

*Section: Transcultural reflections***THE SILENT CRY OF MIGRANT CHILDREN: HOW POSITIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY HELPS CHILDREN IN EXILE FIND THEIR VOICE**

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Abstract

This article is devoted to the study of the psychological consequences of forced migration in children and the possibilities of their therapeutic support within the framework of positive and transcultural psychotherapy (PTP). Based on clinical observations, parental reflection, and the author's practical experience, the phenomenon of the 'child without a voice' is examined - a migrant child who is unable to express the pain associated with the loss of home, belonging, and stable adult figures.

The analysis is based on key concepts of PTC, including the balance model (comprising four spheres: body, activity, relationships, and future), the five-step therapeutic model, and the principle of hope, which enables the activation of the child's internal resources. Special attention is paid to metaphorical work, in particular the use of Ukrainian songs as a symbol of collective trauma and an archetype of hope.

The article describes the characteristic manifestations of migration trauma in children: psychosomatic symptoms, regression, isolation, and silence. The author emphasises the importance of the therapist's role as a cultural mediator and emotionally reliable adult who can hear what cannot be said in words. The therapy uses narrative and body-based methods, positive reinterpretation, and the inclusion of parents as co-therapists.

The paper concludes with practical recommendations for professionals working with migrant children, emphasising the importance of cultural sensitivity and restoring a sense of belonging and inner voice.

Keywords: Positive Psychotherapy, transcultural identity, childhood migration trauma, Balance Model, narrative and metaphor in therapy, therapeutic alliance

Introduction

War, emigration, and loss of home leave an indelible mark on a child's psyche. Finding themselves in a new country, with a foreign language and an unfamiliar system of social relations, children often face not only everyday difficulties but also a profound loss of the ability to express their feelings, pain, and fear. This silence is not just a lack of words, but a cry hidden within the body. I have called this condition 'the child without a voice'.

My personal history as a mother of three children and my professional path as a psychotherapist are intertwined in my migration experience. In this article, I explore how positive and transcultural psychotherapy (PPT), founded by Nossrat Peseschkian, serves as a tool for restoring voice, in both literal and metaphorical senses. Using the balance model (four spheres of life), the principle of hope, and a five-step therapeutic model, we can not only understand the symptoms of a migrant child but also find hidden resources within them.

Special attention is paid to cultural and symbolic work: metaphor, bodily sensations, parental involvement, and archetypes. Song, as a carrier of collective identity, becomes a means of gently integrating lost experiences. This article is not only a description of therapeutic cases, but also an invitation to reflect: can culture heal? And what role does the therapist play – between worlds, between languages, between silence and voice?

Methodology

2.1. Cultural Reflection

At the heart of this article is the image of a migrant child who has lost his voice. This is not just a metaphor. It is a literal, inner reality: a cry that does not sound in words but lives in the body, in behaviour, in silence. It is born in the trauma of migration, when the familiar world is destroyed and the new one has not yet been accepted.

Positive Psychotherapy (PPT), developed by Nossrat Peseschkian, provides a powerful, humane, and practical framework for understanding such states. The method is based on four areas of life:

- the body (physical and psychosomatic reactions),
 - activity (initiative, self-realisation),
 - contacts (relationships, language, integration),
 - future (meaning, goals, self-image).
- All four areas are affected in migrant children:
- in the body - anxiety, tension, insomnia;
 - in activity - apathy, refusal to study, loss of initiative;
 - in contacts - language barrier, social isolation;
 - in the future - loss of identity, fragmented self-image, feeling of 'I am nowhere'.

Positive Psychotherapy (PPT) method offers a five-step path to help:

1. Observation - I carefully and closely observed the children, their reactions, physical expressions of pain, and defence mechanisms.
- 2) Inventory - I collected stories from children, parents, and volunteers, their emotional reactions, recurring images, and conflicts.
3. Encouragement – as a bearer of several cultures (Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Kurdish), I was

able to find a language of support, even without words.

