

SESAME WORKSHOP

Welcome Sesame



Rapid Needs Assessment with Ukrainian Families

Part of Welcome Sesame, an initiative to support families affected by conflict and crisis
March 2023

This research is made possible by the support of IREX and the U.S. Department of State. The contents are the sole responsibility of Sesame Workshop, and do not necessarily reflect the views of IREX or the U.S. Department of State.





- [Overview of Study](#)
- [Methodology](#)
- [Demographics](#)
- [Key Findings](#)
- [Detailed Findings](#)
- [Conclusions](#)
- [Recommendations](#)



Section 1: Overview of Study

Background

Sesame Workshop aims to **expand access to quality, playful and inclusive early childhood education** for families and young children affected by displacement in Ukraine by:

- Improving children's social and emotional learning
- Increasing playful learning for children
- Increasing positive self-concept for children



Research Questions

In March 2023, Sesame Workshop conducted a needs assessment with displaced Ukrainian caregivers of 3-8 year olds to understand the following research questions:

- What are the most urgent needs of the primary caregivers of children aged 3-8 who are experiencing displacement?
- How do caregivers and children identify and regulate their emotions?
- How do caregivers perceive and manage grief including communication with their young children?
- How have perspectives of and the importance of identity, diversity and inclusion changed over time since the invasion began?
- What is the feasibility of content distribution in American Spaces in Ukraine?

Sample



*Location of American Spaces

Location	Caregivers of children ages...	n	Total
Lviv	3-5	25	50
	6-8	25	
Odesa	3-5	25	50
	6-8	25	
Kyiv	3-5	25	50
	6-8	25	
Total			150

Data collection: February 27– March 8, 2023



Section 2: Methodology

Methodology

Data Collection Team

- 14 interviewers
- 3 supervisors who were responsible for ensuring each interviewer met individual quotas; managing recruitment and interviewers' work and remaining in constant communication with interviewers via mobile communications, e-mail, and Viber

Recruitment

- Respondents were initially identified via snowball sampling. The first contact with the respondents was made in IDP centers in each location.

Data Collection

- Face-to-face Computer Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI)
- Average length of interview: 24 minutes



Interviewer Training



- Interviewers were thoroughly briefed on the following during interviewer training:
 - Detailed description of **sample characteristics** and Sesame Workshop's target audience
 - **Recruitment** procedures and snowball sampling methodology
 - Best practices and expectations for **communication and feedback** with supervisors during fieldwork
- Training also included a **full run-through of the scripted survey** and detailed description of iField's features
- Due to the sensitivity of the research topic, training also included a module on **managing emotional reactions in respondents** and two sessions with a psychologist
 - Interviewers were trained to listen without interruption, not to agree, disagree, or express their own emotions in response to the respondent's answers.
 - Interviewers were also trained to remain calm in all situations and gradually return the respondent to the subject of the survey if conversation got sidetracked at any point

COVID-19 Procedures

- To ensure interviewers & participant safety, Ipsos interviewers:



- were trained on appropriate COVID-19 prevention protocols;
 - wore personal **protection equipment** (masks, gloves, antiseptics, etc.);
 - conducted a **temperature screening** before each departure; and
 - maintained and complied with local **social distancing** guidelines.
-
- If it was discovered that interviewers had any one of the following conditions, they were not eligible to participate in data collection:
 - been in **proximate contact** in the last 14 days with anyone who **tested positive** for COVID-19 or who had symptoms of COVID-19, or
 - **tested positive** for COVID-19 in the past 14 days, or
 - experienced **any symptoms** of COVID-19 in the past 14 days.

Caregiver Survey



Total length: 32 questions

Survey objectives: To examine how caregivers perceive and manage grief including how they communicate to their children about grief; recent challenges families are facing; how caregivers are handling their own emotions and managing the emotions of the children they care for, and to learn about resources parents currently use or would like to access.

Question types: Primarily quantitative with some open-ended qualitative questions



Якою мовою ви бажаєте проходити інтерв'ю?/На
каком языке вы хотите проходить интервью?



Software: The survey was programmed and fielded using Ipsos's proprietary software, iField, which is equipped with automatic quality control procedures. An example of the programmed survey in iField is shown above.

Ethical Considerations

- Informed consent was based on international standards for the protection of human subjects. Interviewers explained to respondents that they were able to stop the interview at any point if they felt **uncomfortable or distressed**.
 - Each question also included an option to “refuse” if respondents felt uncomfortable answering, and respondents were made aware of this option at the start of the interview and with each question.
 - All interviewers also underwent two trainings with a psychologist on how to respond if a respondent becomes distressed before conducting any fieldwork.
- **Children were not interviewed** for this study. Caregivers who consented to participate answered from their own perspective and on behalf of children.



Section 3: Demographics

Caregiver Demographics



Gender



88% of caregivers are female



Marital Status

84% of caregivers are married

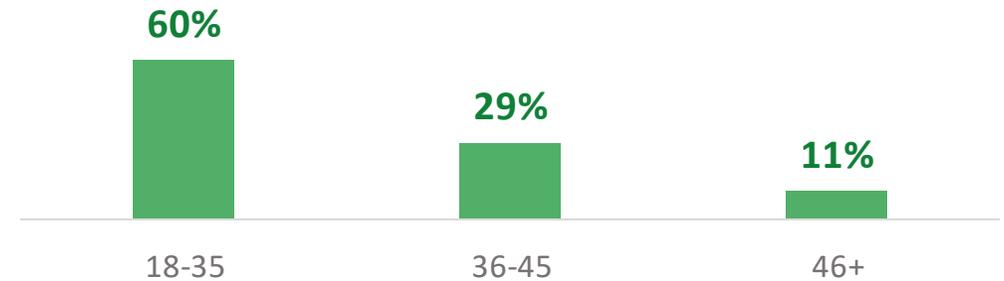


Education

49% have completed a Bachelor's degree or higher

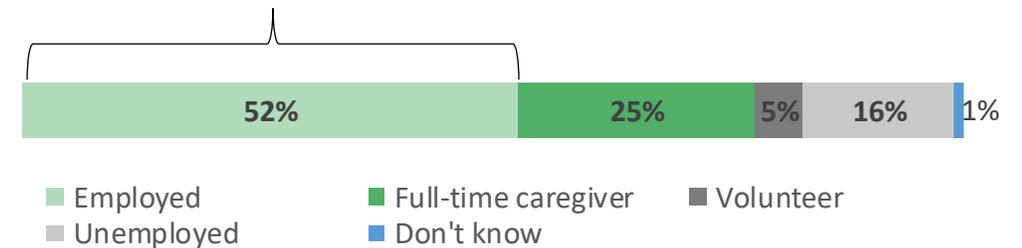


Age



Employment

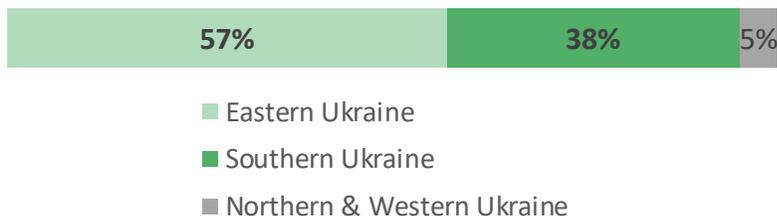
Full-time: 20% | Part-time: 23% | Self-employed: 10%



