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# Schema Therapy for Overcoming Intergenerational Trauma in Forced Migrants

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**Abstract:** This article examines the application of schema therapy in combination with genogram analysis to reduce intergenerational trauma in forced migrants. The study addresses the issue of negative beliefs transmitted from older generations to younger ones. The novelty of the research lies in the comprehensive examination of historical factors that have influenced the social adaptation of these groups. The text provides an analysis of existing developments in migration psychology. The collected data confirm that inherited patterns of anxious perception reduce the ability to establish connections within a new community. The study describes mechanisms for involving family members in the therapeutic process, explores family histories, and analyzes clinical recommendations and expert experiences. The aim of the research is to demonstrate that combining targeted interventions for inherited beliefs with practices that activate internal resources contributes to the more successful integration of forced migrants into a new environment. To achieve this goal, comparative and analytical methods were used. The conclusion outlines promising directions for therapeutic support for families in high-vulnerability zones. This material is intended for psychologists, migration sociology specialists, and the academic community. The proposed conclusions are based on a review of literature sources.

**Keywords:** schema therapy, intergenerational trauma, forced migrants, genogram, family counseling, cognitive patterns, migration psychology, Inner Child.

**Introduction:** Migration is associated with numerous

psychological difficulties, including changes in identity, cultural dissonance, and emotional tension. Early maladaptive schemas (EMS) formed in childhood and exacerbated by intergenerational trauma can significantly affect an individual's ability to cope with migration-related stress. This article examines the relationship between EMS and intergenerational trauma, emphasizing the importance of schema therapy and genogram analysis for understanding and addressing these issues.

The phenomenon of intergenerational trauma has gained particular significance in the study of forced migration. The rapid transformation of the social environment creates conditions for the reinforcement of negative beliefs inherited from previous generations. The objective of this study is to demonstrate the advantages of combining schema therapy with genogram analysis to mitigate negative schemas in forced migrants. To achieve this objective, the following research tasks have been formulated: identifying the nature of intergenerational patterns affecting adaptation during relocation, assessing the effectiveness of the genogram in diagnosing inherited beliefs, and systematizing practices for working with the Inner Child while demonstrating their benefits for transforming family narratives.

The novelty of this study lies in the structured description of mechanisms through which historical family experiences influence current psychological processes. Previous research on migration factors has been expanded with a detailed review of methodological approaches that integrate cognitive techniques with genogram analysis. This combination of measures offers a more comprehensive correction of intergenerational schemas, which are reinforced by the stress of forced relocation and differences in cultural norms.

This article explores the role of EMS and intergenerational trauma in the psychological adaptation of migrants. It examines how schema therapy and genogram analysis can help gain a deeper understanding of the emotional and cognitive patterns that affect adaptation processes. By integrating theoretical concepts with clinical examples, the article highlights the therapeutic potential of these approaches in supporting migrants.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The following sources were used in the preparation of this study: I.O. Brunarska [1] examined the impact of forced migration on the formation of family beliefs, highlighting the risk of transmitting anxiety-based

schemas to the next generation. M. Bunn [2] collected data on the effectiveness of family interventions in working with refugees, emphasizing the importance of a unified approach across generations. F. Dattilio [3] described the principles of cognitive-behavioral interventions that account for historical trauma, while Q. Jia [4] focused on the social integration of elderly migrants who rely on family support. H. Mishchuk [5] studied the process of adapting to new living conditions among internally displaced persons, and E.M. Reese [6] traced how unresolved family conflicts affect the mental health of descendants. D. Rizzi [7] identified the relationship between resilience and effective coping strategies for processing traumatic memories. The materials from the Self Care for Rehabilitation Professionals Working with Displaced Persons portal [8] provide additional insights into the importance of psychological support in forced migration settings. H. Stolper [9] emphasized the effectiveness of family-based approaches in addressing intergenerational patterns, while M. Wiechers [10] described a successful therapy group for migrants incorporating elements of schema therapy.

