



Transformation of existential pain in psychological counselling of military personnel: Building an ideal model as a tool for integrating combat experience

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◆ **Abstract.** The relevance of the study is conditioned by the need to expand contemporary approaches to psychological counselling of military personnel with combat experience. Along with post-traumatic, anxious and depressive manifestations, moral trauma and existential pain are important consequences of combat experience, which can cause loss of life meanings, violation of moral integrity, and a crisis of personal identity. This necessitates the application of counselling models aimed at symptom reduction with simultaneous integration of combat experience, the restoration of personal integrity, and the search of new meanings in life. The purpose of the study was to theoretically substantiate the potential of psychosynthesis in transforming the existential pain of military personnel through R. Assagioli's concept of constructing an ideal model to facilitate the integration of combat experience in the process of psychological counselling. The methodological basis of the research was the methods of theoretical analysis, synthesis, comparison, systematisation, and generalisation of contemporary scientific sources on the psychology of combat trauma, moral trauma, existential psychology, psychosynthesis, and psychological counselling. A comparative analysis of psychotherapeutic approaches to working with moral and existential trauma was carried out, in particular, cognitive behavioural therapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, schema therapy, Gestalt therapy, logotherapy, and existential psychotherapy. As a result of the study, a conceptual model of transformation of existential pain of military personnel by means of psychosynthesis was proposed, the central element of which is the technique of constructing an ideal model. The stages of psychosynthetic counselling were substantiated, including awareness of existential pain through the phenomena of "wonder at pain" and "wonder at joy", disidentification from traumatic experience, establishing contact with the True Self (Higher Self), activation of the will, construction of an ideal model, and integration of combat experience into a coherent system of personal meanings. It was shown that moral trauma and existential pain arise due to the actualisation of fundamental existential givens of human existence and are accompanied by a violation of moral identity, value system, and life prospects. In contrast to

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symptom-centred models of psychological assistance, the proposed approach is focused on the reconstruction of a holistic self-concept, integration of internal conflicts, and the development of personal potential. The practical significance of the study lies in the possibility of applying the proposed psychosynthetic model in consulting military personnel and veterans, and in programmes of psychological support and training of specialists

◆ **Keywords:** Higher Self; will; personal identity; moral trauma; psychosynthesis; disidentification; life-meaning orientations

◆ Introduction

Contemporary research has substantially broadened and deepened understanding of the psychological consequences of participation in combat operations. If for a long time the dominant conceptual model for explaining mental disorders in military personnel was post-traumatic stress disorder, then contemporary research increasingly demonstrates the limitations of a purely clinical and symptomatic approach to understanding the psychological consequences of war. Empirical data by A.A. Kuraieva *et al.* (2024) showed that a significant part of veterans and military personnel, even in the absence of clinically pronounced manifestations of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), experience a deep crisis of life meanings, loss of internal integrity, destruction of established moral guidelines, alienation from their own experience, and difficulties in integrating experienced events into the structure of personal history. That is why in contemporary military psychology, the study of moral trauma, existential pain, spiritual distress, and the crisis of personal identity as interrelated phenomena that determine the long-term psychological consequences of combat experience is becoming increasingly important. J.I. Harris *et al.* (2021) stressed that the central consequence of moral trauma is a violation of the integrity of the individual, the destruction of habitual ideas about justice and humanity. In parallel with the growing interest in moral trauma in the scientific literature, a separate area of research is being formed on the phenomenon of existential pain in military personnel, presented by L. Terletska (2023). In contrast to acute emotional reactions, existential pain encompasses a deep level of experience associated with the loss of a sense of meaning, inner continuity of life, trust in the world, the experience of the inevitability of death, the reassessment of life values, and the need to rethink own identity after participating in combat operations. The loss of life meaning, a sense of inner alienation, and the inability to integrate combat experience into the previous value system often become the main factors of prolonged psychological suffering, which requires fundamentally different approaches to psychological assistance.

Contemporary discourse demonstrates that the psychological recovery of military personnel largely depends on the ability of a person not to displace or forget the experience, but to integrate combat experience into their own life history, rethink it through the prism of personal values, and form a new system of internal meanings. As noted by M.A. Wilson *et al.* (2024), the understanding of psychological counselling for military personnel is also changing accordingly. The researchers noted that the psychologist should work

not only with manifestations of anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic symptoms, but first of all with the processes of restoring personal subjectivity, reconstructing the image of the self, forming a new life perspective, and integrating traumatic experience into a single system of personal meanings. In contrast to models focused mainly on reducing psychopathological symptoms, integrative approaches consider the consequences of combat experience as a process of personal restructuring, covering the transformation of values, changing life meanings, revising the system of relationships with the world and the development of a new personal identity (Hollis *et al.*, 2023). That is why, along with conventional protocols, approaches aimed at reconstructing personal meaning, developing psychological flexibility, post-traumatic growth, moral recovery and integrating traumatic experience are actively developing. A special place among such approaches is occupied by psychosynthesis, which from the very beginning of its development was focused not only on overcoming psychological difficulties, but also on achieving the internal integrity of the individual.