IDP Status



Macro-Regions Lived Previously



Regions Lived Previously

Top regions caregivers lived prior to Lviv/Kyiv/Odesa:

- **Kherson** oblast (26%)
- **Donetsk** oblast (21%)
- **Kharkiv** oblast (14%)
- **Mykolaiv** oblast (12%)

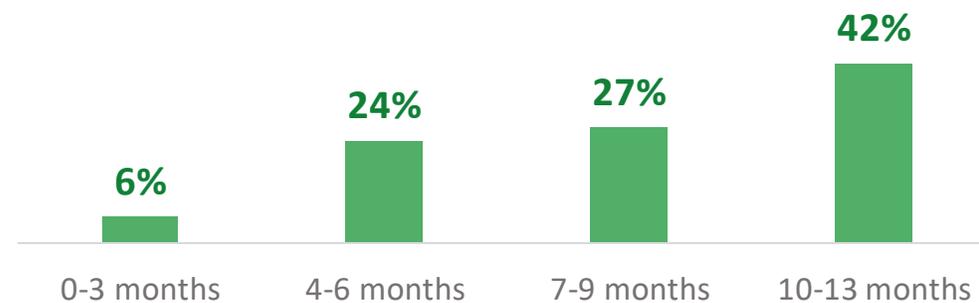


Reasons for Leaving

- Active war in my city (**44%**)
- War coming too close to my city (**38%**)
- Lived in unsafe Russian occupied territory (**14%**)
- Afraid that Russians would attack my city next (**6%**)
- Other (1%)



Duration in Current City



Household Demographics



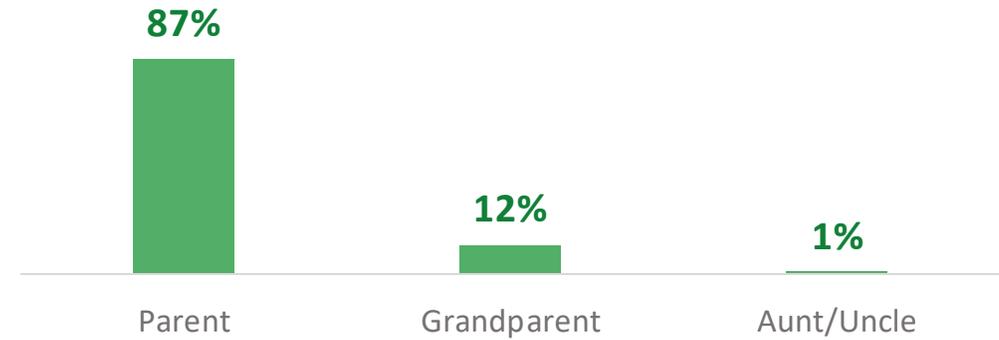
Gender of Children



Girls (61%) represented a higher proportion of children (3-8) than **boys (39%)**



Relationship to Referenced Child



Child School Attendance



School Attendance



- Attend school in-person
- Attend online classes
- Does not currently go to school

Odesa has the highest rate of children currently not in school **(44%)**, followed by Lviv **(32%)**.



Reasons for Low School Attendance

- Child is educated at home **(31%)**
- Child is unwell/unable to attend school **(21%)**
- Schools in are the are full/not accepting new students **(6%)**
- Child does not speak the language in which the local school is conducted **(4%)**
- Lack of documentation **(2%)**
- Other **(35%)**
 - Child is too young for school
 - Anticipation of/hoping to return home soon

*Sample size n=48



Section 4: Key Findings

Key Findings

- **Caregivers are struggling to help their children through their grief** and need support; many do not know where to start without frightening their children.
- **Communication skills** was the most frequently cited learning priority for young children among caregivers.
- **Caregivers need mental health resources** and support for themselves also. In addition to resources about children's mental health, they want resources to help them regulate their own emotions.
- Families are coping with trauma by finding and appreciating everyday joys and pleasures. Other coping mechanisms include talking, distraction, catharsis, and sometimes medical intervention.
- Ukrainians feel they need to grieve many things – people, homes, possessions, and former ways of life. Caregivers **conceptualize grief as death, loss, pain, helplessness, and war** itself. Only 15% of parents said they talk to their child about grief openly and **half do not share serious problems with their child**.



Section 5: Detailed Findings



Caregiver Needs

Caregiver Joys

Despite the hardships of war, caregivers still experience the **everyday joys** of parenthood.



- The ability to **shape and mold** children and their experiences
- Seeing the world **through the child's eyes**
- Watching the child **grow and learn**
- Sharing **love** and a **special relationship** with the child
- Having someone to **care for**
- Having **new motivation** for one's own life / knowing one will leave behind a legacy

“The best thing is to understand that a child needs you very much, that shaping his personality and future behavior is largely up to you. And then to see that the child appreciates you and understands you.”

—Female, age 36-45, Kyiv

“The time spent together with a child brings a lot of positive and unique vivid sensations. And sometimes a child can even give you good advice, to look at things differently than adults.”

—Female, age 26-35, Kyiv

“To love your child, to rejoice at the first steps of his life to eat together to spend leisure and to learn the world together.”

—Female, age 36-45, Kyiv

“That after you something will remain. Love.”

—Female, age 36-45, Lviv

Caregiver Challenges

Caregivers are experiencing the **typical anxieties** of parenthood along with the added pressure of protecting children from the **trauma of war**.



