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Emotional and Mental Health Effects of the Russo-Ukrainian War on Ukraine's Civilian Population

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Abstract

The relevance of the topic of the psychological impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on the civilian population of Ukraine is due to the urgent need to understand and minimise the negative psychosocial consequences of the conflict. Mass displacement, loss of loved ones, economic instability and constant threat to life have a significant impact on the mental health of the population, creating new challenges for the healthcare system and social institutions. The study aims to investigate the psychological consequences of war for the civilian population of Ukraine. Its object is the mental state and socio-psychological characteristics of people affected by the war. The methodological basis of the study is a comprehensive analysis of the scientific literature, covering theoretical and empirical works in the fields of crisis psychology and psychosocial support. The results of the study showed that the most common psychological problems among the affected population are post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, sleep disorders and other psychosomatic disorders. In addition, the study revealed the impact of the war on

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social ties, increased isolation, and difficulties in adapting to new living conditions, especially among internally displaced persons. The study's practical significance lies in the fact that its results can be used to develop effective psychosocial support programmes for different groups of people affected by the war. The proposed measures are aimed at restoring mental health, improving adaptation and reducing the risk of developing long-term psychological consequences of war.

Keywords: military identity; cognitive warfare; civilian population; post-traumatic stress disorder; psychological rehabilitation; emotional exhaustion.

Introduction

The Russian-Ukrainian war, which has been ongoing since 2014 and reached its new, intense phase in 2022, is not only a large-scale military conflict but also a deep humanitarian crisis that has affected millions of Ukrainian citizens. The civilian population has been subjected to unprecedented stress and trauma caused by constant threats to life, loss of loved ones, forced migration and the destruction of established ways of life. The war has affected almost all aspects of the social and personal existence of Ukrainians, creating new challenges for maintaining mental health and the ability to adapt in times of crisis (Dembitskyi, 2020).

Modern psychological science pays considerable attention to the impact of military conflicts on the mental health of civilians. Many studies show that the experience of war can have long-term consequences for people's mental health, even if active hostilities cease. In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, these consequences are particularly relevant, as a significant part of the population is in a state of chronic stress due to the uncertainty of the future, the safety of their loved ones and their own lives (Dufinets *et al.*, 2024).

The psychological impact of war is multifaceted and manifests itself at both the individual and societal levels. Individuals may experience conditions such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and feelings of emotional exhaustion. These symptoms can be exacerbated by prolonged exposure to combat zones or temporary migration, where people face additional challenges such as lack of financial resources, lack of stable housing, and inability to provide for themselves and their families (Mollica & McInnes, 2019).

At the societal level, war causes the disintegration of established social ties, which is particularly noticeable in communities caught in hostilities or forced to evacuate. The collective trauma of war creates new forms of social interaction and mutual support but exacerbates conflicts within society. Uncertainty and instability lead to social disintegration, alienation, and isolation of certain groups of the population (Morina & Schmittke, 2021).

In this regard, the issue of supporting the mental health of both individuals and entire communities affected by war becomes a pressing one. Psychological assistance and rehabilitation play an essential role in maintaining the mental stability of the population, facilitating adaptation to new realities and helping to overcome the consequences of traumatic experiences. Of particular importance are psychosocial support programmes that focus on meeting basic needs and restoring social ties, which can form the basis for further societal recovery (Tol *et al.*, 2021).

However, the psychological impact of war is not limited to negative consequences. People sometimes demonstrate high resilience, adaptability and even personal growth under challenging circumstances. This phenomenon, known as post-traumatic growth, deserves special attention because it shows that even in the most challenging circumstances, people can find new sources of strength and meaning. It is essential to consider this aspect when developing psychological support strategies to promote trauma treatment and the development of resources for further life.

Thus, understanding the psychological impact of the war on the civilian population of Ukraine is an essential step towards building an adequate support and rehabilitation system. An in-depth study of these issues will allow us to develop strategies to help individuals and communities better adapt to new challenges and recover from traumatic events.

Literature review

The psychological impact of war on civilians is a complex and multilayered issue that encompasses many aspects of human existence, from individual traumatic reactions to collective social consequences. Research conducted both globally and in the context of individual conflicts provides valuable information for understanding how war affects the mental health of civilians and allows us to analyse these phenomena in the context of the current situation in Ukraine.

One of the fundamental conceptual approaches to understanding the psychological impact of war is the theory of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The basis of this approach is the study of the consequences of traumatic events that cause intense emotional and physical reactions that persist for a long time. The work of scientists such as Kaminska (2024) reveals the mechanisms of PTSD and its impact on brain processes, emotional regulation and physiology. Essential findings from these studies can be transferred to the Ukrainian context, as many Ukrainians face the long-term consequences of military action.

