate psychological problems and in developing strategies to mitigate their impact through counseling interventions.

Blinov (2011, 2014) has extensively studied the psychological state of military personnel, highlighting the effects of fear and personality deformation due to combat involvement. These studies underscore the necessity of targeted interventions to address specific psychological stressors. Vilyuzhanina (2013) explored the unique aspects of online counseling, emphasizing its potential for addressing psychological issues in remote or resource-constrained environments.

Internationally, contemporary psychological counseling has evolved significantly since its early development, with contributions from Rogers and the integration of theories such as gestalt therapy, behaviorism, and cognitive therapy. These frameworks have informed counseling practices by promoting client agency, fostering non-authoritarian relationships, and adapting to evolving sociocultural contexts.

Recent studies in Ukraine have also focused on the psychological impact of family dynamics on military personnel. Didyk (2018) examined how family-related stress influences servicemen's mental health, while Kokun et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of providing tailored psychological support to both servicemen and their families. Such findings highlight the interconnected nature of family and individual well-being in military contexts.

The increasing adoption of online counseling has introduced new dimensions to psychological practice. Ivaneko (2012) demonstrated the effectiveness of online platforms in delivering counseling services, particularly for individuals unable to access traditional methods. However, these studies also note challenges such as establishing trust and ensuring the efficacy of interventions conducted remotely.

The development of targeted, accessible, and culturally relevant interventions remains a priority for improving mental health outcomes in this population.

**Aims.** The purpose of the article is to conduct a differential analysis of contemporary practices in consultative psychology, to obtain and scientifically interpret empirical data as a prerequisite for identifying the characteristics and determining the priorities of online counseling within the system of psychological rehabilitation and social support for military personnel and their families.

**Metodology.** This study employs a structured and systematic methodology to explore the potential and implementation of online counseling as a form of psychological and social support for military personnel and their families. The methodological framework integrates theoretical analysis, empirical research, and practical application to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

A social and psychological survey is conducted among military personnel and their families to identify their psychological needs and preferences for support mechanisms. Participants include 72 servicemen and their families, with diverse demographics to ensure representativeness. Data collection includes questionnaires and psychological tests to evaluate anxiety levels, family conflict resolution needs, and readiness to seek psychological support, especially online. Specific metrics include age, gender, military rank, education level, combat experience, and previous use of psychological services. Quantitative and qualitative methods are used to interpret the survey and test results. Statistical tools measure the prevalence of psychological symptoms and the effectiveness of online counseling compared to traditional methods.

By combining theoretical insights with empirical data, this study offers a robust methodology to advance the understanding and application of online counseling for military contexts. The findings are intended to guide the development of accessible, effective, and culturally relevant psychological support systems.

**Results.** The need to seek advice and help has existed since ancient times. The existence of advisors, consultants, and the very phenomenon of counseling in its primitive form can be traced in many cultures around the world. In contrast, modern psychological counseling is a branch of practical psychology that involves providing direct psychological assistance to individuals in need by a specialist psychologist, in the form of recommendations based on personal conversation and prior examination of the issue faced by the client. It aims to support the developing personality and is part of the practical psychologist's work. An important stage in the formation and development of psychological counseling can be attributed to the research of C. Rogers. His theory was based on the hypothesis that not all individuals seeking help are mentally ill and require medication. They should take greater responsibility for their own development and pay attention to personal resources. In the mid-20th century, new theories and directions emerged, including behaviorism, gestalt therapy,

transactional analysis, rational-emotive therapy, and cognitive therapy. At the same time, associations of counseling psychologists developed, who employed appropriate methods of psychological practice.

According to domestic researchers, four trends can be identified in the development of counseling psychology:

- a shift in the psychologist's attitude towards the client's symptoms they not only seek to relieve the client of suffering through techniques aimed at alleviating symptoms but also strive to recognize their nature;
- dominance of encouraging the client's own activity during the counseling process;
- formation of a new role position for the consultant, according to which the psychologist seeks equality and partnership with the client, avoids authoritarianism, and demonstrates their own awareness and competence;
- changes in therapeutic relationships due to the blurring of boundaries between psychological and psychotherapeutic schools.