4. Verbalisation – I helped the children find words for their pain, feelings, loss, guilt, and loneliness.

5. Expanding goals — we dreamed, drew, created collages, told stories, planned celebrations, evenings, or the future together.

This model did not impose salvation; it recreated a bridge between the child and themselves.

Everything I did was based on the PPT transcultural approach. It was important not just to help the kids mourn the loss of their homeland, but to show them that their homeland lives inside them. They didn't become poorer; they became richer with another country, another identity. They didn't lose themselves — they expanded themselves.

Together, we learned and developed primary skills: to love, to feel, to empathise. We learned secondary skills, including understanding the rules of a new society, accepting norms, and adapting.

The children learned a new language, culture, and laws, but most importantly, they learned a new way of looking at themselves.

We hosted cultural evenings, discussing Ukrainian traditions, holidays, cuisine, and language. We sang songs, performed in schools, and created an atmosphere of vibrant culture. This enlivened the children, restoring their sense of dignity, belonging, and strength.

'If you want to have what you never had, do what you never did.'

- Nossrat Peseschkian, 'Psychotherapy for Everyday Life'

That's exactly what we did. We learned to act, to love, to be together — even in exile.

Clinical cases and their interpretation

During five months of volunteer work at a hotel for Ukrainian refugees in Ireland, as well as in online support groups, I encountered numerous heart-wrenching stories. But five stories will remain in my memory forever. Each of them is a living fabric of pain, confusion, and metaphorical loss of voice. These children — Ira, Timur, Valeria, Misha, and my children — became my teachers. Through them, I saw how migration strikes the body, distorts relationships, erases activities, and drains meaning. But I also saw how hope and support help restore wholeness.

2.2. Case 1: Ira, 6 years old. Lost between kindergartens and schools

Balance model:

- Body: tension, tears, tantrums, and refusal to attend school.

- Activity: chaos – drawing in textbooks, complete disregard for tasks.

- Contacts: no communication with children – fear, shyness, lack of understanding of the language.

- Meaning: disorientation - does not understand what school is or why she is there.

Five-step PPT model:

1. Observation: Ira hunched her shoulders, looked out the window in class, and clutched her backpack like a shield.

2. Inventory: She did not attend school in Ukraine; instead, she found herself in a foreign country for the first time.

3. Encouragement: fairy tales, appliqués, and game elements - support through the metaphor of growth.

4. Verbalisation: the phrase ‘What if I run away home?’ - an expression of fear. The image of a butterfly without wings.

5. Expanding goals: ‘ladder of courage’ with daily achievements.

2.3. Case 2: Timur, 12 years old. Shadow of a genius

Balance model:

-Body: irritability, apathy, somatic complaints.

- Activity: refusal to do tasks, interest in abstract things.

- Contacts: feeling invisible.

- Meaning: identity crisis, devaluation of abilities.

Five-step PPT model:

1. Observation: apathy, detachment, devaluation of interests.

2. Inventory: in Ukraine - an academic achiever; in the US - ‘unnoticed’.

3. Encouragement: Einstein's story, ‘ladder of strength,’ recognition of value.

4. Verbalisation: ‘I'm afraid I'll forget everything’ — fear of losing oneself.

5. Expansion of goals: notebook ‘Timur vs. the World,’ proposal to create a club.

2.4. Case 3: Valeria, 15 years old. A dark forest of meaning

Balance model:

- Body: fatigue, headaches.

-Activity: Quitting web design due to burnout.

- Contacts: isolation, closedness.

- Meaning: loss of a vision for the future.

Five-step PPT model:

1. Observation: silent, dressed in black, eyes behind glass.

2. Inventory: understanding that realisation will take many years of adaptation.

3. Encouragement: the metaphor of the ‘dark forest’, a letter to oneself in the future.

4. Verbalisation: ‘I don't know who I am now’ — awareness of emptiness.

5. Expanding goals: a notebook for ideas, a map of the ‘inner path,’ an art corner.

2.5. Case 4: Misha, 10 years old. Enchanted by the screen

Balance model:

- Body: agitation, tic-like reactions.

