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BIBLIOTHERAPY AS A TOOL OF PUBLIC INCLUSIVE POLICY: FOREIGN AND UKRAINIAN EXPERIENCE

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals today is impossible without the practical implementation of inclusive policies, including in public services. Thus, the focus of inclusive policies in this study is on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of good health and well-being (SDG 3), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), and peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16) [1]. The chosen focus of the Goals in the context of inclusive policies is explained, first of all, by the fact that the armed aggression against Ukraine today has caused a large-scale mental health crisis, where, according to a 2023 study, in a sample of the adult population of Ukraine, from 27.5% to 35.8% of people met the criteria for at least one of seven mental disorders, with a higher prevalence among women, IDPs and people with combat experience [2]. Such a situation requires understandable, accessible, and inclusive approaches. Thus, bibliotherapy, the targeted use of literature for therapeutic purposes, is one such tool. Therefore, an analysis of the foreign and Ukrainian practice of bibliotherapy as an element of public inclusive policy will allow us to outline the prospects for its institutional development.

Bibliotherapy is an effective non-pharmacological intervention for depression, anxiety disorders, and PTSD, where the basis of its potential is realized primarily through the values of autonomy and social justice, which are key to an inclusive approach [3]. It is important to note that public libraries are now already seen as a resource that about half of visitors (49.6%) consider “very” or “extremely” important for promoting mental health. At the same time, only 5.6% of respondents are aware of bibliotherapy services, indicating significant untapped potential for such services [4].

Literature has an impact on the mental health, social integration, and well-being of vulnerable populations throughout the life course. At the same time, depending on its nature, artistic activities can include social interaction, physical activity, engagement with health topics, and interaction with health institutions (Figure 1) [5].

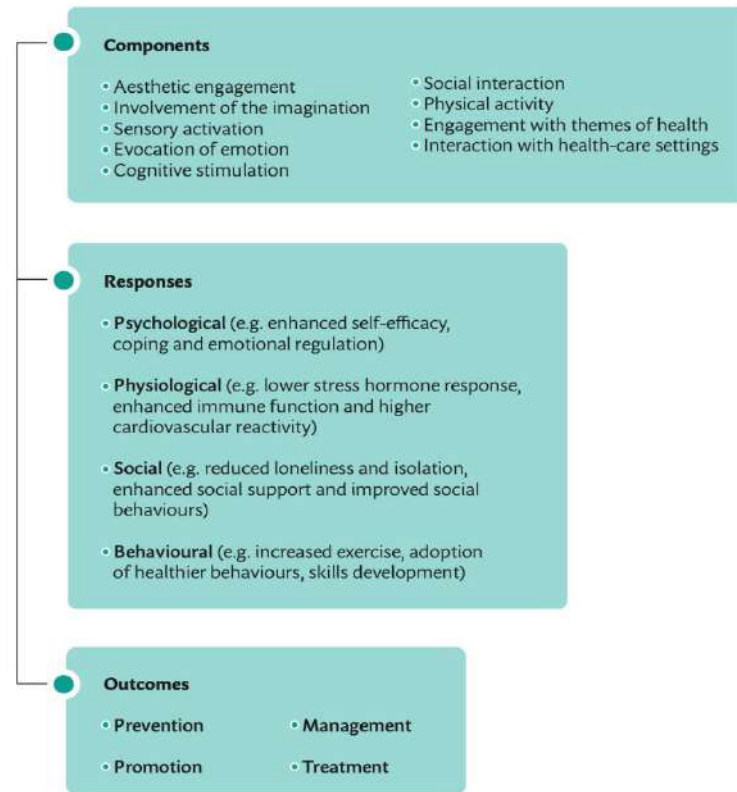


Figure 1. A logic model linking the arts with health

These findings have served as the basis for the inclusion of bibliotherapy programs in public service systems in several countries. For example, the Reading Well/Books on Prescription Program (the British model) integrates bibliotherapy into primary care, based on NICE recommendations, with separate lists for adults with mental disorders, children, and adolescents [6]. The effectiveness of the partnership between public and medical libraries in England is confirmed by participants' reports of decreased anxiety, increased social belonging, and reduced isolation [7]. Similar programs operate in Ireland (Reading Well Ireland) [8], the USA [9], and Lithuania [10, 11], which emphasizes the importance of implementing state policies in this direction. Also, the international legal basis for initiatives

to implement inclusive policies is the guarantee of the right of persons with disabilities to participate in cultural life, and the obligation of states to provide comprehensive rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities [12].

Ukrainian realities today imply an understanding of bibliotherapy as a method of psychoprophylaxis and psychological rehabilitation, which becomes particularly relevant in wartime conditions – primarily in working with veterans, IDPs, and people who have experienced psychological trauma [13]. The Law of Ukraine “On Libraries and Librarianship” stipulates that all citizens of Ukraine have the right to library services, thereby guaranteeing everyone’s right to free access to information, knowledge, and involvement in the values of national and world culture, science, and education stored in libraries [14]. Thus, the Lesya Ukrainka Public Library has been implementing the project “Bibliotherapy: Your Book of Happiness” since 2023, which includes individual consultations with a librarian-bibliotherapist, art therapy classes, and psychological consultations [15]. In 2024, the Kharkiv Regional Library for Children and Youth published methodological and bibliographic materials “Book Therapy = Adolescent Mental Health” [16]. The Sumy State University Library implemented the “BiblioOpora” project as part of the All-Ukrainian Mental Health Program [17]. Despite the positive practices of Ukrainian libraries, these initiatives are not systemic, as there is no regulatory framework or standardized methodology in this area. Thus, libraries are not authorized to provide psychosocial services [14] and are not included in the mental health care system [18], bibliotherapy is not included in the list of social services [19], and is not considered a public service [20]. This regulatory gap creates legal uncertainty regarding the status of bibliotherapy, service quality standards, and mechanisms for implementing bibliotherapy practices.

Both foreign and domestic practice allow us to formulate three key conclusions. First, successful foreign models (primarily the British one) are based on an intersectoral partnership among libraries, the healthcare system, and social protection agencies, whereas in Ukraine, these sectors operate separately. Second, the scalability of bibliotherapy programs depends on the availability of qualification standards for specialists and unified

methodologies. The lack of such standards is the main limitation for the spread of the practice in Ukraine. Third, for certain groups of the population, in particular veterans, IDPs, and people with disabilities, bibliotherapy is a particularly valuable tool due to its cultural accessibility, adaptability, and lack of stigmatization.

Bibliotherapy can be a systemic element of public, inclusive policy, provided that it is clearly regulated, supported by intersectoral partnerships, and standardized. Therefore, systemic support for bibliotherapy as a public service is not only a matter of inclusiveness but also a condition for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

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