The study employs a qualitative approach, including the analysis of clinical cases and a theoretical review, to examine the impact of EMS and intergenerational trauma on the adaptation of migrants. Data were obtained from clinical practice, literature reviews, and genogram analysis to identify recurring patterns and their psychological effects.

The study employed comparative, analytical, and synthetic methods. The comparative method facilitated the examination of different interpretations of family schemas, the analytical method helped systematize perspectives on the issue and select relevant data, and the synthetic method contributed to constructing a comprehensive concept of the genogram as a diagnostic and corrective tool for intergenerational narratives. The proposed methodological framework is based on the interaction of two components: genogram analysis and schema therapy, where each procedure supports and deepens the other.

## RESULTS

Results show that migrants with unresolved intergenerational trauma and rigid EMS experience a higher level of emotional distress and adaptation difficulties. Therapeutic interventions based on schema therapy and genogram analysis have proven effective in helping clients become aware of and modify their maladaptive patterns, thereby improving their psychological well-being.

Numerous descriptions in specialized literature and observations by psychologists indicate that forced migrants often exhibit deeply ingrained beliefs inherited from older generations [1]. Statements such as "I must endure everything," "My desires are not important," or "The world is always unsafe" significantly influence behavior and emotional responses. Analytical reviews show that such schemas become particularly pronounced in situations of forced relocation, where the stress of losing a familiar environment intensifies anxious expectations and feelings of vulnerability [7]. Family surroundings frequently reinforce these patterns, even when they hinder social adaptation.

Studies on the integration of forced migrants into new societies reveal that internal prohibitions formed by previous generations impact self-esteem and obstruct the establishment of relationships beyond familiar circles [4]. Beliefs such as "I must tolerate any situation without complaint" or "Expressing my needs is inappropriate" often lead to low motivation in job searches and reluctance to express discomfort. This behavior fosters the formation of closed diasporas, where individuals remain within familiar boundaries, reinforcing a shared sense of caution. Additional difficulties arise when parents and children encounter differing cultural norms: older family members transmit long-standing beliefs, while younger individuals, trying to adjust to the new environment, must reconcile parental expectations with the demands of the local society.

Guidelines in cognitive-behavioral therapy indicate that addressing intergenerational schemas requires analyzing family histories, including past traumatic experiences [3]. This approach involves creating a detailed "genealogical map of beliefs," tracing the origins of destructive thought patterns. This process helps identify how real or perceived threats became embedded in family narratives and were reinforced through collective experience. In counseling forced migrants, a significant portion of reported concerns relates to inherited fears and a tendency toward self-sacrifice, which prevent individuals from prioritizing their own needs [8].

Clinical observations suggest that modifying intergenerational schemas is more effective when all family members are involved in the process [9]. Practicing specialists note that while individual counseling is beneficial, it is often complicated by family pressure, as relatives may resist reconsidering long-established behavioral principles [2]. A structured approach involves gradually engaging representatives of different generations. The first stage involves

identifying common family statements and assessing their impact on communication styles and worldview. The second stage focuses on reevaluating beliefs with the support of a therapist, who helps participants find evidence that contradicts widely accepted family views. The third stage consists of learning new response patterns and reinforcing them in daily life.

Experiences from psychological support centers indicate that group programs for forced migrants incorporating elements of schema therapy help foster a more flexible attitude toward family traditions [10]. Group discussions, role-playing exercises, and writing tasks enable individuals to recognize how their fears developed and where the tendency toward constant self-sacrifice originated. This approach allows painful memories to be processed beyond individual experiences, revealing shared patterns among different families, which reduces stigma and strengthens mutual support. Considering national and cultural factors is essential, as methods that incorporate familiar family rituals help create a sense of security in the therapeutic process.

Analysis of interview transcripts with migrants demonstrates that changing destructive beliefs improves social integration outcomes: individuals become more willing to establish contacts, seek assistance from local organizations, and develop positive expectations regarding their own success [5]. The weakening of the belief that "everything around is hostile" is accompanied by increased participation in community projects, while overcoming the idea that "my identity does not matter" allows individuals to assert their needs and take action to fulfill them. Family conflicts related to generational differences become less intense as participants gain the opportunity to discuss their internal struggles without fear of judgment.