- The fear of **making mistakes**
- **Controlling their emotions** around children
- **Shielding** the child from difficult things
- Effectively **communicating** to children
- Worrying over children's **future and education**
- Heightened sense of **responsibility** for taking care of children and protecting them from war and trauma

“Feeling helpless when you can’t protect your child and help him.” *–Male, age 26-35, Kyiv*

“It is difficult that you need to choose the right words when educating in order not to harm even more.” *–Female, age 26-35, Kyiv*

“Remain calm and balanced when the war continues. Protect the child and explain that there may be very different events in life.” *–Female, age 36-45, Kyiv*

“The most difficult thing is the fear of the child's life, to understand whether you make the right decisions, and these decisions will then affect the future of the child.” *–Female, 36-45, Kyiv*

Caregiver Sources of Support

Caregivers actively seek advice and support; they turn to a **variety of sources** for this help.



Online Forums

“I look up information on the **Internet** through a search engine, I read **mom forums** on the right topic.”

–Female, age 36-45, Kyiv

“Significant information is drawn from **social networks** and **thematic forums** on the Internet.”

–Female, age 46-45, Kyiv



Friends & Peers

“We **help each other with tips** on the playground when we go out to play, then we adults discuss children's actions and give each other advice.”

–Female, age 36-45, Kyiv



Professionals

“To a **child psychologist**. Mostly we do it in the family circle.”

–Male, age 36-45, Odesa

“I watch videos on YouTube with **psychologists**.”

–Female, age 26-35, Kyiv



Parents & Older Generations

“Usually to **my mother**, who raised three children, she has a lot of experience in raising children.”

–Female, age 26-35, Kyiv

“To **mama**, she is a teacher.”

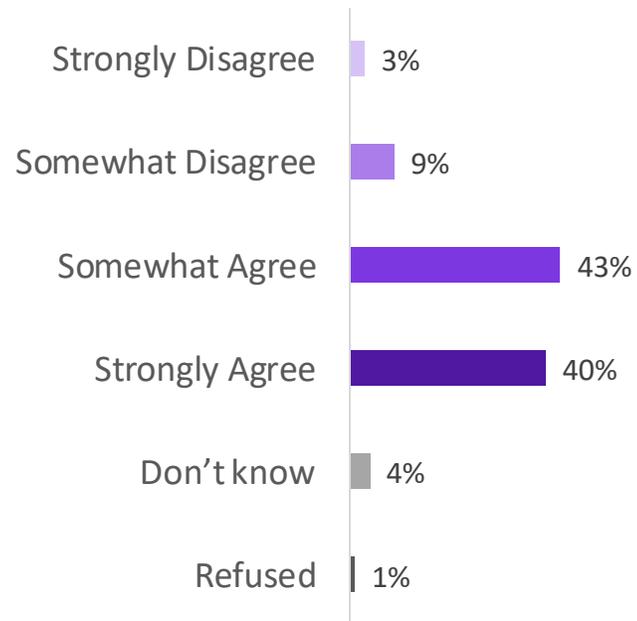
–Female, age 36-45, Lviv

Management of Children's Mental Health

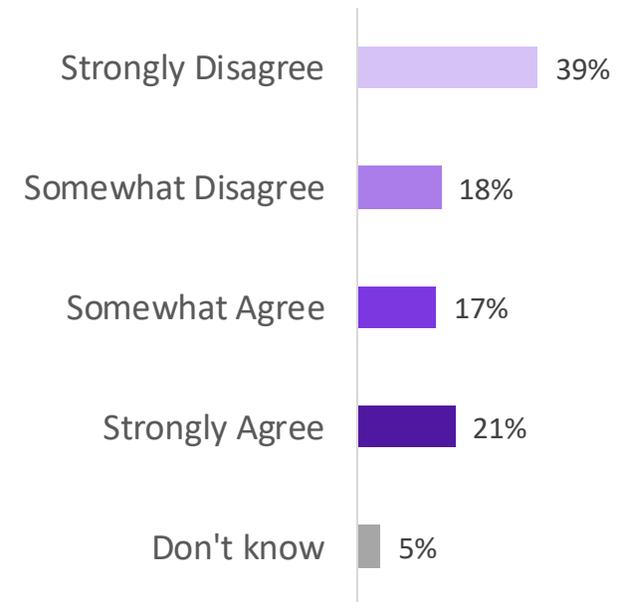
Most caregivers feel they know how to talk to their children about **difficult feelings**, but fewer feel confident in their ability to **identify signs** of these feelings.



I know how to talk with my child about difficult feelings like anxiety and grief.



I don't know how to identify signs of fear and anxiety in my child.

