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PSYCHOLOGICAL ADAPTATION OF PRISONERS OF WAR: ISSUES OF LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

The article examines the psychological adaptation of prisoners of war within international humanitarian law. Attention is given to the Third Geneva Convention, Nelson Mandela Rules, and the role of the International Committee of the Red Cross. The study highlights how legal standards help preserve emotional balance and identity, and argues for an interdisciplinary approach combining legal and psychological support.

Key words: *prisoners of war, psychological adaptation, international humanitarian law, Geneva Convention, Red Cross, Mandela Rules, emotional resilience.*

Target setting. In the context of modern armed conflicts, there is a growing need for a comprehensive understanding of the psychological condition of prisoners of war, particularly the processes of their adaptation to conditions of isolation, uncertainty, and loss of control over their own lives. Psychological adaptation in captivity requires consideration not only of the individual's internal resources but also of external regulatory factors, particularly the legal norms that define the conditions of detention. The issue of integrating psychological and legal approaches in the study of prisoners of war adaptation remains insufficiently explored, which determines the relevance of this research.

Actual scientific researches and issues analysis. In Ukrainian academic literature, the issue of prisoners' adaptation is addressed in the works of M. Blazhivskyi, V. Stadnyk, and N. Pavlyk, who emphasize the psychosocial nature of adaptation, the role of self-regulation, emotional stability, and support from the social environment. Particular importance in this context is

given to institutional conditions that either facilitate or hinder the adaptation process.

The legal dimension of the issue is analyzed through the lens of international humanitarian law, particularly the provisions of the Third Geneva Convention on the Treatment of Prisoners of War (1949), the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules, 2015), and the practical activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The ICRC document “Guidance on the Psychological Support of Detainees” (2021) is considered an example of integrating legal and psychological tools for supporting individuals in detention.

Taken together, these sources outline the multidimensional nature of the issue under study, yet they remain insufficiently integrated with one another. This highlights the need for further interdisciplinary analysis at the intersection of psychology, law, and humanitarian practice.

The Purpose of the Article. The purpose of this article is to analyze the psychological factors influencing the adaptation of prisoners of war to detention conditions, to examine their impact on mental resilience and daily behavior, and to assess the extent to which current legal frameworks address the need for psychological support for this category of individuals.

The statement of basic materials. In the context of modern armed conflicts, the issue of psychological adaptation of prisoners of war becomes particularly relevant. Captivity involves a sudden change in living conditions, the loss of control over one's situation, the restriction of basic rights, and the need to adapt to a challenging detention environment. These circumstances create significant emotional and psychological pressure, requiring an in-depth analysis of adjustment mechanisms, emotional regulation, and the maintenance of mental stability. At the same time, this issue has a legal dimension, as the conditions of detention for prisoners of war are regulated by norms of international humanitarian law. Therefore, the study of psychological processes in captivity should be conducted at the intersection of legal and psychological sciences.

Prisoners of war, as a distinct category of individuals, are placed in a specific environment where their freedom is restricted, the structure of daily life is altered, and social roles and expectations are transformed. In such conditions, emotional stability, the ability to self-regulate, the preservation of core motivational attitudes, and adaptive behavior become critically important. These processes are the focus of analysis within the framework of legal psychology.

Within the framework of this study, the main normative references are the provisions of the Third Geneva Convention on the Treatment of Prisoners of War (1949), the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules), and the activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The Geneva Convention outlines the obligations of the parties to an armed conflict to ensure humane treatment of prisoners, particularly regarding detention conditions, the provision of medical care, and psychological safety. In turn, the Mandela Rules complement these provisions by establishing ethical standards in the treatment of persons deprived of liberty, emphasizing the importance of mental health support, the prevention of dehumanization, and the need for an individualized approach to each detainee.