Practicing psychologists emphasize that working with schemas, particularly those affecting multiple generations, requires ongoing support. They note that reconsidering old beliefs coincides with the emotional processing of the entire family experience, which may bring previously unspoken traumatic episodes to the surface [6]. Despite this complexity, the gradual weakening of intergenerational schemas enhances adaptation and fosters migrants' confidence in their abilities, ultimately contributing to more successful integration into the new society.

## DISCUSSION

The combination of schema therapy techniques and genogram analysis provides a structured approach to

tracing the dynamics of negative beliefs transmitted within families. The use of genograms facilitates the identification of specific beliefs that emerge in similar situations across generations. Work with the Inner Child complements this approach by creating a space where individuals can identify and reinterpret scripts established in childhood. Analyzing interviews with forced migrants reveals that family narratives about past hardships often instill a pathological conviction that openly expressing emotions is impossible. This mindset is reinforced by parental anxiety and a passive attitude toward personal goals. As a result, adaptation is hindered by persistent stereotypes such as "everything around is unsafe" or "personal needs do not deserve attention."

In some cases, family trauma blends with contemporary challenges, creating additional psychological strain. Discussions with clients indicate

that recognizing the origins of these patterns helps reduce emotional responses to critical events in a new living environment. To illustrate the mechanism of accumulating family beliefs, a simplified genogram sketch has been developed.

The genogram (Figure 1) demonstrates how beliefs such as "I must endure everything" and "My needs do not matter" are passed from older relatives to younger generations, with negative schemas intensifying due to real stressors associated with forced migration. During the analysis phase, it is crucial to identify family episodes that contributed to the formation of these ideals. Observations indicate that even when some relatives attempted to improve their lives, they remained surrounded by an atmosphere of distrust and fear of rejection. Eliminating this "chain of beliefs" requires not only targeted intervention but also systematic work with the entire family history.