The central task of psychological work is to integrate internal contradictions, develop awareness, find or choose the inner centre of the individual, and restore the ability to self-control. According to Y.V. Kucherenko *et al.* (2024), this approach is particularly important in working with military personnel, as combat experience is often accompanied by deep fragmentation of the personal structure, conflict between pre-war and military identity, and the experience of moral dilemmas. Special scientific and practical interest within the framework of psychosynthesis is the technique of building an ideal model, which is considered as a concept and a step-by-step process of forming an authentic image (model) of the individual, reflecting its most important values, meanings, potential, and strategic life guidelines. In contrast to the idealised or fantasy self-image, the ideal model in psychosynthesis acts as an internal psychological construct that ensures the direction of personal development, integrates various aspects of individual experience, and contributes to the development of consistency between a person's ideas about their own past, present, and future (Kucherenko *et al.*, 2024). For military personnel experiencing a crisis of self-identity after combat operations, such a model can serve as a psychological reference point that allows them to gradually integrate combat experience into the personality structure without displacing or denying it.

Despite the active development of research on moral trauma, existential pain and psychological rehabilitation of

veterans, the analysis of contemporary scientific literature indicates a lack of attention to the study of mechanisms for integrating combat experience by means of psychosynthesis. N. Jamieson *et al.* (2023) evaluated the effectiveness of a number of psychotherapeutic approaches to dealing with moral trauma, in particular, cognitive behavioural therapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, mindfulness practices, narrative interventions, and moral recovery programmes. However, the advisory potential of psychosynthesis is practically not represented in empirical and theoretical studies, despite its conceptual correspondence to current ideas about the integration of the individual after psychotraumatic events. Thus, an obvious scientific gap is formed, which consists in the lack of a holistic theoretical substantiation of the possibilities of using the construction of an ideal model as a tool for transforming existential pain and integrating combat experience in the process of psychological counselling of military personnel. The relevance of this problem is determined not only by its insufficient theoretical development, but also by the urgent needs of psychological practice. In the context of a long-term war, the number of military personnel who need long-term psychological support is constantly growing, while the effectiveness of psychological assistance increasingly depends on the ability of a specialist to work with a crisis of personal meanings, moral conflicts, identity transformation, and restoration of internal integrity of a person. That is why the development and theoretical substantiation of advisory models focused on the integration of combat experience is one of the most urgent tasks of contemporary military and advisory psychology. The purpose of the study was to theoretically substantiate the potential of psychosynthesis for transforming the existential pain of military personnel by integrating combat experience in the process of psychological counselling based on the concept of the ideal model by R. Assagioli.

◆ Materials and Methods

The research was carried out within the theoretical and methodological paradigm and was aimed at conceptualising the possibilities of using the concept and technique of building an ideal model in the method of psychosynthesis as a tool for transforming existential pain and integrating combat experience in the process of psychological counselling of military personnel. The methodological basis of the study was the provisions of humanistic, existential, transpersonal, and consultative psychology, concepts of moral trauma, post-traumatic growth, psychological integration of traumatic experience, and the theoretical foundations of psychosynthesis developed by R. Assagioli (2000) and further expanded by R.G. Tedeschi & L.G. Calhoun (2004) and S.W. Black & K. Klinger (2022). The research materials were contemporary scientific publications devoted to the psychological consequences of combat experience, moral trauma, existential pain, psychological rehabilitation of military personnel, post-traumatic growth, and the use of integrative models of psychological counselling, including

O.M. Kokun *et al.* (2021) and Y.V. Kucherenko *et al.* (2024). The analysis included papers published in international peer-reviewed scientific journals indexed in international bibliographic databases, and studies by Ukrainian scholars devoted to the psychological support of military personnel during wartime. The theoretical study was carried out in three interrelated stages. At the first stage, a systematic analysis of contemporary scientific approaches to understanding existential pain, moral trauma, personal identity crisis, and psychological integration of combat experience was carried out. At the second stage, a comparative analysis of psychotherapeutic approaches used in working with the consequences of psychotraumatic experience (cognitive behavioural therapy, logotherapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, psychosynthesis) was performed. The comparison was carried out according to the following criteria: the leading psychological mechanism of change, the ability to work with life-meaning experiences, identity crisis, integration of traumatic experience, development of internal resources, and a holistic self-concept.

The choice of psychosynthesis as a conceptual basis for research was conditioned by the fact that this approach combines work with personal identity, life meanings, will, subpersonalities, and spiritual resources of the individual, considering integration as a central mechanism of psychological changes. In contrast to approaches focused mainly on symptom reduction or cognitive restructuring, psychosynthesis allowed considering existential pain not only as a consequence of psychotrauma, but as a potential resource for personal transformation, which was most consistent with the purpose of this study. At the third stage, a conceptual modelling of the consultative process was carried out, in which the construction of an ideal model was determined by the central mechanism of transformation of existential pain and integration of combat experience. During the modelling, the relationships between the processes of disidentification, introspection, integration of subpersonalities, actualisation of personal resources, reconstruction of the system of life meanings and the development of a new integrated self-concept as interrelated stages of psychosynthesis were analysed. The proposed conceptual model was focused on the use in psychological counselling of military personnel who were in a relatively stable psycho-emotional state and have a sufficient level of ability to reflect, introspect, and semantic development of their own experience. Its use was not considered as an independent method of dealing with acute crisis states, severe psychopathological symptoms, or other conditions that require specialised psychiatric or comprehensive psychotherapeutic care. To achieve this goal, the methods of theoretical analysis, comparative analysis, conceptual synthesis, and theoretical modelling were used. Their integrated application provided an opportunity to substantiate the conceptual model of psychological counselling, in which the construction of an ideal model was the central tool for transforming existential pain and integrating the combat experience of military personnel.