The work of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is of particular importance, as it is a neutral humanitarian organization with a unique mandate to visit prisoners of war and monitor their conditions of detention. The legal foundation for the ICRC's activities is laid out in the Geneva Conventions, and its practice demonstrates how international norms are implemented on a practical level through humanitarian action. In this context, the ICRC not only ensures compliance with the rights of prisoners of war, but also actively contributes to meeting their psychological needs—through mediation, the transmission of messages, and facilitating access to medical and psychological care. Therefore, any analysis of the legal mechanisms for the adaptation of prisoners of war to conditions of isolation must take into account the role of the ICRC as a key humanitarian actor within the international legal system [1].

The relevance of this study lies in the need for a deeper understanding of the psychological mechanisms of adaptation among prisoners of war within the framework of existing legal regulations, as well as the necessity to develop practical recommendations for providing psychological support to such individuals in accordance with the norms of international humanitarian law. Adaptation of prisoners of war to conditions of detention is not only an internal psychological process, but also an important indicator of the effectiveness of legal and humanitarian mechanisms in the context of armed conflict. The degree to which mental health, emotional stability, and self-regulation are maintained among prisoners reflects not only their personal psychological resources, but also the extent to which legal guarantees enshrined in international humanitarian law are properly ensured.

Effective psychological adaptation under conditions of isolation is the result of a combination of factors, such as: humane treatment; the provision of contact with the outside world (including access to correspondence and family communication); access to medical and psychological assistance; and the avoidance of situations involving moral humiliation or identity disorientation.

From a humanitarian perspective, the adaptation of prisoners of war is a crucial condition for preserving their human dignity under conditions of restricted freedom. From a legal standpoint, it serves as an indicator of how effectively the provisions of the Geneva Convention and the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners are applied, as well as the extent to which the principles of respect for human rights and personal integrity are upheld in practice.

In modern psychological science, the concept of adaptation is understood as a holistic process of active adjustment of the individual to changing environmental conditions. According to M. I. Blazhivskyi, adaptation encompasses not only the biological response of the organism to external influences, but also the socio-psychological mechanisms that ensure effective interaction between the individual and a new social situation. In

this context, adaptation is viewed as a multi-level system that includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components aimed at achieving internal balance and maintaining personal integrity under conditions of change and stress. The author places special emphasis on the distinction between biological and social levels of adaptation. The former relates to the physiological functioning of the body, while the latter involves psychological and behavioral responses to social reality. This approach allows adaptation to be seen as a dynamic process that constantly evolves under the influence of external challenges, particularly in extreme environments such as detention or captivity [2, p. 236].

According to the definition provided by the American Psychological Association, adaptation is the ability of an individual to respond appropriately to changed or changing situations and to modify their behavior in accordance with different circumstances, which constitutes an essential component of psychological adjustment in extreme conditions [3]. Thus, adaptation is not only an individual capacity for resilience but also the result of interaction between the individual and the socio-legal environment in which they are compelled to function.

Under conditions of isolation, forced environmental change, and threat to life, the process of psychological adaptation plays a crucial role in maintaining the internal balance of prisoners of war. As noted by V. A. Stadnyk, adaptation in wartime is a multi-level phenomenon that encompasses the biological, psychological, and social dimensions of an individual's functioning. Its essence lies in the gradual adjustment to new circumstances through cognitive and emotional restructuring, as well as the modification of behavioral responses that help preserve mental well-being under stress. According to the researcher, the adaptive process unfolds through several stages: awareness of change, formation of coping strategies, cognitive restructuring, and self-reflection. The ability to undergo such internal transformation determines a person's resilience to extreme factors such as isolation, loss of control, lack of support, and uncertainty about the future. In this context, adaptation also

serves as the foundation for the development of resilience – the ability to maintain psychological integrity despite repeated exposure to stressful events [4, p. 113].

Among the factors that contribute to effective adaptation, V. A. Stadnyk identifies: a well-developed self-esteem, the ability to self-regulate, the presence of at least minimal social support, cognitive flexibility, and a value orientation focused on preserving dignity and meaning. Conversely, the risk factors for psychological maladaptation include anxiety, emotional vulnerability, limited communication, the disruption of familiar social roles, and isolation from significant others [4, p. 105].