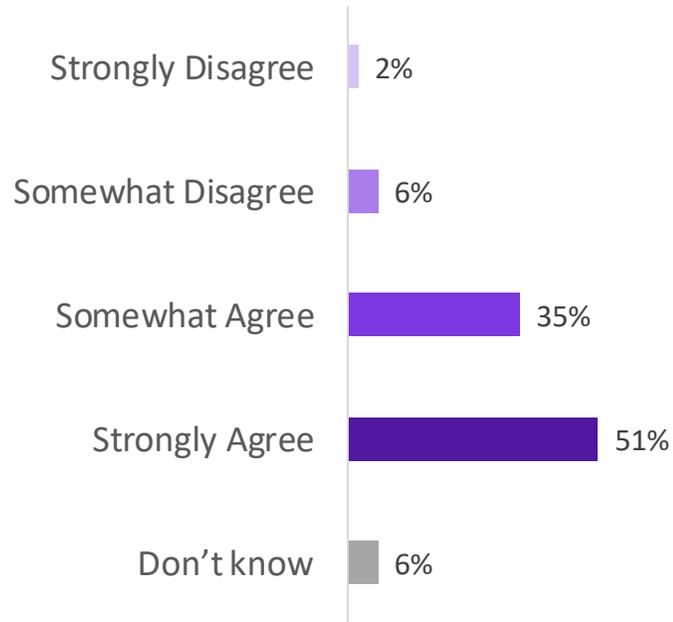


Management of Caregivers' Mental Health

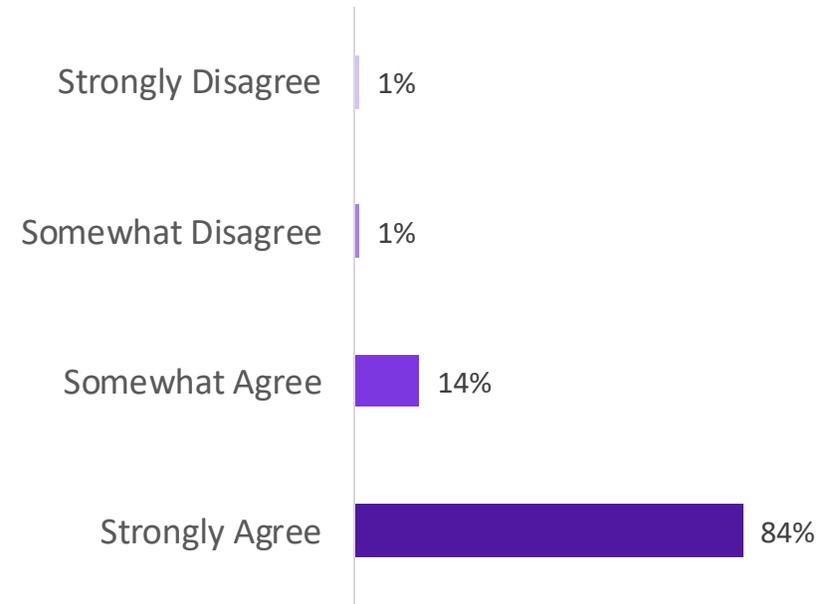
Caregivers are **very confident** in their abilities to care for their children, and most feel they can manage their **mental health** and wellbeing.



I am able to manage my mental health and wellbeing as a caregiver.



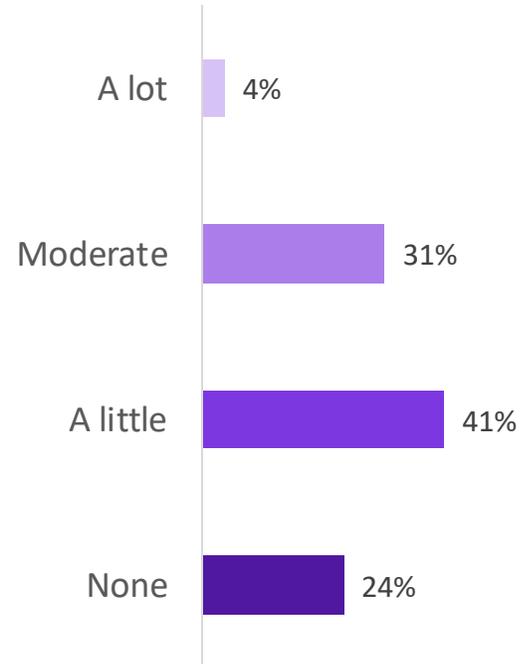
I am confident in my ability to care for my child.



Caregiver Support

About **3 in 4** caregivers say they need some amount of support to meet children's emotional and mental health needs.

Level of Support Caregivers Feel They Need

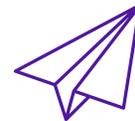
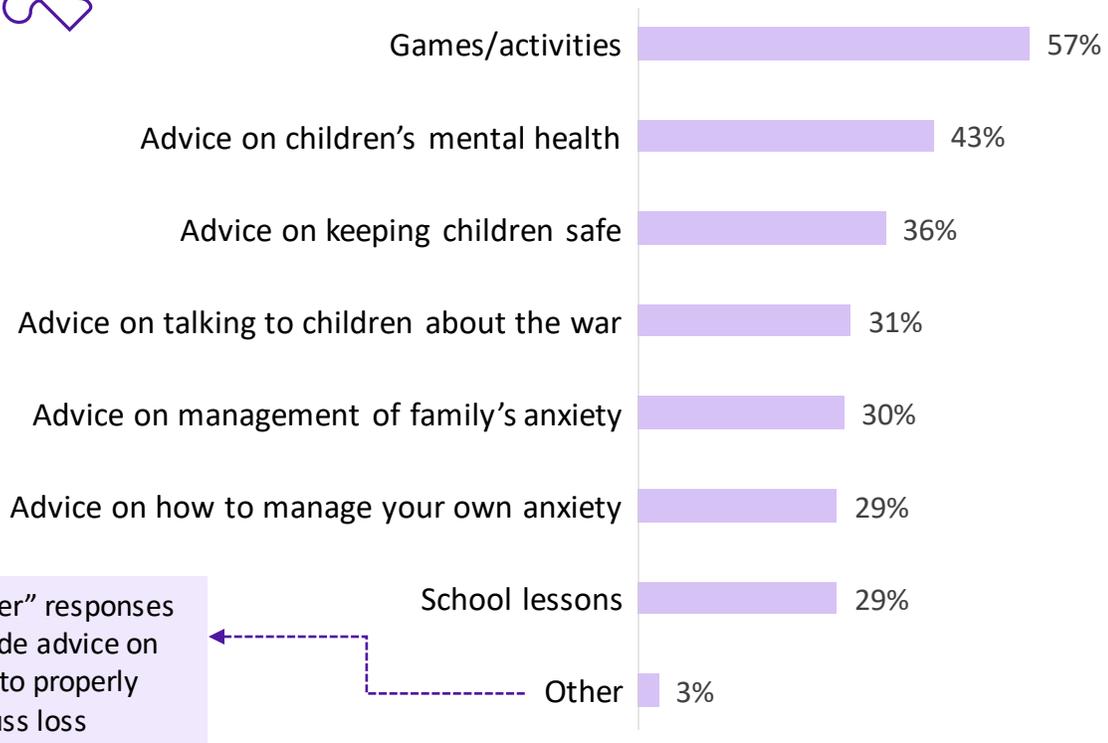