◆ Results and Discussion

For a long time, psychological assistance to military personnel was based mainly on a medical model of mental health, which focused on psychopathological disorders that have clear diagnostic criteria. The focus was on conditions such as PTSD, depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, acute stress responses, adjustment disorders, suicidal behaviour, and addiction (Litz *et al.*, 2009). Accordingly, psychological counselling was primarily focused on identifying symptoms, diagnosing them, and reducing clinical manifestations in accordance with international classifications of mental disorders. An analysis of the clinical experience of working with combat veterans showed that a significant part of military personnel who do not meet the diagnostic criteria for a mental disorder continue to experience deep psychological difficulties. They may not have enough symptoms to make a diagnosis of PTSD or depression, but they suffer from loss of meaning in life, feelings of moral guilt, identity crisis, inner alienation, destruction of the value system, or inability to integrate the experience of combat into their own biography.

As emphasised by J. Grimell (2017), such experiences have a significant impact on quality of life, interpersonal relationships, and professional functioning, although they are not formally classified as mental disorders. In this regard, contemporary military psychology and psychotherapy are increasingly distancing themselves from an exclusively pathopsychological model to a broader understanding of the psychological consequences of war. Scientific discourse actively develops concepts of moral trauma, existential trauma, semantic crisis, spiritual distress, identity trauma, and other phenomena that do not have a separate status of mental disorders in the DSM-5-TR or ICD-11, but can be no less destructive for the individual (Shay, 1994). The focus of psychological assistance is also shifting: from treating symptoms to restoring personal integrity, reconstructing the value system, rethinking combat experience, and forming new life meanings. It is in this context that the existential approach and psychosynthesis become particularly relevant, which allow working with manifestations of psychological distress and also with fundamental questions of human existence (Alberti *et al.*, 2012). The use of the ideal model technique in psychological counselling allows transforming moral and existential pain through the reconstruction of the integral self-concept, the integration of combat experience, and the restoration of the system of personal meanings, which goes beyond the conventional symptom-centred model of psychological assistance. Moral trauma and existential trauma are interrelated, but not identical, psychological phenomena that especially often occur in military personnel as a result of participation in combat operations. Moral trauma occurs when a person becomes a participant, witness of events that contradict their deep moral beliefs, ethical principles, or ideas about good and evil, or fails to prevent such events. As noted by S. Frankfurt & P. Frazier (2016) and J.K. Farnsworth *et al.* (2017), moral trauma does not arise only because of the

fact of participation in military operations, but is formed as a result of a violation of a person's deep moral beliefs. Typical examples are given below:

1. Inability to save a fellow human being. A soldier is forced to leave a wounded comrade due to intense enemy fire or the execution of a withdrawal order. After that, he is haunted for a long time by the thought: "I should have done more", even if it was objectively impossible to save fellow soldier.

2. Civilian deaths during military operations. Despite compliance with the rules of warfare, the soldier becomes a witness or indirect participant in the death of civilians. This can cause deep feelings of guilt, shame, and doubt about own morals.

3. The necessity of using lethal force or the trauma of taking a life. Even when the use of a weapon is lawful and necessary to protect oneself or others, the act of taking a human life may conflict with a service member's pre-war moral values.

4. Choice between two equally difficult solutions (the trolley problem). For example, the need to decide whether to evacuate one seriously wounded soldier risking the life of the entire group, or leave him to save the majority. Such moral dilemmas often leave long-term inner experiences, regardless of the correctness of the decision made.

5. Sense of betrayal on the part of the command or the state. Moral injury may arise when a service member believes that their unit was left without adequate support, supplies, or evacuation, or when decisions by the command conflict with their notions of military honour and justice.

6. Loss of trust in own moral principles. After a long stay in war conditions, a person may realise that they acted contrary to their pre-war beliefs, became more rigid or emotionally indifferent. This is often accompanied by an identity crisis and the question: "Am I still the same person I was before the war?"

7. Guilt for survival. A service member experiences the deaths of fellow soldiers and struggles to accept their own survival, believing that they should have died or that they do not deserve to live more than those who died.

A common feature of these situations is that they are not necessarily associated with unlawful or immoral actions on the part of the service member. Moral trauma can occur even when a person has acted professionally, in accordance with the order, international humanitarian law, and military necessity. Its source is not a legal assessment of the act, but an internal conflict between the personal experience and own system of moral values, accompanied by persistent experiences of guilt, shame, loss of trust in oneself, other people, or the world (Zasiekina *et al.*, 2023). Existential trauma has a broader character and is associated with the destruction of a person's basic ideas about oneself, other people, and the world as a whole. This occurs when combat experience calls into question the fundamental existential pillars of the individual: life security, justice, meaning of existence, freedom of choice, own identity, and the future (Ravn, 2024). Meeting with death, constant threat

to life, experiencing losses, awareness of the randomness of survival, the need to make decisions in conditions of uncertainty, and responsibility for the lives of other people actualise the basic existential givens of human existence. As a result, a soldier may experience a loss of meaning in life, inner emptiness, alienation from civilian life, an identity crisis, and difficulties integrating combat experience into their own biography (Black & Klinger, 2022).

As highlighted by T. Molendijk (2025), dealing with moral and existential trauma is one of the key tasks of psychological counselling for military personnel, because without their integration, even successful reduction of symptoms of anxiety or post-traumatic stress does not ensure the restoration of personal integrity. In the process of counselling, it is important to create conditions for rethinking the own experience, restoring personal meanings, reconstructing moral identity, and forming a new integrated self-image. In this context, the psychosynthetic ideal model technique is of particular value, as it allows combat experience to be acknowledged and incorporated into an updated self-concept, in which the service member remains not merely a bearer of traumatic memories but also a person capable of growth, responsible choice, and the pursuit of their own life values.