- Activity: avoidance of learning, dependence on gadgets.

- Contacts: protest, manipulation.

- Meaning: indifference, lack of direction.

Five-step PPT model:

1. Observation: excitement, constant search for a screen.

2. Inventory: loss of control, absence of father, isolation.

3. Encouragement: fairy tales about wizards, creation of a hero image.

4. Verbalisation: ‘I'm angry that my mum doesn't listen to me,’ ‘I miss my dad.’

5. Expansion of goals: superhero diary, awareness of value.

2.6. Case 5: My children. Split identity

Balance model:

- Body: fatigue, forgetfulness.

- Activity: loss of bearings.

-Contacts: friendliness without inner belonging.

- Meaning: loss of ‘self’ between countries and cultures.

Five-step PPT model:

1. Observation: disorientation, inattention, confusion.

2. Inventory: numerous moves, international family.

3) Encouragement: conversations, family stories, roots map.

4. Verbalisation: 'Who am I?', 'Where is my home?' - search for self.

5. Expansion of goals: 'What will I take with me into the future' project, recognition of multi-layered identity.

These cases do not exhaust the entire experience. However, they illustrate the deep mechanisms of migration trauma in children and show how positive psychotherapy can help restore a voice, literally and symbolically.

However, even the most sensitive words are sometimes powerless. There are moments when neither drawing, nor play, nor conversation can convey what is happening inside.

And then the song came to the rescue.

A song that did not just play in the background, but became the voice of the child, the mother, the community.

This is how 'Oi u luzi chervona kalyna' came into our work — not as background music or a cultural element, but as a profound therapeutic act that restores identity, body, and voice.

This song accompanied us everywhere. We sang it on buses that took us into the unknown, on streets where we tried to feel the ground beneath our feet, in hotel kitchens and accommodation centres, where we made varenky, braided hair, and whispered about home. We sang it on school stages and in church halls, at charity concerts and on Ukrainian culture days — at moments when we began to feel once again that we were being heard.

But it wasn't just a song. It was the resurrection of memory, identity, and a sense of belonging. For children, it was the first word in their native language that sounded not like a command or instruction, but like a heartbeat. For mothers, it was permission to cry, to let their voices be heard again. For all of us, it was collective psychotherapy without words, where each person became a participant in a profound ritual of return.

Kalina, bent over in the grass, became an image of our entire destiny — wounded but alive. The melody, rolling in children's voices, touched the body, activated breathing, caused tremors, tears, and goose bumps. Even those who had not spoken Ukrainian for a long time suddenly recognised something of their own, something deep and familiar in it.

This song became a therapeutic metaphor for working with all four spheres of PPT:

- body - through vibration, singing, breathing;
-activity - through joint performance, participation in concerts;

-contacts - through community, when children sang together with adults, teachers, and audience members;

-meaning - through the realisation that we exist, we are not lost, we have a voice, a history, and strength.

In the context of migration, 'Chervona Kalyna' became more than a cultural symbol. It became a living thread connecting generations, continents, and inner worlds. It was the voice of those who were afraid to speak. It was a language understood by those who could not explain what was happening to them. It was a therapeutic act of resistance to disappearance.

When a child was silent, the song spoke.

When a mother held back her tears, the song let them flow.

When we no longer knew who we were, the song reminded us.

When we felt like nobodies, it gave us back our names, our roots, our voices.

The song 'Oi u luzi chervona kalyna' didn't just play. It brought us back to life.

Discussion: Analysis: therapeutic meanings and cultural universality PPT

Each of the cases described shows that the trauma of migration in a child is not only a reaction to external circumstances, but also a deep internal shock that affects all four spheres of the balance model: body, activity, contacts, and meaning. Forced relocation disrupts the familiar structure of everyday life, breaks the identity system, and renders contact with the future uncertain. However, it is precisely in these conditions that positive psychotherapy reveals its full potential.