What caregivers want information about

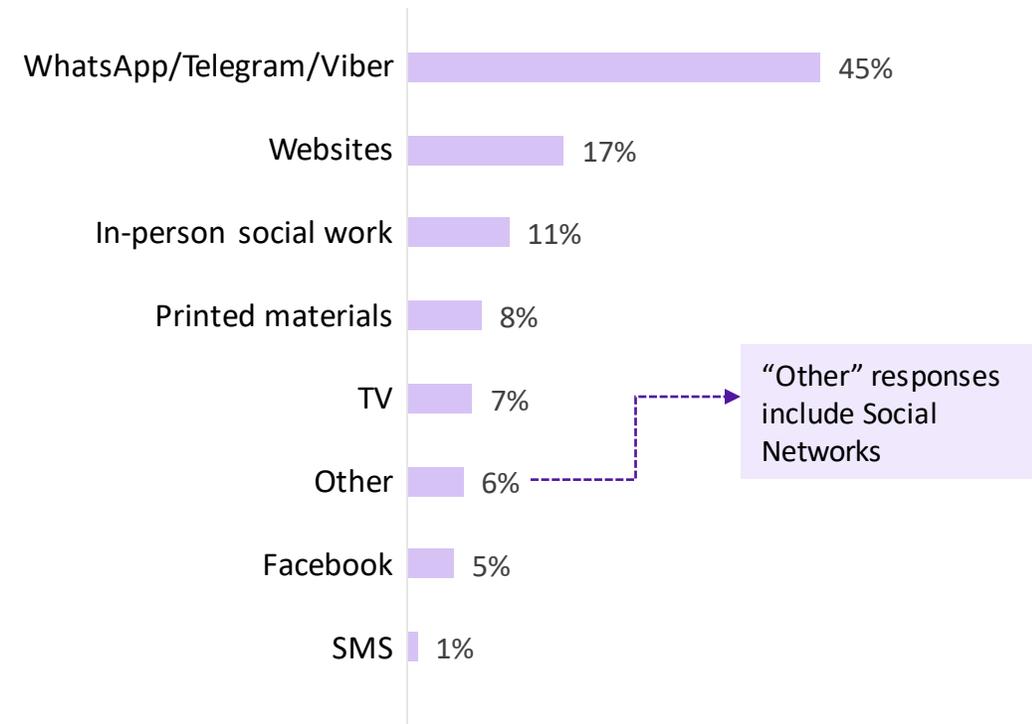
Caregivers feel **games and activities**, along with **advice on children's mental health**, would be most helpful, and online messengers would be the best vehicle to receive this assistance.



Helpful Info & Activities to Care for Children



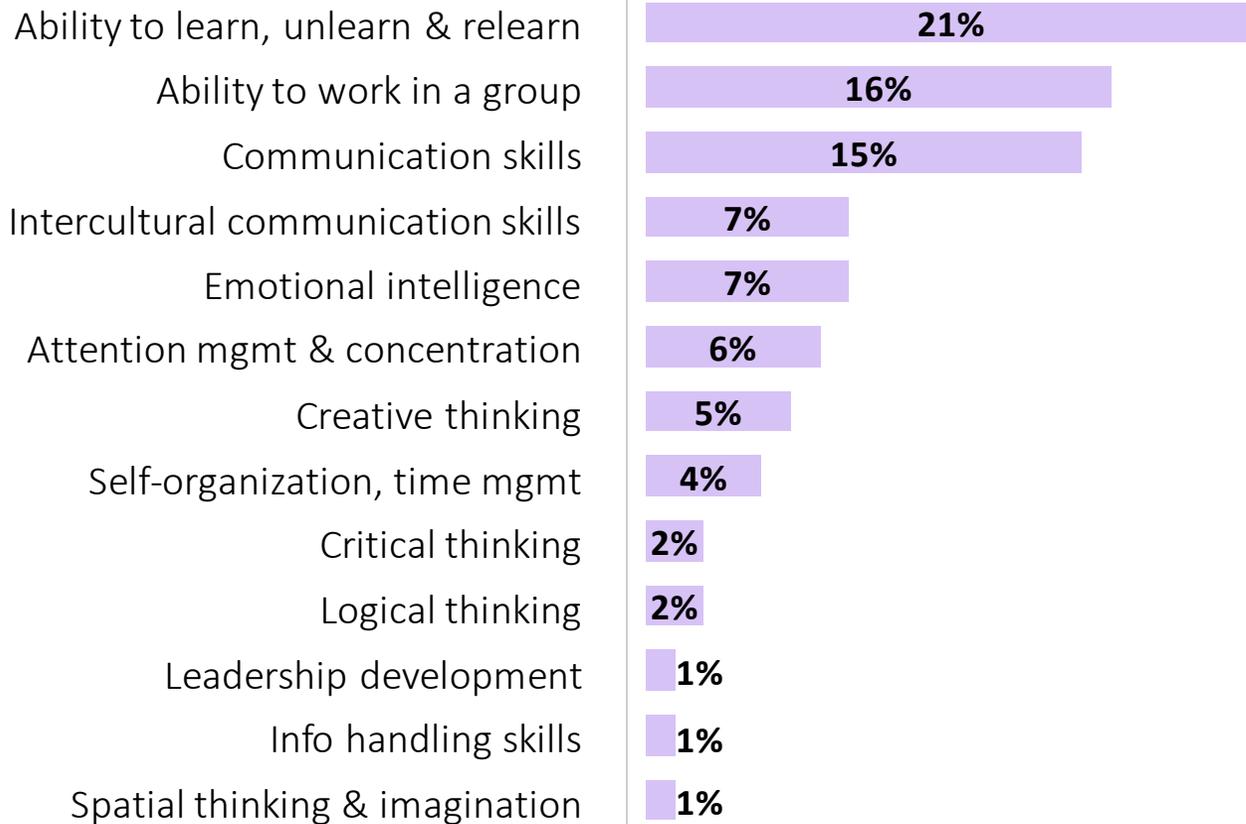
Best Way to Receive This Info



Learning Priorities for Children

Communication skills was the most frequently cited learning priority for children.

Most Important Lessons (Spring 2022) n=100



Most Important Lessons (Spring 2023) n=150





Emotional Management & Grief

Positive Experiences

Families find bright spots **celebrating happy occasions** and **appreciating reprieves** from the war.



- Celebrating **birthdays** or other **special occasions**
- **Social** activities
- **Silence and peace** away from the sounds of war
- Experiencing **outdoor activities** and interacting with **animals or nature**
- New or better **housing** conditions
- **Salary increases**
- **Creative** activities

“We met with our friends who also moved, and we spent such a good hour, we were charged with positivity, the children were also extremely satisfied, it was as if we forgot for a day what we experienced and what is going on now.” *–Female, age 26-35, Lviv*

“The fact that we now live in silence. Sleep well and enjoy every day.” *–Female, age 46-55, Odesa*

“We painted a small picture together with our son using a step-by-step description from the Internet. Still life is bright and colorful.” *–Female, age 36-45, Kyiv*

“A large group of us went to the cinema, went to McDonald’s, it was someone’s birthday, there were merry songs, good cake, cheese, bright balls.” *–Female, age 26-35, Kyiv*

Difficult Experiences

Nevertheless, families are carrying a significant amount of **trauma and hardship** as a result of the war and its consequences.