Ignoring moral and existential trauma can negatively affect not only the mental health of an individual soldier, but also the combat capability of a unit. The accumulation of unresolved internal conflicts leads to the development of emotional exhaustion, loss of motivation, decreased trust in commanders and fellow soldiers, deterioration of decision-making processes, increased impulsivity or, conversely, psychological inhibition. In the long run, this can lead to professional burnout, discipline disorders, and reduced psychological stability and effectiveness in performing combat missions. But timely psychological counselling aimed at transforming moral and existential trauma helps to restore internal integrity, develop resilience, strengthen responsible leadership, maintain the cohesion of the military team, and maintain long-term combat readiness of personnel (Kokun et al., 2021). The

theoretical analysis of contemporary existential concepts, the psychology of combat trauma, and the psychosynthetic approach allowed forming a complete model of transformation of existential pain of military personnel in the process of psychological counselling. In contrast to approaches focused mainly on reducing the symptoms of psychotraumatic stress, the proposed model considers combat experience as a potential source of personal transformation that occurs through rethinking the existential givens of human existence.

In the course of the study, a conceptual distinction was made between the concepts of existential givens and existential challenges. Existential givens are defined as objective, universal, and unchangeable characteristics of human existence that do not depend on individual beliefs or socio-cultural context. These include mortality, freedom, responsibility, fundamental isolation, physicality, the variability of life, suffering, and the lack of a predefined meaning of existence. J.A. Nieuwsma et al. (2015) noted that they form the basis of any human experience and cannot be eliminated, but only realised and accepted. Existential challenges arise as a subjective psychological reaction of the individual to awareness of the fundamental realities of human existence. The main challenges include finding the meaning of life, experiencing freedom of choice, responsibility for own decisions, experiencing loneliness, anxiety before death, and questions of personal identity and authenticity (Siegel, 2010). Based on the analysis, it was established that combat experience significantly intensifies a service member's engagement with all the major existential givens simultaneously. The constant proximity of death, the need to make decisions in conditions of uncertainty, the experience of losses, responsibility for the lives of other military personnel and the post-war return to civilian life significantly increase the intensity of existential pain. The source of psychological suffering is not the existential given itself, but in the way it is personally interpreted (Shyroкова et al., 2025). The study identified the main areas of psychological transformation of existential pain in the counselling process (Table 1).

Table 1. Main areas of transformation of existential pain in the process of psychological counselling of military personnel

Existential given	Manifestation of existential pain	Area of psychosynthetic transformation	Expected psychological outcome
Mortality	Fear of death, loss of the future	Accepting the finiteness of life	Awareness of the value of life
Freedom	Powerlessness, loss of control	Restoring inner agency	Responsible decision-making
Responsibility	Feeling of guilt	Rethinking of own role	Integration of moral experience
Isolation	Alienation, misunderstanding	Development of authentic relationships	Restoring trust
Absurdity/meaninglessness	Loss of meaning	Building personal meanings	New life perspective
Identity/physicality	Destroying of self-image	Reconstruction of the integral self-concept	Integrated sense of self

Source: compiled by the authors

Table 1 showed the relationship between the main manifestations of existential pain in military personnel and the corresponding areas of their psychosynthetic transformation. The presented areas cover rethinking the attitude to mortality, restoring subjectivity and responsibility, overcoming alienation, forming new life meanings, and

reconstructing an integral self-concept. It is assumed that such a transformation will contribute to the integration of combat experience and the restoration of the psychological integrity of personality, according to Y.V. Kucherenko et al. (2024), represents adaptive step-by-step algorithm for advising military personnel, in which the ideal model is

The main elements of the integrated psychosynthesis framework presented in Figure 1 as the “Egg” model, which represents the psychological structure of a service member experiencing existential pain, are characterised below. The lower unconscious contains the mental consequences of a traumatic combat experience, repressed experiences, intense affective reactions, fear of death, feelings of guilt, shame, powerlessness, and bodily responses to stress. It is at this level that a significant part of the experience of moral and existential trauma is localised. Existential pain can manifest as obsessive memories, somatic tension, sleep disturbances, an inner sense of danger, and emotional fragmentation. The middle unconscious provides an integration of acquired life experience, professional skills, and behavioural patterns. After a combat experience, it is at this level that the events experienced are gradually integrated into the overall autobiographical memory. Psychological counselling is aimed at transferring traumatic experiences from the sphere of emotional disorganisation to the level of meaningful life experience. The higher unconscious is a source of spiritual values, personal meanings, internal resources, moral guidelines, and the desire for self-realisation. This area becomes the main resource for the transformation of existential pain. Through an appeal to values, love, service, responsibility, and the meaning of life, the serviceman gradually rethinks the personal experience. The field of consciousness reflects the actual thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, and experiences of a serviceman. It is in the field of consciousness that the initial awareness of existential pain occurs, its acceptance and further rethinking

6.1. Intuition. Helps to discover new existential meanings, restore inner self-confidence, and find answers that cannot be obtained solely logically.

7.1. Will. Central integrating mechanism of psychosynthetic transformation. It is the will that coordinates all mental functions, ensures disidentification with traumatic experience, supports the construction, and achievement of an ideal model and its further implementation in life.

8.1. Personal Self. Acts as the central point of psychological changes. Through the process of disidentification, the soldier moves from the position of “I am my pain” to the position of “I experience pain, but it does not define me”.

