

UDC 3789.8.304.477+37.06

DOI: 10.15587/2519-4984.2023.275023

CHILDREN'S PLAY DURING WARTIME IN UKRAINE FROM THE PRESCHOOL TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

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The article analyzes the results of a study that reveals characteristics of preschool children play activities in the conditions of the war in Ukraine, which were collected in two regions of the country significantly different in the scope of military operations carried out, life activities of the population (in the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine and territories under Ukrainian control), as well as peculiarities of preschool education itself. The objectives of the research were: to find and highlight changes in the content, types and organizational forms of play activities of preschool children in the conditions of war based on the results of observations by preschool teachers; to identify the level of awareness of preschool teachers regarding play resources as an effective tool for psychosocial support of children in war conditions; to determine the need for preschool teachers to develop their skills in facilitating children's play activities in war conditions for the introduction of appropriate measures in the system of postgraduate pedagogical education; to approve a set of diagnostic tools for further research. The results of the research proved that: 1) the war in Ukraine significantly changed a nature of play activities of preschool children compared to the pre-war period, which is reflected in: the dominance of various plots of military actions in the content of a play, while children play new roles (of a positive nature – military, rescuers, fire-fighters, volunteers, doctors, construction workers, etc.), conditioned by the new military reality; children's active use of toy weapons and toy substitutes for modern weapons; increased time, spent on computer games, including war-themed games; reduced time, spent on play in general and free play in particular; refusal of children from noisy, active games in favor of quiet, quiet play alone; growing need of children for greater attention of adults during the play; emotional excitement of children, dominance of negative emotions in the play; increased weight of creative activities in children's daily routine, including play. The specified changes are found both in play activities of boys and girls of preschool age; 2) preschool teachers are aware of the importance of play for supporting the child's well-being in wartime conditions. They consider the level of their own knowledge and skills to support play activities of preschoolers to be insufficient, and so understand the urgent need for their additional training In-service Teacher Training institutions in the area of play facilitation

Keywords: play, war, preschoolers, preschool teachers, facilitation, postgraduate pedagogical education

How to cite:

Gura, T., Roma, O. (2023). Children's play during wartime in Ukraine from the preschool teacher's perspective. ScienceRise: Pedagogical Education, 1 (52), 17–22. doi: <http://doi.org/10.15587/2519-4984.2023.275023>

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1. Introduction

The large-scale armed aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine caused drastic changes in all spheres of life of Ukrainians, which should definitely be reflected in the content, organizational forms and types of play activities of Ukrainian children, as well as the role of adults – parents and teachers in its support. After all, it is the play that reproduces and projects the events that take place in the child's life, reflects his/her external and internal world; it is of fundamental importance for the development of a person, in all his/her spheres; it has a huge resource for supporting the child's well-being in extremely difficult living conditions, which should be fully involved in the national educational process in the war and post-war periods. In addition, it is important to realize the extreme importance of children's play in

terms of such global trends as commercialization, marketization and didacticization, a critical reduction of the child's time for free play, the lack of a safe space, replacement by digital, computer forms [1], which requires significant changes in the professional training and postgraduate education of teachers of preschool education institutions (hereinafter referred to as PEI).

Therefore, it is extremely relevant for modern psychological and pedagogical science and educational practice to study the peculiarities of play activities of Ukrainian preschool children in war conditions for the appropriate urgent correction of the content of higher and postgraduate pedagogical education, the tasks of scientific-methodical and organizational support of the professional activities of teachers of special education, as well as an appropriate direction of educational work with

parents of preschoolers. After all, in the conditions of war, children's play becomes not only its victim, but also a powerful means of combating it [2].

2. Literary review

The analysis of various scientific studies on children's play shows that despite more than a hundred years of studying the phenomenon of children's play in world and domestic psychological science, there are many concepts of play that focus on its influence on various areas of a child's mental development, in addition, – significant achievements in the research of Ukrainian folk play and Ukrainian play culture by domestic scientists – ethnologists and folklorists (B. Grinchenko, N. Zaglada, M. Maksymovych, K. Sementovskiy, I. Shcherbak, etc.), teachers and psychologists (L. Artemova, A. Bogush, V. Kotyrlo, O. Savchenko, K. Shcherbakova, etc.), the problem of determining the characteristics of children's play in the conditions of war remains unsolved both in the world and domestic scientific space. This is evidenced by the presence of only isolated scientific works, devoted to its research, both in modern ethnology and in pedagogy and psychology.