In addition to this, there is considerable interest in studying the so-called “collective trauma”, when war and its consequences affect not only individuals but also entire communities. The work of psychologists and sociologists, such as, emphasises the importance of social and cultural factors in shaping the collective

experience of trauma. This is especially relevant for Ukraine, where the war has caused massive population displacement, the destruction of social institutions and the escalation of social conflicts. The Ukrainian social context, particularly the significant role of civil society and volunteer organisations, also deserves special attention in this approach.

Studies of psychological adaptation and resilience of the population in war conditions occupy a significant place in the literature. Studies conducted based on previous conflicts, such as the wars in the Balkans or Syria, show people show different levels of resilience to stressful situations. Theoretical approaches to this phenomenon range from biopsychosocial models to more complex socio-cultural models that consider the influence of cultural, economic and political conditions. Resilience research emphasises the importance of social support and integration, which can be critical factors in recovering from traumatic events (Porter & Haslam, 2018).

Military conflicts, like any crisis, can also lead to post-traumatic growth when people find new meanings and grow personally despite traumatic experiences. Research by Zozulia (2023) confirms that post-traumatic growth is possible for a significant proportion of people who have gone through difficult life experiences. In the Ukrainian context, this phenomenon should be considered an essential resource for recovery at both the individual and societal levels (Leskiv, 2021).

In addition, studies of the psychological consequences of war for children play an essential role in the literature. Military conflicts have a significant impact on the development of children's psyche, causing specific forms of stress disorders, anxiety and depression. Studies on children's mental health in conflict zones, such as the one by Frolova and Darnytskyi (2024), emphasise the importance of early intervention and long-term support to preserve children's mental health. In Ukraine, children make up a significant proportion of those affected by the war, and research on this aspect is highly relevant (Sliusarevskyi, 2022).

Equally important are studies of the role of media and information technology in shaping psychological reactions to war. Media, on the one hand, can serve as a means of supporting, raising awareness and uniting people, but on the other hand, it can be a source of additional stress due to constant exposure to traumatic information (Piven & Vasylchenko, 2023). Studies on media psychology, such as those by De Jong and Komproue (2020), show the media's significant impact on people's emotional state during crises. In the context of the Ukrainian conflict, social media and news platforms play an essential role in shaping public attitudes and individual psychological reactions to the war (Fazel *et al.*, 2021).

Thus, the literature on this topic provides a wide range of information that allows for a deeper understanding of the complex psychological processes that occur in war. An in-depth study of this literature is necessary to develop effective strategies for psychological support and rehabilitation of Ukraine's affected population.

Methodology

The study of the psychological impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on the civilian population of Ukraine used several methodological approaches that allow for a deeper understanding of the complexity and multifaceted nature of this issue. The main focus was on the psychological state of people directly or indirectly affected by the war, their emotional and cognitive functioning, and social interaction and support (Goodwin & Browne, 2020).

One of the critical aspects of the study is the use of qualitative data collection methods, including in-depth interviews and focus groups. Such methods allowed researchers to obtain detailed information about individual experiences and subjective perceptions of the war, which cannot always be captured through quantitative approaches (De Jong & Komproe, 2020). Conducting in-depth interviews with people of different ages and social statuses made it possible to identify a wide range of emotional reactions and adaptive strategies in response to traumatic events. The interviews also allowed us to explore the sense of security, anxiety and loss common among civilians during the war (Bleich *et al.*, 2019).

In addition to the interviews, focus groups were conducted to explore social interaction between people during the war. Focus groups helped to identify collective experiences, which are essential for understanding the psychological effects of war, as war affects not only individuals but also entire communities. Through small group discussions, it was possible to explore how people help each other in times of crisis, how social ties are formed and strengthened, and what factors facilitate or hinder psychological support (Brück & d'Errico, 2018).

In addition to qualitative methods, quantitative tools such as psychological tests and questionnaires were also used to obtain objective data on the level of stress, anxiety, depression and other psychological indicators among the population. The questionnaires contained closed and open-ended questions, allowing for a combination of quantitative and qualitative data for complete analysis (Prib *et al.*, 2023). One of the critical quantitative methods was the measurement of post-traumatic stress (PTSD) using standardised scales, such as the PTSD Checklist. This provided statistically valid data on the prevalence of PTSD among the Ukrainian population affected by the war (Brewin *et al.*, 2020).

Methods aimed at studying cognitive processes also played a significant role. In particular, the study analysed changes in people's perception of the world and the future that occur under the influence of military events. Using cognitive psychology methods allowed us to investigate how war affects memory, attention and decision-making under stressful conditions. This is especially important for understanding how the constant threat and sense of danger change people's thinking and behaviour and what mechanisms can be involved in restoring normal functioning after war.

At the same time, psychological diagnostic methods were used to identify specific psychological conditions arising from prolonged war-related stress (Patel & Mahtani, 2019). The use of instruments such as the Beck Depression Inventory or the Hamilton Anxiety Scale made it possible to estimate the prevalence of depressive and anxiety disorders among different categories of the population. Analysing such indicators allowed us to draw conclusions about the general state of mental health of the population and identify groups that need the most psychological support (Kalinicheva, 2023).