When discussing counseling, we refer to providing psychological help to individuals who do not have pathological mental disorders but are experiencing difficult life circumstances. Thus, the psychologist's task is to assist the client in coping with current life challenges. The main goal of psychological counseling is to help the client recognize their problem and find effective solutions, as well as to teach the client to take responsibility for their decisions and acquire the ability to utilize the knowledge gained. In this way, psychological counseling helps individuals perceive themselves, others, and life situations adequately, as well as change their system of interpersonal relationships. Consequently, psychological counseling is based on certain principles that align closely with the ethical principles of medical professionals: respect for the client's personality, acceptance of their values and life norms, a friendly attitude, and the maintenance of confidentiality. Another important principle is the psychologist's refusal to give advice and recipes, as they cannot take responsibility for another person's life. Their task is to enhance the client's responsibility for what is happening to them, encouraging them to be active in analyzing the problem and finding a way out of the crisis.

An analysis of the scientific literature allows us to identify the main areas of psychological counseling (Table 1).

In accordance with the Instruction on the Organization of Psychological Support for the Personnel of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, psychological support is a targeted activity carried out by military management bodies, commanders, and officials of moral and psychological support structures aimed at psychological selection, formation, maintenance, and restoration of personnel psychological readiness to perform tasks, emotional-volitional stability to negative psychological factors, reduction of psychogenic losses, and preservation of the mental health of military personnel. Some tasks of psychological support include assisting in organizing and conducting social-psychological and professional adaptation and rehabilitation of military personnel, identifying individuals with neuro-psychological instability, implementing psychoprophylactic measures and psychological correction, teaching

personnel psychological methods for providing individual and mutual assistance, and restoring and preserving the mental health of personnel.

Table 1. Areas and Directions of Psychological Counseling

Spheres of psychological counseling	Direction of psychological counseling
The mental development of a child	Fulfilling emotional needs in acquiring personal identity through cultural, ethnic, and ethical self-determination processes; providing psychological assistance to avoid emotional trauma when realizing the inevitability of death or in cases of real loss of parents and close relatives; assisting in the development of stable value and moral norms
Existential and personal issues of adolescents	Helping to overcome the crisis of psychological separation from parents and identification of the adolescent, feelings of inferiority, awareness of the limited capabilities of parents, sexual issues, the struggle for personal and social status, and the transformation processes of infantile religious consciousness
Existential and personal issues of adolescents	Helping to overcome the crisis of psychological separation from parents and identification of the adolescent, feelings of inferiority, awareness of the limited capabilities of parents, sexual issues, the struggle for personal and social status, and the transformation processes of infantile religious consciousness
Marriage and family	Marital and parental conflicts, family crises, relationships within the family, premarital counseling
Issues of mental and personal health	Traditional preventive and ongoing assistance in cases of mental and somatic illnesses, emotional and spiritual suffering related to mood disorders, alcoholism, drug addiction, life stresses, conflicts, and borderline states
Problems of the elderly	Developing an adequate worldview, fulfilling the emotional needs of the elderly, responding to religious issues, regular patronage, and counseling in organizing an appropriate lifestyle
Places of imprisonment, hospitals, barracks, student dormitories	Issues of personality, communication, mental state, as well as spirituality
Psychological assistance and support in crisis situations	Counseling relatives and close ones in cases of sudden death, suicide attempts, rape, betrayal, loss of a loved one, and job loss
School counseling	Covering issues of teacher-student relationships, relationships among students, issues with parents, school performance, development of abilities, and behavioral deviations
Professional counseling	Includes both general orientation in choosing a particular profession and specific issues: how to write a resume, how and where to get another profession, where to find a job according to one's capabilities
Psychological assistance concerning cross-cultural issues	Barriers to adaptation, overcoming ethnic prejudices and stereotypes in immigrants; Management consulting (consulting in organizations): assistance in making managerial decisions, communication skills training, monitoring and resolving conflicts, and working with personnel

*Source: developed by the authors* 

These and other tasks are realized through organizing and conducting psychological training, psychological diagnostics, and analyzing individual psychological characteristics of military personnel, providing psychological assistance to personnel, and conducting psychological counseling and social support for military personnel and their families.