Thus, P. Bankova [3], R. Caillois [4], T. Hyder [5], M. Heikkilä [6], D. Feldman [2], Levin E. Diane Nancy Carlsson-Paige [7] and others who in their writings to one or another degree relied on the works of the founder of play philosophy J. Huizinga [8] devoted their works to the peculiarities of children's play in wartime.

As P. Bankova points out, in children's plays and toys, all wars find their direct reflection, the content of the "war play" itself reflects all the features of military operations - starting from the time of year, in which battles take place, and ending with specific types of struggle, weapons, military-heroes. And this applies both to real wars, such as the Second World War, and to the Cold War of the 20th century [3].

In his book "Man, Play, and Games", R. Caillois pays considerable attention to the separation of free, spontaneous play as a source of joy and inspiration for the child ("play") from organized, controlled game according to the rules ("game"), war, according to the scientist, is integrally reflected in both types of playing activity, changes their content and forms [4].

Based on the results of research on the play of refugee children, T. Hyder [5] concludes that, on the one hand, war destroys children's play, and on the other hand, it is the most effective healing tool for young children who have suffered from war and military conflicts, and it is play that can return children to their lost childhood [5]. Children's play in wartime has its own specific gender characteristics (M. Heikkilä [6]), which should be taken into account in the educational process.

As noted by Levin E. Diane, Nancy Carlsson-Paige [7], it is extremely important to carry out educational work with children's parents and teachers regarding the correct response to children's plays of war, toy weapons, models of behavior in play, etc.

In his book "Homo Ludens", J. Huizinga, investigating the connection between play and war, asserts its ontological nature. Although the essential features of play do not coincide with the features of war, because play, according to the author, is voluntary, but the state of war is imposed on at least one of the participants; play

has its rules, but war knows no rules [8], however, war is reflected in play as in human culture, war and play are closely intertwined. It is interesting and extremely dramatic that, as a witness of the two world wars, J. Huizinga, exploring the concept of war in the context of the play concept of culture, leaves out of his attention the facts of history that are not related to the Middle Ages, ritual and ancient legends, creating contradictions regarding of the results of his own analysis of the play phenomenon [9].

The subject of D. Feldman's scientific research was the study of changes in children's play during the war, both in modern and historical experience, as well as a comparison of the play experience of children in Syria, where the war began in 2011, and in the Nazi-occupied territory of Eastern Europe (in concentration camps, secret bunkers of the Holocaust) [2].

According to the results of a comparative analysis, D. Feldman claims the following: 1) the war attacks children's play, primarily free play, makes it fragile due to the lack of a safe playing environment, which causes the emergence of underground play in the literal sense of the word in Syria (in basement bunkers, protected from bombings) and chamber play during the Holocaust; 2) war forces children to adapt their play to specify and understand their own traumatic experience; 3) although the war destroys play, makes it impossible for many children for a certain time, children still play all kinds of games (sports, entertainment, creative, dramatic, etc.); 4) war causes the emergence of unique play plots that reflect the traumatic life experiences of children, the emergence of extreme play, in which children play with death, act out their own deaths and play a way out of death (for example, a game, called "Going to the gas chamber", playing doctor, roll call, etc. of Jewish children in Auschwitz, Auschwitz-Birkenau, etc. [10]); 5) war turns play into a way of learning, which makes it possible to organize a child's life in chaotic and dangerous conditions [2].

Terrible, extremely traumatic for Ukrainians, but at the same time the unique experience of the war in Ukraine in the 21st century on the European continent acutely actualizes the need for an empirical study of the peculiarities of play activities of preschool children, which reveals the resources of play in supporting their well-being in the war and post-war periods.

3. Research aim and tasks

The aim of the study is to determine the characteristics of play activities of preschool children in the conditions of war in Ukraine based on the results of a survey of teachers of preschool education institutions in two regions of Ukraine, which differ significantly in the characteristics of the course of military actions, life activities of the population (in the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine and territories under Ukrainian control), as well as peculiarities of activities of preschool education institutions.

To achieve the goal, the following tasks were set:

1) to find out changes in the content, types and organizational forms of play activities of preschool children in war conditions based on the results of educators' observations;

2) to reveal the level of awareness of play resources as an effective tool for psychosocial support of children in war conditions among educators;

3) to determine the needs of educators in the development of their skills in facilitating children's play activities in war conditions for the introduction of appropriate measures in the system of postgraduate pedagogical education;

4) to probate diagnostic tools for further research.

4. Materials and methods

During November–December 2022 (9 months after the start of the war), a survey was conducted among preschool teachers in two regions of Ukraine: Zaporizhzhia and Odesa regions. The specified regions of Ukraine have their own characteristics regarding the life of the population, the functioning of educational institutions, the organization of the educational process, as well as the professional activity of teachers of special education in the conditions of war, which are reflected in the following portraits of the regions.