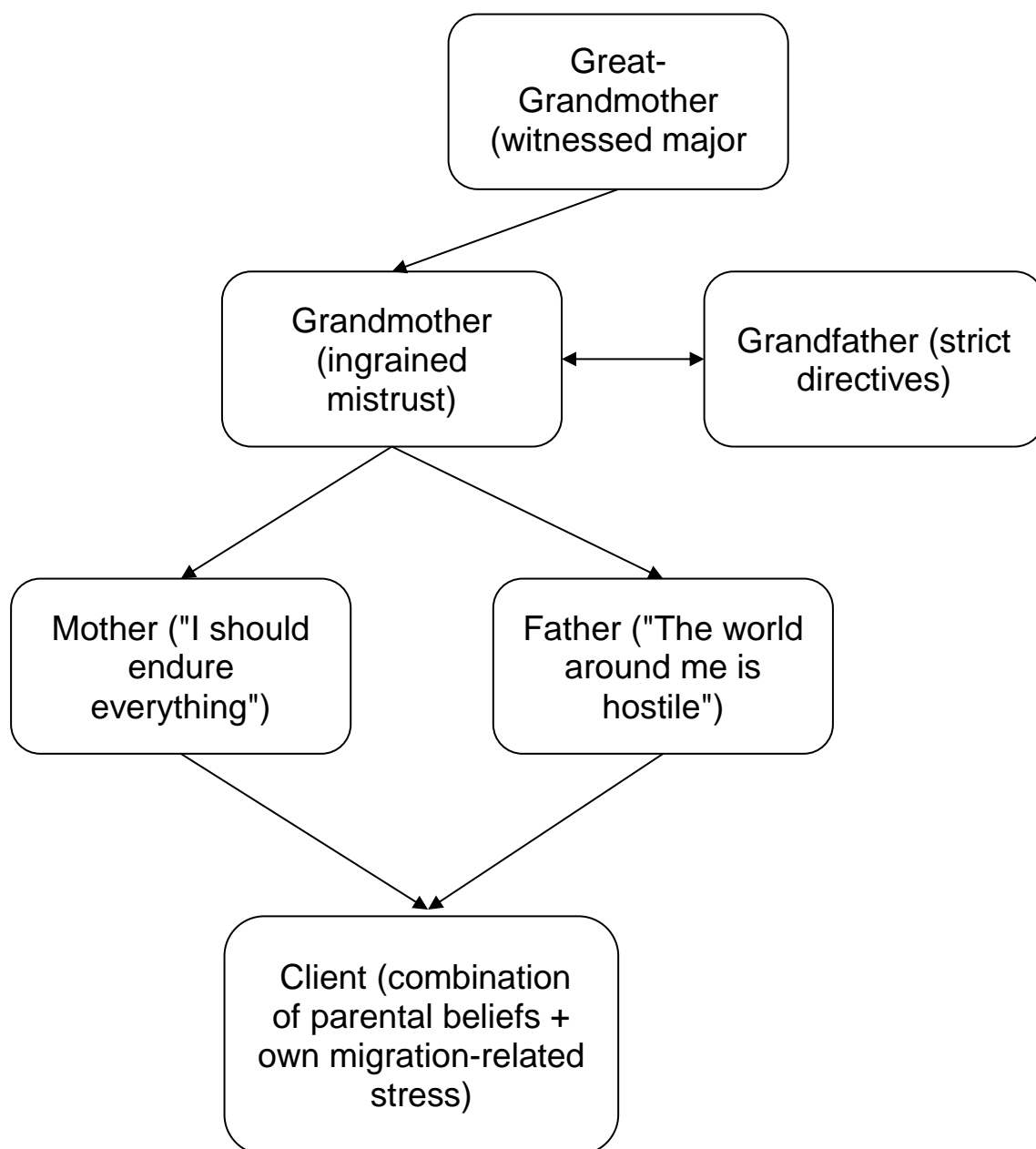


Figure 1. Genogram highlighting intergenerational transmission of beliefs

The Inner Child concept represents the part of an individual's personality that carries vulnerabilities formed during traumatic experiences. Under the schema "My needs do not matter," individuals tend to suppress their aspirations, justifying this through a sense of duty to their loved ones. In working with the Inner Child, therapists guide clients to recognize the depth of their emotions, observe their childhood stance from a detached perspective, and begin rewriting scripts where their individual needs were invalidated. The following diagram presents a simplified intervention plan that integrates genogram analysis with methods for addressing vulnerable personality parts.

**This model outlines five key stages:**

1. Constructing and collaboratively discussing the genogram with a focus on periods of family upheaval.
2. Identifying recurring beliefs and analyzing their impact on present-day behavior.
3. Addressing Inner Child imagery and reevaluating childhood experiences linked to injustice and insecurity.
4. Developing and reinforcing alternative beliefs that encourage open expression of needs.
5. Utilizing everyday situations to solidify new response patterns.