- Experiencing **acts of war** (shooting, bombing, etc.)
- Loss of **loved ones**
- Experiencing **alarms and warnings**
- **Moving** to a new place
- Having to **cut back** on purchases

“This is a war, and I don't want to remember how we ran away from the bullets that wanted to catch up with us.” *–Female, age 36-45, Kyiv*

“We completely lost the housing we had (it was destroyed), and today we have no place to return to.” *–Male, age 26-35, Kyiv*

“When the alarm sounds, the child is nervous and alert. He was very afraid of the offensive on February 24 and did not want to leave the house.” *–Female, age 36-45, Kyiv*

“We have difficulties every day, because we moved to a completely unknown city from a small, quiet town. Every day some problems or various questions arise.” *–Female, age 36-45, Kyiv*

The Meaning of Grief

Caregivers' definitions of grief touch on themes of **death**, **loss** and **uncertainty**.

“Grief is when you leave and you are not sure that you will return, you **leave a part of your soul**, a part of your past life.”

– Female, age 36-45, Kyiv

“**To go into the unknown**, to leave what gave you a sense of peace and confidence.”

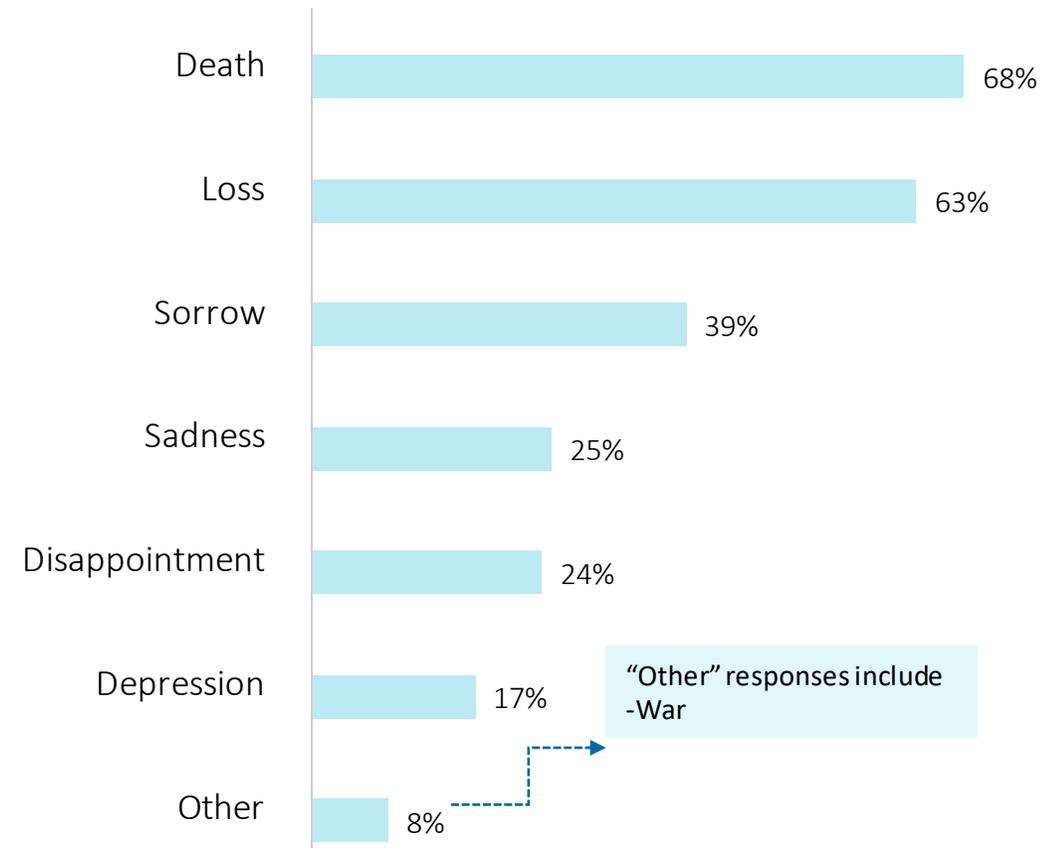
– Female, age 36-45, Kyiv

“Grief is **the war that takes away our loved ones**.”

– Female, age 36-45, Odesa

“Grief is the war in our country and everything else that comes from it. We have lost virtually everything, and we had **to start from scratch in the unknown**.”

– Female, 26-35, Kyiv



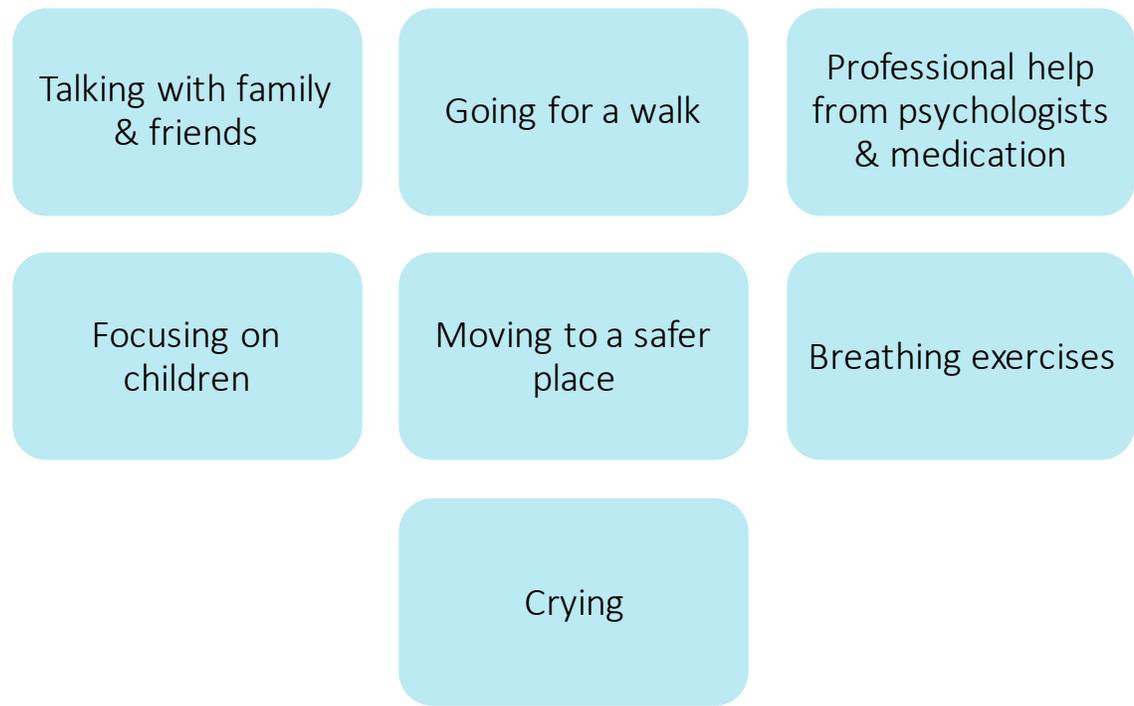
Experiences & Management of Grief

Ukrainians are experiencing many forms of grief as a result of the war and forced relocation, and a range of coping tactics are helping them through these feelings.