A significant contribution to the understanding of the phenomenon of adaptation was made by N. V. Pavlyk, who defines personal adaptation as a holistic process of interaction between an individual and a new environment, which ensures a balance between internal psychological states and external living conditions. Adaptation possesses not only biological or psychological dimensions but also a socio-psychological nature, encompassing both conscious and unconscious mechanisms, including empathy, self-regulation, reflexivity, moral normativity, and communicative competence [5, p. 70].

In the context of studying the psychological condition of prisoners of war, particular importance is placed on such characteristics as the ability to exercise emotional self-control, skills of effective interaction with others, and the awareness of one's social role in new circumstances. These factors significantly influence the effectiveness of the adaptation process. Pavlyk emphasizes the role of individual psychological resources, including the level of psycho-emotional resilience, the readiness to accept change, and the capacity to develop new behavioral strategies under conditions of uncertainty – all of which are critically important in situations of forced isolation.

Summarizing the main approaches to understanding psychological adaptation, it is important to emphasize that this process is highly dependent on the external environment in which an individual finds themselves. For prisoners of war, adaptation unfolds under conditions of forced isolation, restricted freedom,

and the loss of control over their own lives, which leads to increased emotional vulnerability and a strong need for external support. At the same time, the success of adaptation is determined not only by personal resources but also by the extent to which the surrounding environment – particularly at the level of legal and regulatory conditions – ensures compliance with international standards for the treatment of prisoners.

The psychological adaptation of prisoners of war is a complex process of adjusting to conditions of isolation, uncertainty, and restricted personal autonomy. The effectiveness of this process largely depends on the extent to which international legal standards for the treatment of prisoners are upheld. In this context, particular attention is given to the Third Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War of 12 August 1949, which provides the legal foundation for the humane treatment and lawful detention of individuals captured during armed conflict [6].

Certain provisions of the Convention directly or indirectly contribute to the psychological stabilization of prisoners of war, creating conditions that minimize the traumatic effects of isolation and loss of control over life circumstances [7]:

1. The right to humane treatment (Articles 13, 14, 17) prohibits cruelty, humiliation, and both physical and moral violence. These guarantees help establish a basic sense of safety, which is a fundamental condition for adaptation to a restrictive environment.

2. Conditions of detention (Articles 25–32) must ensure adequate housing, food, hygiene, and medical care. Physical comfort serves not only physiological needs but also supports psychological well-being by reducing distress and preserving basic autonomy.

3. Maintaining contact with the outside world (Articles 70–77), including the right to correspondence and receiving news from relatives, is essential for preserving identity and social integration, thereby supporting inner stability in conditions of uncertainty.

4. Access to cultural, educational, and labor activities (Articles 38–42) helps maintain daily structure, instills a sense of purpose, and preserves internal order and goal-setting – all critical for adaptation during prolonged isolation.

5. Medical care (Articles 30–32, 109–110) in the Convention is broad in scope and includes not only somatic but also mental health needs. This opens the possibility for recognizing psychological conditions – including depressive, anxiety, and post-traumatic disorders – as requiring intervention.

6. The right to be informed about one's rights (Article 41) empowers prisoners to act as legal subjects rather than passive detainees. Awareness of rights helps restore a sense of agency and reduces anxiety and maladaptation.

7. Monitoring compliance by independent bodies, especially the International Committee of the Red Cross (Article 126), provides external oversight and an additional layer of protection for prisoners, which indirectly reduces psychological stress.

Thus, although the Third Geneva Convention does not explicitly use the term "psychological adaptation", it contains a range of provisions whose implementation directly affects the mental well-being of prisoners of war. These provisions establish a legal framework within which an individual can preserve their dignity, identity, and sense of internal control – all of which are key components of adaptive responses to stress.