Online counseling is an alternative source of psychological assistance in cases where traditional psychological counseling is unavailable or impossible. Online counseling allows psychologists to expand their professional activities and assist individuals who, for various reasons, cannot be physically present at a session. By using communication tools, and thus consulting in real-time, this form of providing psychological help is not significantly less effective than in-person counseling.

However, the psychologist-counselor must have experience and skills for online work, possessing a set of techniques that can be used in this form of counseling. Online counseling has several significant advantages, as it does not require time for travel, allows for communication at a scheduled time, and is a convenient form of obtaining psychological assistance, which is easier to undertake, especially for individuals who feel shy or have difficulties in communication. Online counseling can be practiced as an additional method to in-person counseling or as an independent therapeutic process. As an adjunct, clients may use online communication with the consultant between face-to-face sessions [8]. Psychological assistance to military personnel and their families through counseling and online counseling should be provided to restore and preserve functional mental health. The most challenging aspect of organizing counseling work with military personnel and their families is the stage of establishing psychological contact and gaining trust.

The most significant factors that determine the wide range of threats to the mental health of military personnel include strict regulation of all types of relationships, threats to personal health and life, loss of colleagues and subordinates, intense physical strain, material and economic restrictions and limitations in nutrition, isolation from communication with relatives, close friends, the necessity of unconditional submission, limitations in choice and decision-making, forced openness in all areas of life, encouragement of aggressive behavior, suppression of individual initiative, and restrictions on self-expression. These factors can provoke significant fatigue, exhaustion, and energy depletion, suspicion, memory impairment, difficulties concentrating, development of post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, destructive personality changes, social-psychological maladaptation, communication limitations, antisocial behavior, domestic, medical, and family issues, conflicts with spouses, family members, close friends, uncertainty about the future, suicidal thoughts, partial or complete loss of life meaning, lack of confidence in one's abilities, pessimism, feelings of neglect and unworthiness, distrust of others, feelings of unreality regarding surrounding events, development of a sense of inability to realistically influence events, and excessive anxiety. The aforementioned states and determinants of disrupted psycho-emotional balance are grounds for counseling interventions in the system of psychological support and rehabilitation of military personnel and their families.

In the families of military personnel, there is uncertainty regarding issues related to preparation and participation in combat operations, timeframes, the family's ability to cope with separation, and thoughts about the risk of injury or death. Unresolved problems within the family can have potentially destructive consequences. A serviceman who is worried and preoccupied with family troubles can easily become distracted and unable to focus on important tasks at critical moments [13]. This underscores the need for comprehensive programs for psychological support and rehabilitation that address the concerns of both military personnel and their families. Such conclusions are confirmed by the results of an empirical study conducted by the authors among the personnel of one of the military units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

The social and psychological study consisted of several stages: a sociopsychological survey of personnel, psychological testing, analysis and interpretation of the collected data, and the development of practical recommendations for psychologists and consultants working with military personnel and their families. The study involved 72 servicemen (71.2% – men, 28.8% – women). The largest share of respondents by age belonged to the group aged 30 to 45 years (56.2%), while the age group under 30 years constituted 31.5%. The number of surveyed servicemen aged 45 to 55 years and over 55 years totaled 12.3%. Higher education was held by 63.9% of respondents, specialized secondary education by 26.4%, and secondary education by 9.7%. Servicemen with secondary education held the rank of soldier, with 71.4% of them called up to the Armed Forces of Ukraine through mobilization. By military rank, the distribution of respondents was as follows: enlisted personnel – 30.6%, sergeants – 40.3%, and officers -29.2%. The share of women among officers was 17.1%. Regarding combat experience, nearly a third of respondents (27.8%) answered negatively. This category is equally represented by servicemen mobilized and contract soldiers.