Dynamic model of psychosynthesis (Sørensen, 2023):

1.3. Subpersonalities. Military personnel may experience the activation of various subpersonalities, including the “Warrior”, “Commander”, “Wounded”, “Rescuer”, “Inner Critic”, “Survivor”, “Father”, “Man”, “Victim”, and “Protector”. Psychological work within the framework of psychosynthesis is not aimed at eliminating these parts of the personality, but at their awareness, coordination and integration into the integral structure of the Self. In the diagram, each subpersonality is correlated with a dominant mental function and the corresponding level of the unconscious. Thus, the Subpersonality “Victim” can manifest itself at the level of the lower unconscious through unpleasant bodily sensations, experiences of powerlessness and inner emptiness.

2.3. Vertical development axis. Reflects two possible areas of personal dynamics after combat experience. Upward movement (psychosynthesis) involves accepting existential pain, developing awareness, disidentification, building an ideal model, forming new life meanings, and post-traumatic personal growth. Downward movement (regression) is characterised by fixation on traumatic experiences, increased psychological disintegration, avoidance, feelings of hopelessness, and narrowing of personal identity.

Within the proposed conceptual model, the number 11 indicates the final result of the psychosynthetic transformation of existential pain (an ideal model). It symbolises the achievement of a harmonious interaction between the personal Self, the Higher Self, mental functions, subpersonalities, and different levels of the psyche. After passing through the process of awareness, disidentification, building an ideal model and integrating combat experience, the serviceman forms a new integral self-concept, in which existential pain ceases to be a source of destruction and is transformed into a resource of personal development, psychological stability, and post-traumatic growth. Based on the complex model of psychosynthesis shown in Figure 1, a sequence of stages reflecting the logic of psychosynthetic counselling is determined. The first stage is not to reduce the intensity of existential pain, but to realise it as a carrier of important information about the inner world of a person. In psychosynthesis, pain is not considered solely as a pathological symptom that needs to be eliminated, but as a manifestation of an internal conflict between the actual way of existence of the individual and its deep development potential. That is why the consultant helps the serviceman to move from an automatic desire to get rid of pain to a position of careful study of its content. At the

centre of this approach is not the question “How to stop this pain?”, and “What does this pain signify?” (activation 5 in Figure 1). At this stage, the soldier can experience the phenomenon of “wonder at pain”, when he realises that the source of their suffering is not only a traumatic event, but also a collision with the fundamental existential givens of human existence. Further, there may be a “wonder at joy” – the discovery that behind the experience of pain is hidden a significant personal value, love, loyalty, a sense of duty, a desire for justice, or another resource that gives this pain its existential content. Surprise creates a psychological distance between a person and their experience and translates the reaction from an automatic emotional level to the plane of awareness. It is this awareness that creates the conditions for the transition from the experience of suffering to its semantic transformation in the field of consciousness (4). The second stage is the process of disidentification (de-identification) – one of the fundamental principles of psychosynthesis, which allows a person to stop identifying their own personality with individual experiences, roles, or crisis states (1.3). In the context of combat experience, this is particularly significant, as following trauma, a service member may begin to define themselves through their own pain: “I am traumatised”; “I am someone who lost fellow soldiers”; “I am a person who broke down”. This identification gradually narrows the self-concept, restricts the vision of the future, and supports the existential crisis.

In the process of counselling, the consultant helps the client to form a different internal position, which is reflected in psychosynthetic formulas: “I am not my pain – I am more than my pain”, “I am not my crisis – I am more than my crisis”, “I am not my traumatic experience – I am someone who experiences it and is able to give it a new meaning”. The process involves acknowledging the suffering while expanding the boundaries of personal identity. Pain is recognised as a real part of the experience, but it ceases to define the individual completely. The theoretical basis of such a process is one of the basic laws of psychosynthesis, formulated by R. Assagioli (2000): “We are dominated by everything we identify with; what we disidentify from, we can control”. It is disidentification that creates inner freedom in relation to own experiences. The serviceman gradually moves from the position of the object of injury to the position of the subject of their own life, able to realise, comprehend and actively transform personal experience. The process of disidentification is supported by other laws of psychosynthesis. According to the law of attention, any mental content on which consciousness concentrates for a long time becomes more powerful and influential. If a person’s entire attention is focused solely on pain, guilt, or loss, these experiences gradually become a central element of their identity. Instead, shifting attention to the inner Observer through the will (8.1), own resources, values, and developmental potential weakens the dominance of traumatic experiences and opens up the possibility of integrating new meanings. That is why, after the process of disidentification is

completed, it becomes possible to build an ideal model – a new integrated self-image that no longer denies combat experience, but also does not allow it to remain the only basis for self-identification (Sørensen, 2023). Thus, existential pain is gradually transformed from a source of destruction into a resource of personal development, and combat experience is integrated into the integral life history of a serviceman. The ideal model includes desired personal qualities, life values, ways to interact with the world, and future social roles. In psychosynthesis, the ideal model (11) is not considered an unattainable ideal or a fantasy image of perfection. It is a realistic model of personality development, reflecting its potential opportunities and direction of further integration, and the result of psychosynthetic transformation, in which the individual achieves internal integrity, retains functionality, the ability to self-regulate, and realise their own values despite the experienced existential pain. For this reason, the model is shaped in accordance with a person's inner values, meanings, and deeper aspirations, rather than social expectations or imposed standards (Firman & Gila, 2010).

