

Psychologists use Syrian experience to help Ukrainian families

March 18 2022, by Michael Addelman



A two-page leaflet developed from the experience of displaced Syrian parents in the country's civil war has been translated into Ukrainian in the hope it will make a difference to struggling families.

The leaflet is based on the research of Dr. Aala El-Khani, a University of Manchester psychologist and parenting trainer who developed numerous [family](#) skills interventions and parenting resources while working in the refugee camps of Syria.

The academic, who is of Syrian heritage herself, worked with Professor Rachel Calam, professor of child and [family psychology](#) at The University of Manchester, to produce the leaflet.

It explained that bedwetting, nightmares, withdrawal and even aggression are normal responses to [childhood trauma](#), and offered basic reminders and suggestions for looking after themselves and their [children](#).

Working with a humanitarian organization in Syria, 3000 leaflets were printed and distributed with humanitarian bread supplies to families inside the war-torn country.

Research shows that one of the most important predictors for the [mental health](#) of children who experience conflict and displacement is the way that they are cared for by their families.

However warm, positive parenting can help buffer children from psychological harm.

Professor Calam said: "We aim to share this vital information through any channel possible so that parents and caregivers are able to best support children through conflict, flight, displacement and eventually resettlement to somewhere new.

"We appeal to journalists and the public alike to use every opportunity to help to spread this vital information and help families and children affected by the terrible war in Ukraine.

"We know that good family relationships are a better way to understand children's mental well-being than their actual experience in wartime—appalling as that may be.

"If families can provide warm, positive and secure parenting, that can be powerfully protective, and this information helps them to achieve just that."

Dr. El-Khani's works as an independent consultant for international organizations including UNODC and War Child.

She graduated with a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from The University of Manchester, Division of Psychology and Mental Health, where she is now an honorary Research Associate.

She told the [Guardian](#) in an interview that every parent she met was struggling with emotional or behavioral changes in their children.

"Some had gone looking for advice, asking camp doctors, teachers and NGO. But these people were too overwhelmed with their own roles or didn't have the knowledge to help," she told them.

A talk by Dr. El-Khani's called "What it's like to be a parent in a war zone," which has had 1.1 million views so far, has been made an Editor's Pick on the [TED Talk](#) front page.

You can download the leaflet in Ukrainian [here](#), in Russian [here](#) and in English [here](#).

Provided by University of Manchester

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