One of the key humanitarian actors that significantly influences the conditions of detention for prisoners of war – and, consequently, their process of psychological adaptation – is the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). According to the provisions of international humanitarian law, this organization is mandated to carry out visits to individuals deprived of liberty, including prisoners of war, in order to assess both the physical and psychological conditions of their detention. This activity is governed by the norms of customary international humanitarian law (Customary IHL, Rule 124), which grant the ICRC the right of unimpeded access to places of detention and authorize it to conduct confidential consultations with the responsible authorities regarding the conditions of detainees [8].

One of the important elements of psychological support for prisoners of war is ensuring their ability to maintain contact with family members. In this regard, the Red Cross Messages program is implemented, allowing detainees to send short letters or messages to their loved ones. This form of communication helps reduce anxiety levels, fosters a basic sense of security, and supports emotional balance. The legal basis for this practice is outlined in international humanitarian law, specifically in Customary IHL Rule 125 [9].

Based on the collected information, the International Committee of the Red Cross conducts consultations with the administrations of detention facilities to ensure that the conditions of confinement comply with the provisions of international humanitarian law. In this process, particular emphasis is placed on the psychosocial dimension: the recommendations focus on reducing stress factors, supporting opportunities for social interaction, and ensuring access to medical and psychological care. These measures are part of a comprehensive approach that recognizes psychological well-being as an integral component of humane treatment for individuals held in captivity [8].

The document *Guidance on the Psychological Support of Detainees*, developed by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in 2021, plays a particularly important role in organizing psychological support for individuals deprived of liberty. It serves as a practical guide for staff working in facilities where prisoners of war and other categories of detainees are held. The document presents a systematic approach to providing psychological assistance, taking into account the specific challenges of isolation and high levels of stress. It outlines a step-by-step model of support, including initial response, emotional stabilization, development of adaptive mechanisms, and gradual recovery of internal resources.

Special attention is given to the typology of emotional and behavioral reactions to imprisonment, such as anxiety, helplessness, apathy, emotional detachment, or aggression. It also identifies risk factors (previous psychological trauma, lack of

social support) and protective factors (emotional resilience, family contact, meaningful activities) that influence the effectiveness of adaptation. The document emphasizes the need for an individual approach to each detainee, taking into account their psychological state, personal traits, age, gender, cultural background, and past experiences.

Furthermore, it highlights the importance of interdisciplinary cooperation between psychologists, medical staff, social services, and facility administrations to ensure comprehensive care. In this context, ICRC's recommendations not only clarify standards of humane treatment but also contribute to the creation of conditions that promote the long-term psychological well-being of detainees [10].

The activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in supporting prisoners of war fulfill not only a legal and human rights function but also play a significant role in ensuring the psychological well-being of individuals in captivity. Through regular monitoring, facilitating communication with the outside world, providing recommendations, and promoting access to medical and psychological care, the ICRC helps create conditions that ease the process of adaptation to deprivation of liberty. This support contributes to reducing psychological stress, lowering the risk of mental health disorders, and preserving the personal integrity of prisoners of war. The humanitarian presence of the ICRC in detention facilities serves not only as a guarantee of compliance with international legal norms but also as a crucial factor directly influencing the quality of psychological adaptation in the extremely challenging conditions of captivity.

In the field of international humanitarian law and human rights, an important role is played by the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, known as the Nelson Mandela Rules, adopted by the UN General Assembly. Although these rules do not carry binding legal force for UN member states, they serve as a widely recognized ethical framework for the treatment of individuals deprived of liberty. The Rules establish fundamental standards of humane treatment that are taken into account when developing national laws,

policies, and practices in the penitentiary system. Their provisions can be applied to various categories of detainees, including prisoners of war, as they emphasize the need to respect human dignity, protect mental health, and ensure safe detention conditions.

The Nelson Mandela Rules were adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 17, 2015, as a revised and expanded version of the earlier Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, originally approved in 1955. These rules were named in honor of Nelson Mandela, recognizing his lifelong struggle for human rights and dignity, even under the conditions of long-term imprisonment [11].