The process of building an ideal model is associated with the phenomenon of an external unifying centre as a concrete support for self-realisation in activity and behaviour. The external unifying centre is formed through the establishment of a functional and semantic connection between the personal Self (8.1), the Higher Self (6), and the ideal model as an image achievable ideal (11), which is taken out of the elements of the “Egg” model, which together determine the course of integration of mental functions, subpersonalities, and levels of the psyche in the process of psychosynthesis. At the initial stages of psychological counselling, the client often needs a certain external reference point, which represents integrity, maturity, and the desired direction of personal development. Such a unifying centre can be a significant person, a spiritual ideal, a professional or moral model, a value system, or a symbolic image that evokes trust and inner response (Ferrucci, 1982). The external unifying centre serves as a temporary support, helping the serviceman overcome disorganisation caused by moral or existential trauma, and establish the course of further personal changes. As the psychosynthetic process develops, there is a gradual transition from the support to the external to the internal unifying centre, which, according to R. Assagioli (2000), is a True or Higher Self. Unlike the empirical (conscious, personal) Self, which can be temporarily identified with pain, crisis, social roles, or traumatic experiences, the True Self is seen as an unchanging centre of consciousness and will that preserves the integrity of the individual regardless of external circumstances. It is the establishment of contact with the True Self that allows integrating even the most painful experiences without losing own identity. An important mechanism of this process is the will (7.1), which was defined by R. Assagioli (2000) as the central function of the individual, providing conscious choice, inner freedom, and the ability to direct personal development.

After identifying with the traumatic experience, the serviceman gradually moves from a reactive experience of their own pain to an active development of the future self-image. Through repeated visualisation of the ideal model, its emotional residence, and the consistent transfer of individual characteristics to everyday behaviour, the will becomes an integrating force that combines conscious values, personal meanings, and specific actions. As a result, a new integrated self-image is formed, in which combat experience no longer defines the personality in its entirety but becomes one of the components of their life journey. The practical implementation of the proposed conceptual model is carried out using the psychosynthetic exercise “Building an ideal model”, adapted to the tasks of psychological counselling of military personnel experiencing existential pain. The exercise is based on the principle of using creative imagination to form a realistic image of an integrated personality, which is not a fantasy ideal or an unattainable model, but reflects the potential state of psychological integrity available to a particular person in the process of personal development. The goal of the technique is to gradually relinquish inauthentic self-images formed under the influence of traumatic experience, social expectations, and internal conflicts, and to create a new integrated image of the self that serves as a guide for further psychological transformation. The first stage of the exercise involves studying the client's self-images, in particular, false or partial models of the Self. With the help of managed visualisation, the client consistently addresses various ideas about the self: an understated or restrictive image, an idealised image, a fantasy image of the desired Self (“barren image” according to R. Assagioli), the image they seek to present to others, self-perceptions shaped by the evaluations of others, and the image they believe others would like to see in them. After visualising each image, the client reproduces it as a drawing or symbol at will and performs a brief reflection on the emotions, associations and meaning associated with it in their own life.

The second stage is disidentification. After analysing all the constructed images, the client becomes aware of their impact on their life, identifies those that constrain their development, and, through an act of will, symbolically relinquishes these inauthentic self-perceptions. At this stage, one of the basic principles of psychosynthesis is implemented – disidentification, according to which a person ceases to perceive individual roles, experiences, or consequences of a traumatic experience as identical to their own personality. The third stage is building an ideal model. After freeing themselves from previous images, the client is invited to create a new self-image that reflects their authentic values, life goals, and inner potential. The emphasis is therefore placed not on creating an unattainable ideal, but on developing a realistic model of a person capable of functioning effectively, accepting their own experience, and realising their life values. The resulting image is also recorded as a drawing or symbolic image and accompanied by written reflection. The fourth stage is the integration

of the ideal model. The final component of the exercise is the psychological “revival” of the created model. The client imagines themselves embodying the fully developed ideal model and gradually experiences typical life situations, modelling new ways of responding, behaving, and making decisions in accordance with the new personality structure. Regular repetition of this stage helps to transfer the existing internal changes to everyday life and consolidate new behavioural strategies.

The action of the exercise is based on a combination of several interrelated mechanisms of psychosynthesis. Disidentification (8.1/5) helps to separate the personal Self from traumatic experiences, negative roles, and limiting ideas about oneself, while creative imagination (4.1) allows forming a realistic image of further personal development. Activation of the will (7.1) is associated with the conscious choice of a new direction of development and its consistent implementation, and integration of subpersonalities (3.1) is associated with the coordination of internal roles and contradictory parts of the individual. Contact with the Higher Self (6) orients a person to authentic values, meanings, and personal potential, which together sets the stage for a gradual reconstruction of the self-concept (8.1) after a traumatic experience. Thus, building an ideal model in psychosynthesis is not limited to visualising the desired qualities, but involves a consistent restructuring of the way to perceive oneself and own experience. Such a process is aimed at moving from a fragmented identity formed under the influence of moral and existential trauma to a more holistic self-perception, consistent with the inner will, personal meanings and authentic values, which creates prerequisites for constructive integration of combat experience (Vargiu, 1974). An important result of the study was the substantiation that the central mechanism of psychological changes is the transformation of personal meanings, and not a direct decrease in the intensity of negative experiences. In psychosynthesis, the development of desired qualities and a new personal perspective occurs only after accepting and realising negative experiences, and not by displacing them. If during the development of an ideal model there is resistance or strengthening of negative emotions, this is considered as a manifestation of non-integrated internal conflicts that require separate study before further modelling of the desired image. Generalisation of the results gives grounds to assume that the use of the technique of building an ideal model in consulting military personnel can help to restore the integrity of personal identity, integrate combat experience into life history without its displacement, develop internal freedom and responsibility, form new personal meanings, and increase psychological stability. In addition, its use can potentially activate the processes of post-traumatic personal growth. Thus, the conducted research allowed developing a conceptual model of psychological counselling of military personnel, in which the algorithm for constructing an ideal model acts as a central psychosynthetic tool for integrating combat experience.