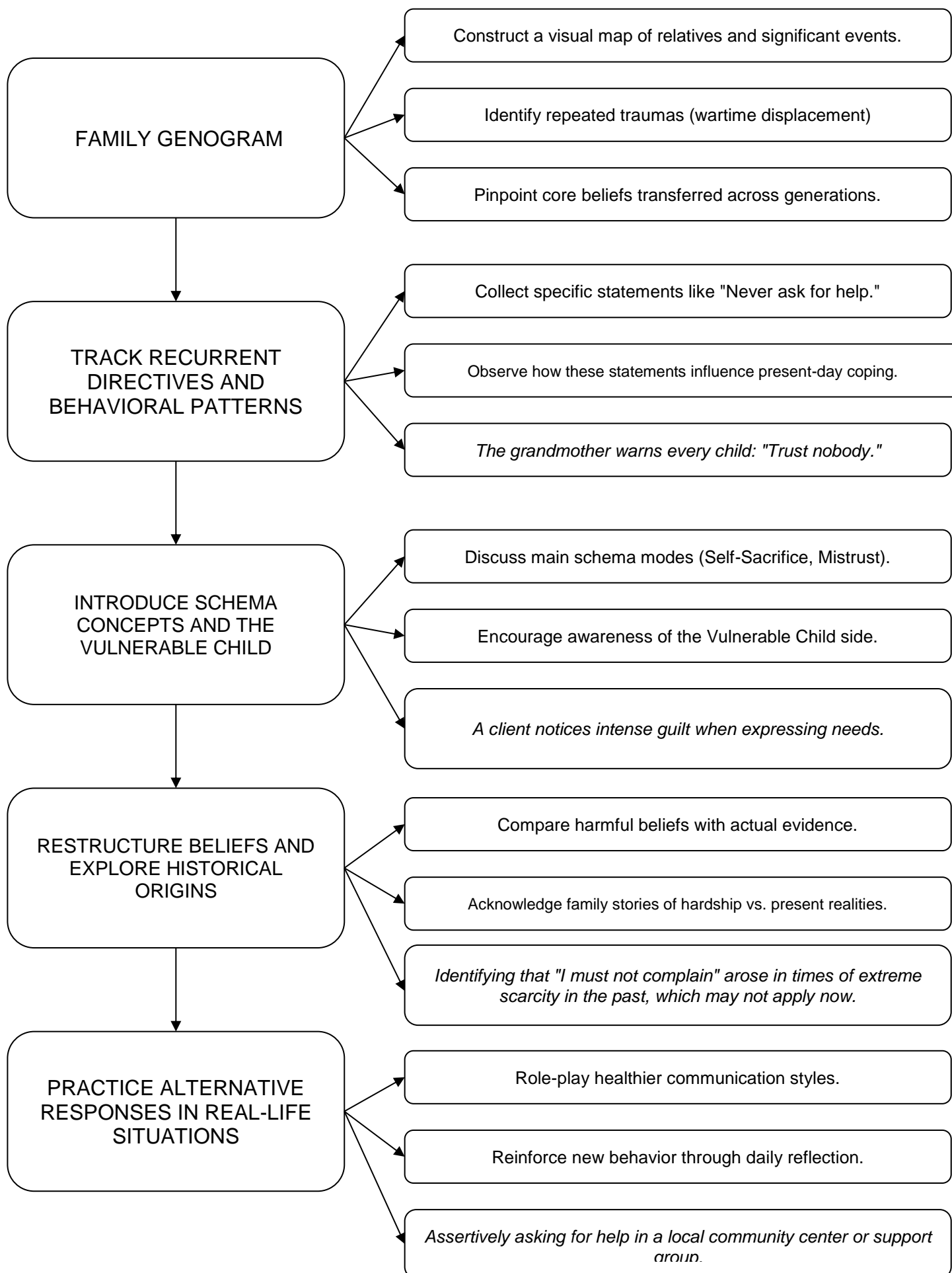


Figure 2. Expanded workflow combining genogram analysis and schema therapy

According to specialist observations, applying this comprehensive approach enhances autonomy and fosters a more flexible communication style in a new society. Families of migrants participating in the program report that after processing their genogram and correcting negative narratives, their relationships become less strained: extreme vigilance diminishes, and intergenerational understanding improves. Simultaneously, individuals learn new behavioral patterns that make it easier to express dissatisfaction or seek assistance.

Exploring family histories where ancestors previously attempted to weaken destructive patterns fosters optimism: evidence that change is achievable serves as a positive example for younger generations. Clients note that such cases activate internal resilience by reducing the sense of being "doomed" to hardship. This effect is more pronounced when therapists help clients

integrate new beliefs into daily family rituals, embedding them into the collective emotional experience.