Portrait of the Zaporizhzhia region

The large-scale armed aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine led to the temporary occupation and presence in the combat zone (as of 01.12.2022) of more than 83 % of the territorial communities of the Zaporizhzhia region with more than 500 educational institutions, to the destruction of more than 155 educational institutions, as well as to a change of residence of a significant part of the population, including - pedagogical workers of the region. Thus, according to the statistical data of the Department of Education and Science of the Zaporizhzhia Regional State Administration as of December 1, 2022, more than 38 % of the teachers of preschool education institutions carry out their professional activities outside their place of permanent residence: more than 14 % of the preschool teachers work outside Ukraine, more than 24 % of the specialists - in other territories of Ukraine. Since the first day of the war, the educational process in the Zaporizhzhia region has been carried out remotely and is primarily aimed at creating safe conditions for applicants and all employees of educational institutions, some PEIs have entered face-to-face/remote (blended) work mode for the time of the study.

Portrait of the Odesa region

As a result of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, at least 400 civil infrastructure objects, including educational institutions, were damaged in the Odesa region due to missile strikes, airstrikes and landmines. After the liberation of part of the Kherson region, the Odesa region became one of the regions of Ukraine that received a large number of internally displaced persons (as of 01.12.2022) – 129,151 persons were registered, 37,809 (30 %) of them were children. As of August 1, 2022, 854 internally displaced children were enrolled in pre-school education institutions in the region.

Since the beginning of the war, the educational process in preschool education institutions of the Odesa region was introduced in a distance format with a gradual transition to a face-to-face/blended format. As of August 1, 2022, out of 796 intact preschool education institutions of the Odesa region, taking into account the security situation, 20 (2.5 %) institutions work in a face-to-face format, 128 (16 %) – in a remote format, others – in a blended format. The activities of preschool education institutions of the Odesa region are primarily aimed at creating a safe educational environment, ensuring the

provision of quality educational services in accordance with the requirements of current legislation and the Basic component of preschool education.

Therefore, conducting a study of the peculiarities of play activities of preschool children in the conditions of war with the participation of educators from the specified regions of Ukraine makes it possible to determine the main directions of the dynamics of children's play in terms of its content, organizational forms and factors, as well as the professional needs of teachers in terms of its facilitation.

The survey was conducted using the author's questionnaire, which consisted of 9 auxiliary socio-demographic questions and 10 questions of the main part.

The main part of the questionnaire contained closed questions (Do you think that the play of preschool children has changed significantly in the conditions of martial law? Did you and the parents of the children discuss the issue of play in the conditions of martial law, how often? Do you agree that play is an effective tool of psychosocial support for children in wartime conditions? Do you consider it necessary to provide additional training for preschool teachers to facilitate children's play in wartime conditions?) and open questions (How exactly, in your opinion, did the play of preschool children change in wartime conditions (give examples)? What new games do children play in wartime (give examples)? Complete the sentences: "In my opinion, child's play in wartime ..."), formulated in accordance with the research task. The filling method is electronic (using google.forms).

The research sample is a non-probabilistic convenience one, which involved the inclusion of subgroups of the pedagogical community in a proportion, determined by the researchers.

56 teachers of PEI who gave voluntary consent took part in the study (64 % of the respondents from the Zaporizhzhia region, 38 % from the Odesa region), 100 % women aged 27 to 62 years, with a total of 4 to 45 years of teaching experience. Participation of the teachers was voluntary.

Among the respondents: 48 % of the teachers work in PEIs of the regional center; at the time of the study, 55.5 % were permanently residing in the controlled territory of Ukraine, 11 % were permanently residing in the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine (respondents from the Zaporizhzhia region), 30 % were not permanently residing in the territory of Ukraine, outside Ukraine – 7.4 % of specialists.

Taking into account the fact that for the past 10 years, within the framework of the project "Care for Education" under the initiative of the LEGO Foundation, Ukrainian teachers of PEIs have actively participated in trainings on Pedagogy of Play, it was important to find out the presence of such experience, therefore, 35 % of the respondents of the Zaporizhzhia region were participants in such trainings and only 10 % – of the Odesa region, which is 26 % of the total number. Participation in trainings, special courses, webinars on the subject of game pedagogy, which were organized by other educational service providers over the past three years, was attended by 57 % of the educators of Zaporizhzhia PEIs and 35 % of Odesa ones, which is 49 % of the entire

sample. So, among the respondents there are those who have up-to-date expert knowledge of modern pedagogy of play, including within the framework of the LEGO Foundation "Care for Education" project in preschool.