The problem of moral and existential trauma has become increasingly important in contemporary psychotherapy in recent years. Despite differences in theoretical approaches, most trends recognise that the psychological consequences of combat experience are not limited to the development of post-traumatic stress disorder or other mental disorders. Considerable attention is paid to restoring a person's ability to live in accordance with their own values, integrate traumatic experiences, restore identity, and form a new system of life meanings. However, the mechanisms for achieving these goals differ significantly in different psychotherapy schools. In cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), moral and existential pain is considered primarily through a system of dysfunctional beliefs, automatic thoughts, and cognitive distortions that were formed after traumatic events. The work of a psychologist is aimed at identifying such beliefs as “I am guilty”, “the world is dangerous”, “I will never be normal again”, their critical analysis and gradual cognitive restructuring. Contemporary adaptations of CBT for military personnel also place considerable emphasis on addressing guilt, shame, and traumatic memories (Herman, 1997). In acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), the central task is not to eliminate pain, but to develop psychological flexibility. It is believed that suffering is aggravated not by the traumatic experience itself, but by a person's struggle with their experiences. Therefore, the client learns to accept complex emotions without avoidance, identify with their thoughts (cognitive diffusion), be aware of their own values, and behave in accordance with these values, even in the presence of pain. When working with military personnel, ACT is particularly effective in overcoming moral trauma, when feelings of guilt cannot simply be refuted by logical arguments (Hayes et al., 2012). Scheme therapy considers existential experiences as a consequence of the activation of early maladaptive schemes and modes of personality, which can worsen after combat events. In particular, moral trauma often activates patterns of defection, punishment, distrust, emotional deprivation, or excessive standards. As noted by A. Arntz & G. Jacob (2013), counselling aims to identify these patterns, develop a “healthy adult” regimen, and develop more adaptive ways to respond to experiences. In Gestalt therapy, the central concern is unresolved experience and disruptions in a person's contact with themselves and the surrounding world. Combat experience may remain an unfinished Gestalt, manifested in recurring memories, emotional fixation, difficulty completing the grieving process, or inability to accept the loss. Psychotherapy work focuses on awareness of actual experiences “here and now”, completing emotionally incomplete situations, and integrating discarded aspects of the individual (Perls, 1969).

A special place in working with existential pain is occupied by logotherapy by V.E. Frankl (1966), which proceeds from the position of a person's desire for meaning as the main motivational force. From the standpoint of logotherapy, suffering itself does not destroy the individual, if a person is able to find or create the meaning in

their experience. Counselling is aimed at finding the personal meaning of combat experience, rethinking losses, responsibility, and own life vocation. It was logotherapy that for the first time systematically posed the problem of existential vacuum and loss of meaning as an independent psychological phenomenon. In existential psychotherapy, moral and existential pain is seen as a natural consequence of a person's encounter with the fundamental data of existence: mortality, freedom, responsibility, isolation, and the lack of a predefined meaning of life (Yeomans, 2018). The

task of the consultant is not to eliminate these experiences, but to create a space for their awareness, acceptance, and personal understanding. It is argued that confronting own finitude, responsibility, and freedom enables a person to live more authentically. The analysis of the theoretical foundations of these areas suggests that most of them focus mainly on individual components of the experience of moral or existential trauma: cognitive, emotional, behavioural, or semantic. A comparison of the methods is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparative table of psychotherapy schools working with the main manifestations of existential pain

Criteria	CBT	ACT	Logotherapy	Psychosynthesis
Work with symptoms	Present	Present	Partially present	Partially present
Work with meanings	Partially present	Present	Central focus	Central focus
Work with identity	Partially present	Present	Present	Central focus
Work with will	Not a focus	Partially present	Present	Central focus
Personal integration	Not a focus	Present	Present	Central focus

Note: the following scale is used for evaluation: “not a focus” – aspect is not included in the conceptual model of the approach; “partially present” – aspect is considered indirectly and does not constitute a separate target of the work; “present” – aspect is a component of the approach, but not its main focus; “central focus” – aspect forms the core of theoretical provisions and practical work within the approach

Source: compiled by the authors

Comparative analysis shows that CBT, ACT, and logotherapy focus primarily on individual aspects of existential pain, while psychosynthesis encompasses a broader set of targets, combining work with meanings, identity, will, and personality integration. This gives grounds to consider psychosynthesis as a more holistic conceptual approach to working out moral and existential trauma. But much less attention is paid to the process of holistic reconstruction of the individual after a combat experience, when not only the attitude to trauma changes, but also the very structure of self-identity, the system of internal roles, life prospects, and the image of the future. It is in this respect that R. Assagioli's (2000) psychosynthesis demonstrates its conceptual specificity. Unlike approaches that are primarily focused on accepting, comprehending, or cognitively re-evaluating experiences, psychosynthesis combines these processes with active personality integration. The central place is occupied by the mechanisms of disidentification, the development of the conscious self, work with the will, the integration of subpersonalities, and the construction of an ideal model, which allow not only to change the attitude to combat experience, but also to form a new integral personal organisation. In the context of moral and existential trauma, this is of fundamental importance. If moral trauma destroys the value system, and existential pain destroys life meanings and identity, then psychosynthesis offers tools aimed specifically at restoring the integrity of the individual, and not just at reducing symptoms or adapting to the experience experienced. Building an ideal model allows integrating combat experience into a person's life history, without denying it, but simultaneously not allowing it to become the only basis for self-identification. It is this integrative orientation that makes psychosynthesis a particularly promising method of

psychological counselling for military personnel experiencing moral trauma and existential pain.