The next diagram illustrates the interaction between the Inner Child and the Adult part of the personality during the process of rewriting negative scripts. Figure 3 highlights two core components: the Inner Child, carrying fears and past grievances, and the Adult part, capable of providing conscious support. When clients learn to engage with their childhood self without judgment or suppression, the intensity of automatic defense mechanisms decreases. The Adult part then "permits" new behaviors, allowing individuals to move beyond chronic self-sacrifice and anxious anticipation of misfortune. According to therapists, this approach strengthens positive self-perception and encourages social initiative



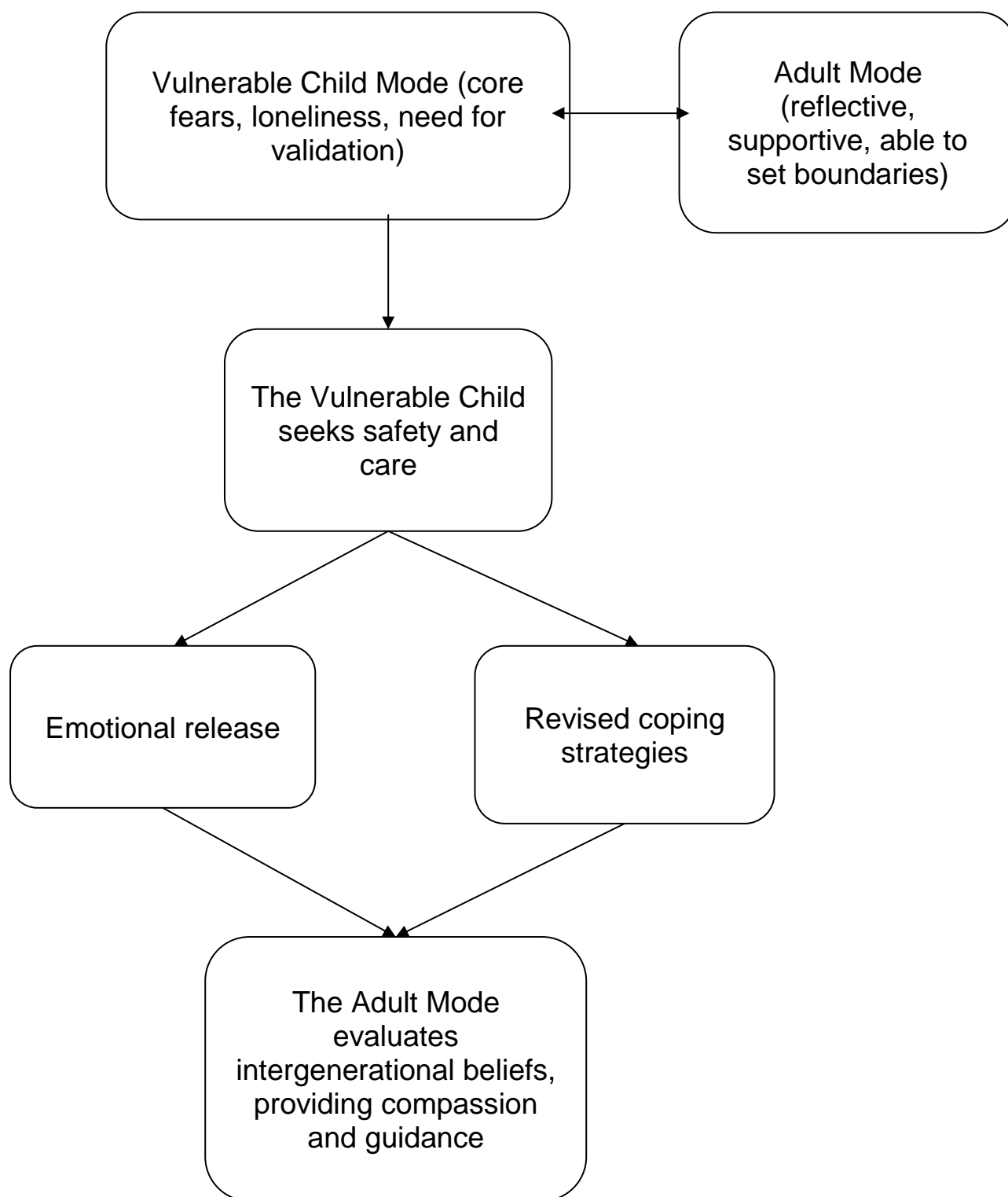


Figure 3. Interaction between the vulnerable child and the adult part

A clinical case of a 35-year-old migrant from Ukraine illustrates the impact of EMS and intergenerational trauma on psychological adaptation. The client exhibited pronounced abandonment and defectiveness schemas, which led to difficulties in relationships and social isolation. The use of schema therapy and genogram analysis helped her understand how her family's history of forced resettlement influenced her