It was important for solving research tasks to find out the potential opportunity of educators to directly observe children's play activities in war conditions, to compare it with the pre-war period, which is a key to analyzing the received empirical data and formulating conclusions. To do this, the respondents were asked questions about the existing form of the educational process in PEIs and their assessment of the current opportunity to observe the play of preschool children both in the role of teachers and in the role of parents, as well as members of families with children.

So, among the respondents, only educators of the Odesa region work offline (9 % of the respondents), 14 % of the teachers work in a blended form, remotely – 68 %, 12 % are on layoff/temporarily not working. However, the vast majority of the interviewed teachers of PEIs confirmed that they have their own opportunities to observe children's play activities in war conditions (43 respondents, which are 77 % of the total sample). *The responses of teachers who did not have the opportunity to directly observe play activities of children in war conditions were not taken into further analysis.*

Thus, the actual position of a preschool teacher, the experience of pedagogical activity in preschool in general and in the pre-war period in particular, as well as the opportunity available to the interviewed teachers to observe the play of children in kindergarten and/or in the family, are grounds for considering the answers of the respondents as expert, and the data obtained – reliable and trustworthy.

5. Research results and their discussion

According to the results of the conducted research, data were obtained that testify to the following.

1. The interviewed teachers of preschool education believe that the play of preschool children has changed significantly during the war compared to the pre-war period. This was confirmed by 91 % of the respondents, of whom this opinion was confirmed by 100 % of the preschool teachers in the Zaporizhzhia region and 78 % in the Odesa region. Moreover, 22 % of the respondents noted the presence of more significant changes in playing activities of boys, whose play acquired a special, different from girls', military content, when a play necessarily involves the death of a person or an animal.

2. The main changes in play activities of preschool children in wartime conditions, according to the observations of PEI educators are the following:

Firstly, – the dominance of various plots of military actions in the content of a play (86 % of the respondents noted this), namely: helping the military, playing to order and manufacturing military equipment; designing and launching missiles, tanks, drones, etc. weapons; playing the military of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, territorial defense, partisans, sappers; playing rescuers, firefighters, who dismantle rubble after missile strikes; helping volunteers, playing volunteers who help others, including providing medical care; digging trenches, building protective military structures, bunkers and

checkpoints; play of evacuation, which manifests itself in the playing of such plots as packing an alarming suitcase; packing things in case of a forced change of residence as a result of active hostilities, taking care of animals that change their place of residence together with the family; play of air alerts, bomb shelter building.

Among educators who are in the temporarily occupied territories of the Zaporizhzhia region, children's play have become new in terms of their plot: play of partisans, hostages, accountants and photographers of enemy equipment.

As an example of a teacher from the temporarily occupied territory of the Zaporizhzhia region - "a boy who did not know how to count often saw columns of tanks, built columns of tanks from stones in the yard and learned to count."

Moreover, 22 % of the educators noted the significant impoverishment of children's playing activities as to their plots, playing the same plots of military actions in the game for a long time.

In addition, according to the observations of the educators, plays with military themes are typical for both boys and girls, this was noted by 19 % of the respondents from both regions of Ukraine.

It is interesting, that none of the interviewed teachers of PEIs did not mention negative characters among the heroes of children's story play: even in group play, children played the roles of defenders-heroes, volunteers, rescuers, etc., they did not feature aggressors, attackers, occupiers, "rashists". This is not quite typical for children's story role-playing games, but it clearly indicates the nature of those social actions, aspects of adult life, which they reproduce in the play process.

Secondly, – children actively use toy weapons and toys that are substitutes for modern weapons, for example, "sticks – javelins", "pieces of slate – bayraktars", "stones – rockets", etc.

Thirdly, – increasing the time, spent on computer games, including military ones. According to the observations of PEI educators, "even when there is an opportunity to play together, with toys, children often prefer playing on a phone or tablet."

Fourthly, – reducing the time for playing. Thus, educators note that "with the beginning of the war, children grow up faster", "they refuse to play", "play have become more limited in time, are interrupted by air alarms", "play sare becoming more mature", "children began to play adult games with their parents more often". In this context, children's reproduction in their play of the actions of adults related to war (cruel, obsessively protective, extreme, like demining, pulling out from under rubble, etc.), as noted by educators, is dangerous for them, their mental health.