Positive psychotherapy allows us to work with trauma not through painful immersion, but through reliance on resources, potential, and restoration of balance. The five-step model helps to establish a therapeutic process even within a limited time frame, as seen in settings such as hotels or online support groups. The balance model serves not only as a diagnostic framework but also as a roadmap for returning to oneself, step by step, sphere by sphere.

These cases demonstrate that children in different cultures manifest trauma differently,

depending on their age, gender, family structure, previous experiences, and social environment. But one thing remains universal: a child needs someone who sees their pain. Someone who can name it. Someone who can stay close when there are no words.

The uniqueness of PPT is that it offers not only methods, but also a position. The position of a therapist is that of a person who walks alongside, helps to name feelings, restores dreams, and opens up new perspectives. This is especially important when working with children who are caught between worlds, between cultures, between loss and hope.

For me, as a professional, working with these children has been a moment of personal growth. PPT ceased to be just a method — it became my philosophy. It gave me a language to speak to those who have no words. It allowed me to rediscover my belief that a psychologist can be useful even in exile, even when they are still searching for support.

On a personal level, as a mother, I went through a process of division, pain, and recovery together with my children. I realised how important it is not only to support a child, but also to acknowledge your vulnerability. PPT helped me to name my feelings, see my resources, and preserve my identity.

Working with cases has shown that even in a foreign country, even without an office, without a diagnosis, and a clear protocol, psychotherapy is possible. It is born from contact, from observation, from words and gestures. And it gives back a voice. Not only to children. But also to us, adults.

Conclusions

Working with migrant children through the lens of positive psychotherapy has revealed not only patterns of adaptation but also the deep mechanisms of silent trauma. These findings confirm the effectiveness of the PPT method, opening up new perspectives for therapists, parents, and school systems.

1 The trauma of a migrant child is rarely expressed in words. More often, it is silence. A silent cry, hidden in the body, in withdrawal, in behavioural symptoms. PPT offers a safe way out of this silence through observation, encouragement, verbalisation, and restoring balance.

2. The four-factor PPT model (body, activity, connections, meaning) helps to see the structure of loss and build a path back. It is not a rigid protocol, but a flexible roadmap that can be used in individual, group, family, or volunteer practice.

3. The five-step PPT model provides consistency and depth even in limited settings, such as temporary shelters, schools, or online support groups. It allows you to see the process as a living movement, from silence to voice, from confusion to direction.

4. The integration of cultural symbols (such as songs, fairy tales, and family stories) enhances the therapeutic effect. They become anchors of identity, channels for expressing emotions, and rituals of reconnecting with belonging. In this context, the song 'Oi u luzi chervona kalyna' (Oh, red viburnum in the meadow) proved to be particularly powerful — not as background music, but as the voice of the community, as an instrument of unity, breath, and hope.

5. The personal involvement of the psychologist — whether it be migration experience, parenthood, or volunteer work — does not interfere with therapy but rather deepens it, provided there is professional reflection and supervisory support. Where the therapist remains alive, the child gains the right to be themselves.

Practice recommendations:

- Psychologists: use PPT as a philosophy and method, especially in situations of trauma, cultural transition, and loss.

- Parents: Be attentive to silence, participate in simple rituals of togetherness, and maintain emotional dialogue.

- Schools and communities: create safe spaces, recognize the uniqueness of each child's migration journey, and incorporate cultural elements into adaptation programs.

Ideas for future research:

- The impact of PPT on the adaptation of refugee children in the school environment.

- The role of metaphor, song, and cultural ritual as therapeutic tools.

- The impact of parental reflection on the success of child therapy in emigration.

- A comparative analysis of the reactions of children of different ages and cultures to PPT interventions.

Thus, positive psychotherapy is not just a way of working with pain. It is a way for children to regain their voice. A voice that resonates with

memory, strength, connection, and the future. Sometimes this voice sounds like a word. Sometimes it sounds like a look. And sometimes it sounds like a song. But the main thing is that it sounds again.

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