emotional reactions. Over time, targeted therapeutic interventions contributed to the development of healthier behavioral models and improved self-esteem. To enhance the psychological adaptation of migrants, schema therapy can be utilized in both individual and group settings. Group therapy is particularly beneficial as it fosters a sense of belonging and shared



experience, which is critical for migrants experiencing social isolation. The development of psychoeducational workshops aimed at recognizing and restructuring maladaptive schemas can help migrants cope more effectively with emotional difficulties.

The integration of schema therapy, genogram analysis, and Inner Child techniques yields a multifaceted effect. Individuals reassess their family history, recognize inherited beliefs, and acquire tools for their modification. In some cases, psychological blocks previously perceived as personal weaknesses are revealed to be the result of the emotional burden carried by the entire family system. Reinterpreting these beliefs enables clients to engage more actively in their new communities, build trust in local institutions, and establish more stable social connections.

Given the increasing number of migrants experiencing psychological difficulties, rehabilitation centers can greatly benefit from integrating schema therapy and genogram analysis into their therapeutic programs. These methods allow for the structured identification of deep-seated emotional patterns and the disruption of intergenerational trauma cycles. For example, rehabilitation programs for Russian-speaking and Ukrainian-speaking migrants may include group sessions aimed at recognizing and transforming maladaptive schemas while taking cultural factors into account.

Russian-speaking migrants often face cultural and language barriers, identity crises, and feelings of isolation. EMS formed under the influence of collective historical traumas (such as political repressions and forced migration) can significantly affect their emotional resilience and ability to integrate into a new society. Therapy that addresses these cultural aspects can substantially improve their psychological well-being.

Thus, the study emphasizes the importance of understanding EMS and intergenerational trauma for providing effective psychological support to migrants. By addressing these deep-rooted factors, therapists can help clients develop healthier coping mechanisms and enhance their capacity to adapt.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, Russian-speaking migrants often face cultural and linguistic barriers, an identity crisis, and feelings of isolation. EMS formed under the influence of collective historical traumas (such as political repression and

forced migration) can significantly impact their emotional resilience and ability to integrate into a new society. Therapy that takes these cultural aspects into account can substantially improve their psychological well-being.

The beliefs formed in previous generations, rooted in past crises, significantly complicate the adaptation process of forced migrants, confirming the first research objective related to identifying characteristic intergenerational patterns. The use of genogram analysis reveals the causes and structure of destructive beliefs, demonstrating the effectiveness of this tool in recognizing inherited scripts, aligning with the second objective. The integration of schema therapy methods with Inner Child work facilitates personality reorientation, reducing the impact of traumatic family experiences and strengthening psychological resilience, which directly corresponds to the third objective. As a result, a comprehensive approach that addresses both the family system and individual experiences of those who have undergone forced migration provides opportunities for gradually overcoming destructive schemas and achieving more successful integration into a new environment.

The conducted study lays the groundwork for further development of therapy focused on intergenerational themes and highlights the significance of combining genogram analysis with schema therapy principles in supporting individuals affected by forced displacement.

Understanding the impact of EMS and intergenerational trauma is a crucial aspect of providing effective psychological support to migrants. Schema therapy and genogram analysis offer valuable tools for identifying and transforming maladaptive patterns, ultimately contributing to better adaptation and improved mental well-being. Integrating these methods into rehabilitation centers and online programs can significantly enhance the psychological resilience of migrants facing cultural and emotional challenges.

In the future, it is important to investigate the effectiveness of online psychoeducational programs in working with EMS among migrants. Given the accessibility of digital platforms, online interventions may serve as an additional resource for individuals experiencing adaptation difficulties. The development of structured courses focused on recognizing schemas, processing trauma, and regulating emotions could enhance the quality of psychological support for migrants worldwide.

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