These Rules contain 122 provisions covering various aspects of life and conduct for individuals held in detention. Among the key principles with direct relevance to psychological adaptation are the following [12]:

- Respect for human dignity and the inherent value of every person, including the prohibition of torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.

- Non-discrimination in treatment, regardless of gender, age, nationality, or other characteristics.

- Normalization of life in detention, which means striving to reduce the differences between life in custody and life in a free society – including access to social interaction, education, work, and recreational activities.

- Contact with the outside world, including regular correspondence and visits from family members, as an element of maintaining social bonds.

- Right to health care, which includes access to both medical and psychosocial support.

In this context, the Nelson Mandela Rules serve as an important ethical and normative framework for understanding the legal conditions that foster an environment conducive to the adaptation of individuals in detention. These rules emphasize that the treatment of prisoners must be grounded in principles of humanity, safety, and the preservation of social connections. This approach directly aligns with key psychological factors of

adaptation – including the support of a sense of agency, the maintenance of self-esteem, and the reduction of stress levels.

Conclusions. Theoretical analysis has shown that the ability to effectively adapt in conditions of captivity is closely linked to the preservation of core elements of personality: emotional stability, a sense of identity, self-regulation skills, and access to external support. The study's findings indicate that compliance with international humanitarian standards positively influences the reduction of psychological maladaptation among prisoners of war and contributes to the development of internal coping mechanisms. At the same time, neglect of such standards increases the risk of re-traumatization, exacerbates crisis experiences, and disrupts basic psychological functions. The integration of psychological and legal approaches allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how to support prisoners of war under conditions of restricted freedom. Further research in this area should focus on the development of individualized psychological assistance programs that consider the person's legal status, stage of adaptation, and personal resources.

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ПСИХОЛОГІЧНА АДАПТАЦІЯ ВІЙСЬКОВОПОЛОНЕНИХ: ПРОБЛЕМИ ПРАВОВОГО ЗАБЕЗПЕЧЕННЯ ТА ПСИХОЛОГІЧНОЇ ПІДТРИМКИ

У статті проаналізовано психологічні механізми адаптації військовополонених у контексті міжнародно-правових норм, зокрема положень Третьої Женевської конвенції, Правил Нельсона Манделі та рекомендацій Міжнародного комітету Червоного Хреста. Особливу увагу приділено впливу правового регулювання на психічне благополуччя осіб у полоні, а також ключовим чинникам, що сприяють зниженню дезадаптації. Досліджено роль гуманітарних стандартів у збереженні внутрішньої стабільності, ідентичності та саморегуляції. Зроблено висновок про необхідність міждисциплінарного підходу до підтримки військовополонених, який об'єднує психологічні та юридичні інструменти захисту особистості, адже умови утримання полонених регулюються нормами міжнародного гуманітарного права. Дослідження психологічних процесів у ситуації полону доцільно здійснювати на стику юридичної та психологічної наук.

У межах цього дослідження основними нормативними орієнтирами є положення Третьої Женевської конвенції про поводження з військовополоненими (1949), Мінімальні стандартні правила поводження з ув'язненими (Правила Нельсона Манделі, ухвалені ООН), а також діяльність Міжнародного комітету Червоного Хреста. Женевська конвенція визначає обов'язки сторін збройного конфлікту щодо забезпечення гуманного поводження з полоненими, зокрема в частині умов утримання, надання медичної допомоги та забезпечення психологічної безпеки. Своєю чергою Правила Нельсона Манделі доповнюють ці положення, встановлюючи етичні стандарти у ставленні до осіб, позбавлених волі, з акцентом на підтримку психічного здоров'я, недопущення дегуманізації та необхідність індивідуального підходу до кожної особи.

Ключові слова: військовополонені, психологічна адаптація, міжнародне гуманітарне право, Третя Женевська конвенція, Міжнародний комітет Червоного Хреста, Правила Нельсона Манделі, адаптація, психосоціальна підтримка, умови утримання, емоційна стабільність, правові гарантії.

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