



"Coloring calms the Amygdala": A Trauma-Informed Tool for Kids in Crisis

The "Why" Behind Books Unbound's Ukrainian Coloring Books



The Psychological Impact of War

Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine on February 24th 2022, one-third of the population has been displaced with over 7.2 million Ukrainians fleeing beyond the border and becoming refugees. The negative psychological impacts of war may be amplified in new ways by the entire population, regardless of age or involvement in the conflict, due to the [accessibility of media](#) and the rapid spread of digital content. According to the Ukrainian Red Cross, damage to mental health will be the most devastating legacy of the war in Ukraine. Research data among internally displaced persons in Ukraine due to previous conflicts before the war revealed a Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) prevalence of 32%, a depression prevalence of 22%, and an anxiety prevalence of 17% (Roberts et al., 2019, p. 111).

As refugees are exposed to stress at every stage of their displacement, these numbers will likely rise. Pressures include separation from family, a lack of livelihood opportunities, xenophobia, perilous journeys, and exposure to conflict or persecution. A recent survey conducted by UNHCR and the World Bank in Uganda found that rates of depression among refugees were markedly higher than among people living in host communities (UNHCR, 2022). There is a need to support Ukrainian families in managing their stress, and ensuring access to safe and evidence-based mental health services (Turner & Sandford, 2022).

"Coloring calms the amygdala" (Wei, 2022).

The amygdala is our emotional regulator, determining our fear and stress response. Lowering amygdala activity can reduce the burden of unpleasant emotions, such as stress and depression. Therefore, children needing to release negative or perplexing feelings often find coloring a peaceful and relaxing activity. Additionally, remaining in the present can be challenging for an emotionally disturbed child. Coloring allows them to divert their attention from anxious thoughts, relaxing the amygdala in a manner similar to meditation.

Distressing imagery can be replaced with colorful and neat pictures. Breathing also slows down during coloring, allowing for more oxygen absorption, which lowers tension and increases feelings of calmness (Wei, 2022). A study among minority children in America found that they tend to experience higher levels of mental health issues and decreased access to treatment. This is aggravated by the absence of culturally appropriate services for their particular mental health needs in the context of their own culture, family, and community (Pumariega M.D et al., 2005). Attempting to mitigate this dynamic for Ukrainian children around the world, Books Unbound's coloring books promote diversity, inclusive learning, and immediate access to creative activities. The culturally sensitive coloring materials were created for Ukrainian children and refugees to de-stress and calm their minds, giving them a sense of peace – even for just a few moments a day.



References

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