According to the analysis of empirical data, 26.4% of respondents sought help from a psychologist during their military service. The most common reasons for seeking help included feelings of anxiety and inner unrest (12.7%), family conflict situations (7%), experiencing an extraordinary event (7%), personal injury (5.6%) or injuries to comrades and/or their deaths (4.2%). Additionally, 22.2% of respondents indicated that they had experience receiving psychological help using communication tools, particularly the Internet (online counseling, forums, email).

It is worth noting that among servicemen who chose online counseling as a form of psychological assistance, citizens from all age groups were represented. No dependencies were established based on gender or type of military service in the study. At the same time, 33.3% of servicemen reported experiencing some discomfort during counseling, with the issues they sought help for being resolved incompletely. Investigating the issue of psychological assistance received by family members of servicemen, it was noted that 25% of respondents claimed that their relatives had such experience, while 13.9% did not have information on this matter. The leading reasons relatives of servicemen sought qualified assistance included experiencing extraordinary events (35%) and feelings of anxiety and inner unrest (29%). Requests concerning family conflict situations constituted about 12%.

Additionally, 48.6% of respondents indicated they would be willing to seek psychological help in the future, while among servicemen who had already experienced such consultations, the corresponding percentage was 56.5%. Regarding the choice of a psychologist, 66.7% of respondents stated that the age and gender of the specialist were not of significant importance. 31.9% of servicemen would most likely choose an active-duty military person or a veteran as a specialist, 12.5% preferred a civilian psychologist, and 8.3% would prefer talking to a comrade. The results of the conducted research also indicated that, despite the belief that most servicemen are inclined toward one-time counseling, only 15.3% of respondents gave such an answer, while 34.7% indicated that problem resolution could be achieved within 10–15 sessions. 26.4% of

servicemen believe that psychological issues should be addressed individually, depending on the nature of the problem. The study found that among respondents, common concerns include feelings of anxiety (13.9%), frequent sleep disturbances (18.1%), suicidal thoughts (13.9%), and combinations of these symptoms, with deterioration in family relationships (19.4%) and conflicts at work (29.9%). There is no doubt that among both active and veteran servicemen, as well as their family members, there is currently a significant number of individuals who need psychological assistance.

**Discussion.** The research underscores the critical role of online counseling as an innovative approach to providing psychological and social support for military personnel and their families. Participation in combat and exposure to the associated psychotraumatic factors result in a range of mental health challenges, emphasizing the urgent need for accessible and effective psychological interventions.

The role of online counseling in overcoming barriers to access. One of the key findings of this study is the effectiveness of online counseling in overcoming logistical barriers faced by military personnel. This modality addresses the geographical constraints often experienced by soldiers deployed in combat zones or stationed in remote locations. Furthermore, online counseling reduces the stigma associated with seeking mental health support by offering a private and less intrusive platform for individuals to engage with psychological services. The accessibility and flexibility of this approach make it a vital tool in the mental health and rehabilitation framework.

Psychological Challenges and Tailored Interventions. The study highlights various psychological issues experienced by military personnel, including anxiety, sleep disturbances, post-traumatic stress symptoms, and interpersonal conflicts. The diversity of these challenges calls for personalized and adaptive interventions that cater to individual needs. Online counseling offers the advantage of customization, where sessions can be tailored to address specific concerns, such as family conflicts or professional stressors. This adaptability enhances the efficacy of counseling and aligns with the psychological complexities faced by military personnel and their families.