Experiences of Grief



Management of Grief



Children & Grief Management

Getting children through their difficult emotions requires **talking**, **distraction**, and **catharsis**.



Children's Reactions to Difficult Emotions

Catharsis and expressions of pain	Most frequently cited reactions are screaming and crying
Distractions and play	Distractions include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cartoons/entertainment • Toys • Physical activities (playing with siblings, going for a walk) • Classes • Drawing/art
Discussions	"She tries to convey her feelings to me and demands that I give advice. She also sometimes "consults" with her favorite doll." – Female, age 26-35, Kyiv



Parents' Tactics for Helping Children through Difficult Emotions

Reassuring them things will be better soon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being calm/not showing distress to show things will be better soon • Talking about pleasant things • Reassuring child the worst is behind them • Being understanding and supportive through listening
Distractions (especially play and positive content)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buying toys/treats if they can • Watching/consuming entertainment • Reading books • Being silly/positive • Going for a walk • Playing games
Hugs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showing child they are loved/not abandoned through physical affection • Giving the children their full attention

Discussing Grief with Children

Only **15%** of caregivers discuss grief openly with their children, and about half never share serious problems with their child.



*Are there specific aspects of grief that you want to discuss with your child but have not yet?**

Yes	47% feel their child is too young to understand (of this group, 64% are referring to a child aged 3-5)
	20% find grief a difficult topic to discuss
	6% feel they don't understand the topic enough
No	15% discuss grief openly with their child
Don't know	12% are not sure



How often do you share serious problems with your child?

Always	1% always share
Sometimes	46% sometimes share
Never	51% never share
Don't know	3% are not sure or refused

Discussing Grief with Children

Many find discussing grief with children greatly challenging.

Greatest Challenges in Talking to Children About Grief



Finding the words to explain the situation without further upsetting the child

“Children are very receptive and absorb everything like a sponge, so you need to choose your words very carefully.”
-Male, age 26-35, Kyiv



Staying calm/ managing own emotions in talking to child

“It is difficult to restrain yourself when you want to howl, and you have to live for the sake of the children, and even at this moment you need to be close to hold and hug the child and explain.” –
Female, age 36-45, Kyiv



Navigating the child’s lack of understanding

“A child does not yet have the same life experience as an adult. I think that the child will not always be able to understand what you are discussing with him.”
-Female, age 26-35, Kyiv

Grief Resources for Children

Caregivers are **resourceful** when it comes to working through their grief and turn to a variety of sources for support.

Resources Used



Online Psychology Resources

“I use Google search to look for child psychologists, how to talk with children in difficult situations.”
- Female, age 36-45, Lviv



Books

“Books for parents - how to keep parents from going crazy. Books about pediatrics.”
- Female, age 26-35, Lviv

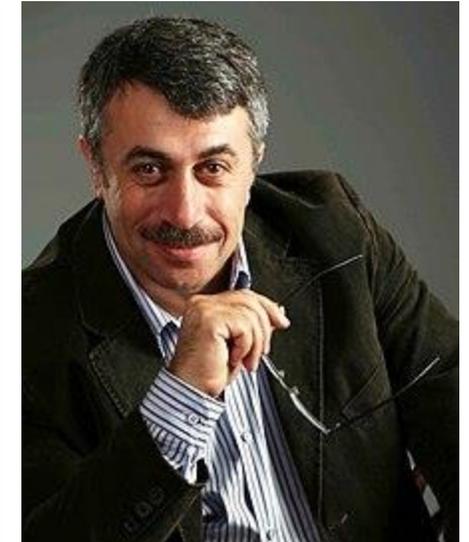


Personal Stories via Blogs & Social Media

“There is also a lot of grief on Facebook and many people wrote different stories from their lives.”
- Female, age 18-25, Kyiv

Dr. Yevgeny Komarovsky

Dr. Komarovsky is a well-known Ukrainian pediatrician and TV presenter who has gained public trust and admiration for books, e-magazines, and YouTube series, in which he gives advice about emotional support for children during the war.



Unhelpful Elements of Resources Tried:

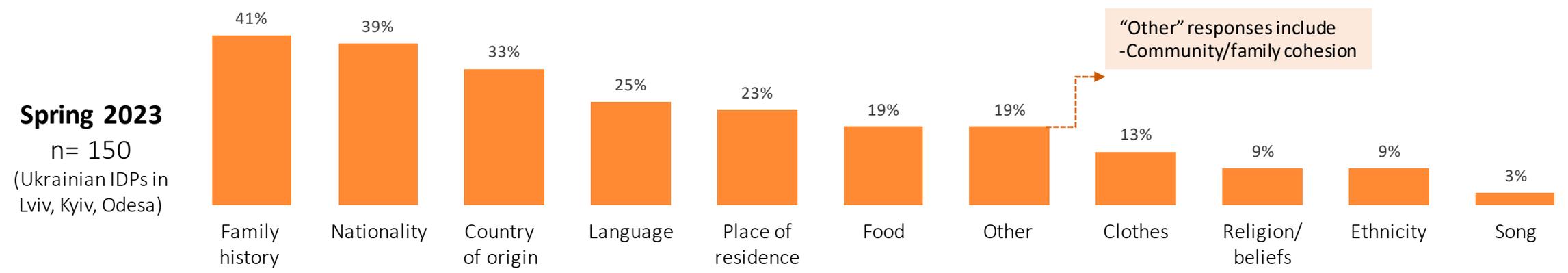
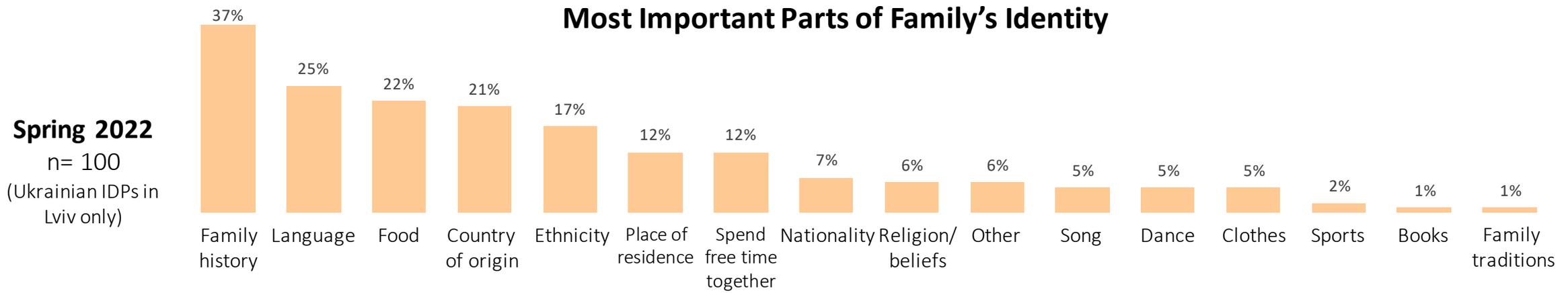
- Redundancy
- Lack of substance
- Misleading/conflicting information