Fifthly, – children's rejection of noisy, active play in favor of quiet, sedentary play alone. This is caused by the critical limitation of safe space for children to play, which has moved from playgrounds, kindergarten yards, houses and parks to basements, corridors and bomb shelters. As the educators note, "children hardly communicate with their peers", "they play alone, even when they are in a children's group", "children no longer have the opportunity to play active, active play in the basement, where the child has to sit and hardly move."

Sixthly, – the growing need of children for more attention from adults, support of the teacher during the play: "children want the teacher to be nearby", "to hold their hand".

Seventhly, – the emotional excitement of children during the play process; the dominance of such emotional reactions of children in the game as anger, rage, anxiety, fear, as well as sadness and sorrow.

Eighthly, – increasing the importance of creative activities in children's daily activities, including in play, primarily construction and drawing: "if children do not have the opportunity to play on a tablet or phone, they draw, sing", "they often draw patriotic pictures to hand over to the military", "they draw and sing about red viburnum", "they build something from what they find nearby".

3. Preschool educators are aware of the importance of play in maintaining the child's well-being in wartime conditions. Yes, 100 % of the respondents agree that play is an effective tool for psychosocial support of children. According to teachers, child's play in war conditions:

– this is "an effective way to cope with stress, negative emotions, fears", "a natural way to distract yourself and immerse yourself in another reality", "a way to escape from war and its consequences", "a certain rescue strategy", "an opportunity to return to the usual/normal/peaceful life";

– becomes even more important from the point of view of child development than in peacetime; "acquires much more therapeutic meaning".

However, as the educators from the temporarily occupied territories of the Zaporizhzhia region note, in certain situations play can be "used by enemy propaganda", "be abnormal, destructive", and therefore, the teacher should activate children's patriotic play, "gently lead the plot of the play to a more positive direction" etc.

In addition, the surveyed teachers are aware of the insufficient level of their own knowledge and skills to support preschool children's play activities in war conditions, they understand the need for their additional training to facilitate children's play in difficult conditions, as noted by 95 % of the interviewed preschool educators.

4. Despite the awareness of the PEI teachers of the important role of an adult in the playing activity of a child in the conditions of war, the urgent need for parental support, 37 % of the respondents have never discussed these issues with their children's parents, and only 14 % do it constantly.

Since the conducted research is of a pilot nature, the prospects for further scientific research are seen in: conducting a comparative analysis of the features of play of Ukrainian children who live in different conditions and in different territories; determining the gender characteristics of children's play in war conditions, as well as current models of adults' involvement in children's play.

6. Conclusions

The results of the conducted research make it possible to state the following.

1. The war in Ukraine significantly changed play activities of preschool children compared to the pre-war period, which, in turn, is manifested in:

1) the dominance of various plots of military actions in the content of a play and children's playing of new roles (of a positive nature) due to the new war reality;

2) children's active use of toy weapons and toy substitutes for modern weapons;

3) increasing the time, spent on computer games, including war-themed games;

4) reduction of playing time;

5) refusal of children from noisy, active play in favor of quiet, sedentary play alone;

6) growing need of children for greater attention of adults during the play;

7) emotional excitement of children, dominance of negative emotions in the play;

8) increasing the importance of creative activity in children's daily activities, including play.

Moreover, the mentioned changes are manifested both in play activities of boys and girls of preschool age. Depending on the nature of military operations in the region, play activities of preschool children are distinguished by their features in terms of the content of their plots and roles, which requires additional attention.

2. The PEI educators are aware of the importance of play for maintaining the child's well-being in wartime conditions, consider play an effective tool for combating stress, and a means of psychological recovery. However, the reproduction by children in their play of actions related to war (sometimes cruel, obsessive defensive, extreme, etc.) requires special skills from adults as a partner in the play.

3. The preschool educators are aware of the insufficient level of their own knowledge and skills to support preschool children's play activities in war conditions, note their own need for additional training in play facilitation, including in the aspect of applying art pedagogic (primarily, visual and constructive) methods. Special attention needs to be paid to the issue of partnership between teachers of preschool education and parents of preschool children regarding the use of play resources to support the child's well-being in extremely difficult living conditions, as well as targeted educational activities for parents.

4. The obtained results of the pilot study make it possible to design further scientific research on the study of children's play activities in the conditions of war in Ukraine, as well as to implement effective educational measures to prepare teachers of preschool educational institutions and parents of preschoolers to facilitate children's play in order to support their well-being in the extraordinary realities of life.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in relation to this study, including financial, personal, authorship, or any other, that could affect the study and its results, presented in this article.

Funding

The study was conducted without financial support.

Data availability

The manuscript has associated data in the data repository.

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Received date 15.12.2022

Accepted date 19.01.2023

Published date 31.01.2023

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