The analysis of contemporary psychotherapeutic approaches has shown that they explain the nature of moral and existential trauma in different ways and use different mechanisms of psychological changes. The general trend of contemporary psychotherapy is a gradual transition from a symptom-centred model of care to working with meanings, values, moral identity, and personal integrity. It is in this context that psychosynthetic techniques, in particular, the technique of building an ideal model, can be considered as an integrative tool for psychological counselling of military personnel, which combines the rethinking of existential experience with the active development of a new image of themselves and their own future. Analysis of the developments of R. Assagioli (2000) allowed establishing that the ideal model technique has a significant potential for integrating traumatic experience, since its goal is not to create an unattainable image of an “ideal person”, but to form a realistic model of personality that corresponds to the current stage of human development and ensures its further psychosynthesis. The central mechanism of the technique is the creation of an achievable self-image, its repeated visualisation, experience, and gradual transfer to real behaviour.

◆ Conclusions

The conducted theoretical research allowed substantiating the expediency of considering the existential pain of military personnel as an independent subject of psychological counselling, which goes beyond the traditional symptom-centred model of psychological assistance. It was established that along with post-traumatic manifestations, a significant part of the military experiences moral and

existential trauma, which manifests itself in the loss of life meanings, violation of moral integrity, crisis of personal identity, and difficulties in integrating combat experience. It is these phenomena that largely determine the long-term psychological consequences of war and require a separate methodological understanding. As a result of the study, a conceptual model of transformation of existential pain in psychological counselling of military personnel was developed, which was based on the principles of psychosynthesis by R. Assagioli. Thus, the expediency of using the algorithm for constructing an ideal model as a tool for integrating combat experience in the process of psychological counselling was substantiated. The proposed approach was focused on restoring personal integrity, transforming existential meanings, and forming an integrated self-concept, within which combat experience was included in the life history of the individual, without determining its self-identification.

The sequence of psychosynthetic counselling, which included awareness of existential pain through the phenomena of “wonder at pain” and “wonder at joy”, the process of disidentification with traumatic experience, the construction of an ideal model, and the integration of new personal meanings, was theoretically substantiated. It was shown that this sequence creates conditions for the transition from experiencing moral and existential trauma to post-traumatic personal growth, the development of inner freedom, responsibility, and psychological stability. A

comparative analysis of contemporary psychotherapeutic approaches has shown that most of them work effectively with individual cognitive, emotional, behavioural, or semantic aspects of traumatic experience. Psychosynthesis is characterised by an integrative orientation, since it combines work with existential meanings, moral values, identity, and personal development potential in a single consultative process. It can therefore be considered a promising method of psychological support for military personnel experiencing moral and existential trauma. Prospects for further research are related to empirical testing of the proposed model and evaluation of the effectiveness of psychosynthetic interventions in dealing with moral and existential trauma of military personnel.

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♦ **Анотація.** Актуальність дослідження зумовлена потребою в розширенні сучасних підходів до психологічного консультування військовослужбовців із бойовим досвідом. Поряд із посттравматичними, тривожними та депресивними проявами важливими наслідками бойового досвіду є моральна травма й екзистенційний біль, що можуть спричиняти втрату життєвих смислів, порушення моральної цілісності та кризи особистісної ідентичності. Це визначає необхідність застосування консультативних моделей, орієнтованих не лише на редукцію симптомів, а й на інтеграцію бойового досвіду, відновлення особистісної цілісності та формування нових життєвих смислів. Метою дослідження було теоретичне обґрунтування можливостей психосинтезу у трансформації екзистенційного болю військовослужбовців через концепцію побудови ідеальної моделі за Р. Ассаджіолі в інтеграції бойового досвіду в процесі психологічного консультування. Методологічною основою дослідження стали методи теоретичного аналізу, синтезу, порівняння, систематизації та узагальнення сучасних наукових джерел із психології бойової травми, моральної травми, екзистенційної психології, психосинтезу та психологічного консультування. Проведено порівняльний аналіз сучасних психотерапевтичних підходів до роботи з моральною та екзистенційною травмою, зокрема когнітивно-поведінкової терапії, терапії прийняття та відповідальності, схема-терапії, гештальт-терапії, логотерапії та екзистенційної психотерапії. У результаті дослідження запропоновано концептуальну модель трансформації екзистенційного болю військовослужбовців засобами психосинтезу, центральним елементом якої визначено техніку побудови ідеальної моделі. Обґрунтовано етапи психосинтетичного консультування, що включає усвідомлення екзистенційного болю через феномени «здивування від болю» та «здивування від радості», розототожнення з травматичним досвідом, встановлення контакту зі Справжнім Я (Вищим Я), активізацію волі, побудову ідеальної моделі та інтеграцію бойового досвіду у цілісну систему особистісних смислів. Показано, що моральна травма та екзистенційний біль виникають унаслідок актуалізації фундаментальних екзистенційних даностей людського буття й супроводжуються порушенням моральної ідентичності, системи цінностей і життєвих перспектив. На відміну від симптомоцентричних моделей психологічної допомоги, запропонований підхід орієнтований на реконструкцію цілісної Я-концепції, інтеграцію внутрішніх конфліктів і розвиток особистісного потенціалу. Практична цінність дослідження полягає в можливості застосування запропонованої психосинтетичної моделі у консультуванні військовослужбовців і ветеранів, а також у програмах психологічного супроводу та підготовки фахівців

♦ **Ключові слова:** Вище Я; воля; ідентичність особистості; моральна травма; психосинтез; розототожнення; смисложиттєві орієнтації