Identity



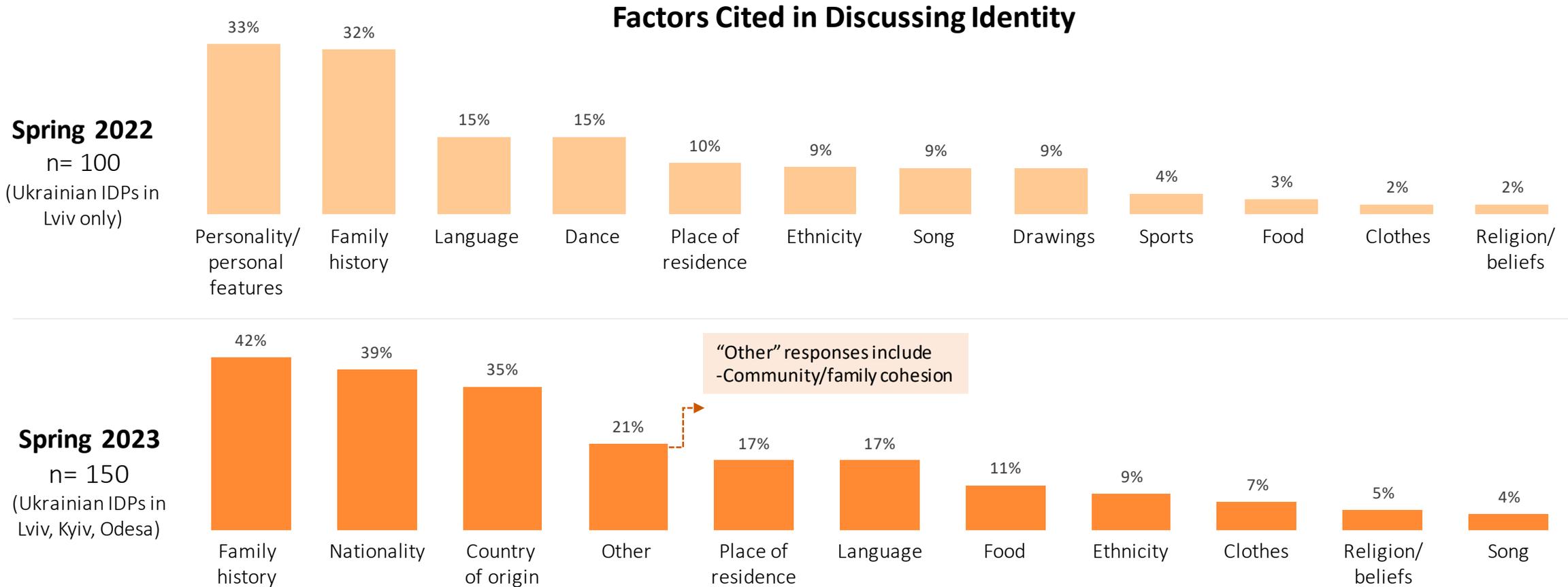
Caregivers Perceptions of Identity

Family history is still the most important aspect of identity for Ukrainian IDPs, and **nationality** has grown in importance since last year.



Discussing Family Identity with Children

Family history, nationality, and country of origin are the most cited factors when children ask about identity.





Section 6: Conclusions

Conclusions

- While many caregivers said they knew **how to talk to their child about topics such as anxiety and grief**, very few (15%) are openly having these conversations with their children.
- Caregivers **feel relatively confident** managing their own mental health and wellbeing while caring for their children. However, they are struggling with their own emotions and most said **they could use support**.
- Grief is taking on **many forms and meanings** for Ukrainians; most relate to war and its consequences.

Conclusions

- The trauma families are facing due to the war is not preventing them from appreciating **everyday joys and pleasures**. These glimmers of happiness are especially important for emotional wellbeing.
- Caregivers are actively seeking **tools and resources** to help them cope, and many are finding comfort in communal processing.
- Among caregivers, **communication skills** was the most frequently cited learning priority for young children.



Section 7: Recommendations

Recommendations

- Partner with individuals caregivers trust like mental health professionals and psychologists; invite them as a guest speaker in video content.
- To facilitate difficult conversations around grief and anxiety, provide parents with simple approaches on how to start these conversations. Share this information on blogs, online social forums or directly via message.
- Parents and children both need support to manage feelings of stress and grief – there is an opportunity to create content that is both child and adult facing.
- Caregivers feel play and distraction are important for helping children through big emotions and still want content that is fun, interactive, and playful, while also informative and healing. In-person events in American Spaces for children to socialize and play could also help serve as a reprieve from worry.

Limitations



- A majority of this sample (88%) are women because many Ukrainian men were not permitted to leave their hometowns or are participating in combat.



- Given the sensitivity of the survey topics, there is potential for social desirability bias and self-report bias, in that respondents may provide answers they believe they 'should' provide. To mitigate this bias, instruments included quantitative and qualitative questions on similar concepts to allow for triangulation and a more nuanced interpretation of the results.



- To maximize inter-rater reliability (IRR), interviewers received extensive training on how to ask each question and specialized training on how to ask sensitive questions and react to respondents answers.



- To reduce inter-coder bias between coders, the team was limited to only two people, a universal code frame was developed, and the analysts conferred when identifying themes.

Contact Information:

Samera Zaidi, Director of International Research and Evaluation

Sesame Workshop

samera.zaidi@sesame.org