Empirical insights and practical implications. Empirical data from the study reveal that a significant proportion of servicemen and their families experience unresolved mental health concerns. While many participants expressed willingness to seek psychological help, the study found gaps in satisfaction with the outcomes of previous counseling sessions. This highlights the need for enhanced training for online counselors, particularly those working with military personnel. Expertise in military culture and an understanding of the unique stressors faced by soldiers are crucial for building trust and delivering effective support.

Additionally, the preference among many military personnel for counselors with combat experience or military backgrounds indicates the importance of shared understanding and relatability in therapeutic relationships. Incorporating veterans and active-duty military personnel into counseling roles could improve engagement and trust within this population.

Family-centered support and preventive measures. The findings also emphasize the interconnectedness of military personnel's mental health and their family

dynamics. Family-related stressors, including uncertainty and separation, exacerbate psychological challenges for soldiers. Online counseling provides a platform to address these issues collaboratively, involving both the servicemen and their families in the counseling process. Furthermore, preventive measures, such as educating families on coping mechanisms and fostering resilience, can mitigate potential stressors before they escalate.

Challenges and Future Directions. While the advantages of online counseling are evident, challenges such as technical issues, lack of internet access in certain regions, and the need for proper training in online modalities were noted. Addressing these obstacles is essential for the effective implementation of online counseling programs. The development of comprehensive training modules for online counselors, incorporating techniques specific to military populations, can bridge this gap. Additionally, leveraging technological advancements such as AI-driven chatbots and virtual reality-based interventions could complement human-led counseling efforts.

Recommendations for policy and practice. This study advocates for the integration of online counseling into the broader framework of psychological and social support for military personnel. Key recommendations include:

- 1. Training and certification establishing specialized training programs for counselors to enhance their skills in addressing the unique needs of military personnel and their families.
- 2. *Veteran involvement* encouraging the participation of veterans and active-duty personnel as counselors to leverage their shared experiences.
- 3. Technological infrastructure investing in reliable digital platforms to facilitate seamless online counseling services.
- 4. Family engagement developing family-centered programs to strengthen support systems and foster resilience among military families.

The findings affirm that online counseling is a critical component of psychological support for military personnel and their families. By addressing logistical challenges, personalizing interventions, and involving families in the therapeutic process, online counseling contributes significantly to the mental health and well-being of Ukraine's defenders. Future efforts should focus on scaling up these services, addressing existing challenges, and fostering collaborations among military organizations, mental health professionals, and policymakers. This multi-faceted approach will ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of online counseling initiatives in addressing the psychological needs of military personnel.

Conclusions. The results of the conducted study confirmed that military personnel and their family members require a special approach in the process of psychological rehabilitation and social support. Therefore, the issue of improving online counseling programs and activities to enhance or restore the mental health of the country's defenders and their families arises. This also pertains to increasing the level of psychological awareness among military personnel and their families regarding the availability of psychological assistance in various life, conflict, and crisis situations, the use of different types and forms of counseling, including online; training servicemen in self-help and mutual assistance methods in case of sudden interruptions

in online counseling sessions, or if continuation is impossible due to technical issues or the execution of combat tasks.

Additionally, it is important to inform about the functioning and use of online services, platforms, and chatbots for psychological assistance, where one can find meditative techniques, breathing and relaxation exercises, and other helpful tips for stabilizing mental health. We consider it advisable, when choosing an online consultant for military personnel, to involve and prioritize psychologists who are veterans, combat participants, and specialized professionals among active military personnel who understand military affairs, have experienced similar conditions, and are part of the reference environment.

Furthermore, when working with military personnel and their families, it is essential to establish the principle of equality in relationships, pay attention to the development of mutual assistance, and form family traditions and values, emphasizing preventive measures to promote and adhere to a healthy lifestyle as a prerequisite for mental well-being and social development.

**Author contributions.** The authors contributed equally.

**Disclosure statement.** The authors do not have any conflict of interest.

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