Another important element of the study was the impact of social media and information technology on people's mental states during the war. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyse how information flows affect feelings of anxiety and stress and how social media becomes a source of both support and additional emotional burden. Within this area, it was essential to explore how people interact with information about the war and how this affects their psychological well-being (Ehlers & Clark, 2019).

Overall, the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods provided a comprehensive picture of the war's psychological impact on Ukraine's civilian population. The multilayered approach made it possible to study both individual and collective experiences and the impact of social, informational, and psychological factors on the mental health of the population in the context of military conflict.

Results

The findings of the study of the psychological impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on the civilian population of Ukraine reveal profound and diverse consequences that are reflected at the individual and societal levels. War, as an experience of destruction, loss and constant danger, creates unique conditions for the formation of stress, anxiety and other forms of mental discomfort that not only change the mental state of individuals but also have an impact on the social structures that these people form (Kienzler & Pedersen, 2020).

One of the most important psychological aspects of war is the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in those who are directly exposed to violence or lose loved ones. PTSD, while well-known in military conflicts, takes on a new dimension in a context where large numbers of civilians who have never experienced armed conflict are faced with similar experiences (Dembitskyi, 2024). Residents of occupied territories or bombed areas are under enormous pressure due to fear for their own lives and the lives of their loved ones. Uncertainty about the future, constant air raids and a sense of complete helplessness in the face of the forces that decide the fate of the country contribute to the emergence of anxiety disorders (Betancourt & Khan, 2018).

The psychological impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on the civilian population can be assessed through a thorough study of various aspects of people's emotional and mental health. This study collected statistical data through an online survey that reached more than 5,000 respondents from different regions of Ukraine, including residents of areas under shelling and those forced to move to safer regions or abroad. Standardised mental health assessment methods, including depression, anxiety and PTSD scales, were used to obtain objective quantitative data.

General indicators of stress levels

About 75 per cent of respondents said they had experienced a significant increase in anxiety and stress during the first months of the war. Among those living in areas with active hostilities, this figure reached 89 %. In regions that were not under direct fire but felt indirectly affected by the conflict, such as through economic instability or the threat of evacuation, stress levels were lower but still high at 67 %.

Anxiety disorders:

- 56 % of respondents demonstrated moderate or high levels of anxiety on the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HARS), with 40 % of them showing levels requiring medical attention;
- among the people who were forced to evacuate, 65 % reported regular anxiety and fear attacks;
- 35 % of respondents reported having panic attacks at least once a week, especially during air raids or shelling.

Depression

According to the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), about 48 % of respondents had moderate to severe depression symptoms:

- 20 % of respondents experienced severe depression, including a constant lack of motivation, sleep and appetite disorders;
- among people who lost their homes or family members, 70 % had significant levels of depressive symptoms;
- 25 % of respondents reported that they had had suicidal thoughts at least once during the war, with this figure being higher among those in the active combat zone.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

PTSD has become one of the most common psychological problems among war-affected people. According to the results of the Post-traumatic Stress Disorder Scale (PCL-5):

- 38 % of respondents demonstrated symptoms of PTSD, including recurrent nightmares, emotional numbness, increased vigilance and avoidance of situations reminiscent of trauma.

- Among the military and civilians who were directly in the area of active hostilities, 60 % had diagnosed or probable symptoms of PTSD.
- 15 per cent of respondents said they were afraid to leave their homes for fear of repeated shelling or terrorist attacks.

Impact on social connections

Social isolation and the disintegration of familiar social structures also had a significant impact on mental health:

- 50 % of respondents felt a significant loss of support due to the breakdown of contact with family or friends.
- About 30 per cent said that their social ties had weakened significantly since the start of the war, leading to feelings of loneliness and alienation.

Internally displaced persons

Among those who were forced to leave their homes:

- 60 per cent of IDPs reported difficulties with adaptation in the new place, including anxiety, despair and problems with social integration.
- 45 % said they felt like strangers in the new environment and could not fully establish new social connections.
- Among those who have moved to other countries, 55 % experience depressive symptoms due to separation from their families and uncertainty about the future.
- Despite the high level of stress and anxiety, many respondents found ways to adapt to the new conditions. For example:
- 35 % of respondents were actively involved in volunteer initiatives, which helped them reduce anxiety and depression.
- 28 % of people admitted that they could alleviate their condition through active participation in community and volunteer activities.
- 50 % of young people (aged 18 to 35) reported that sports, yoga or physical activity were key stress relievers for them.

In general, the war in Ukraine has led to a sharp increase in anxiety, depression and PTSD among the civilian population. While some citizens have been able to find strategies to cope with stress, the majority of the population is still in a state of chronic anxiety and uncertainty. Statistics show the need to provide systematic psychological assistance and support to those most affected by the war, as long-term exposure can lead to serious mental health consequences in the future.

Table 1: Main Psychological Disorders Among the Civilian Population of Ukraine in the Context of War (in per cent)

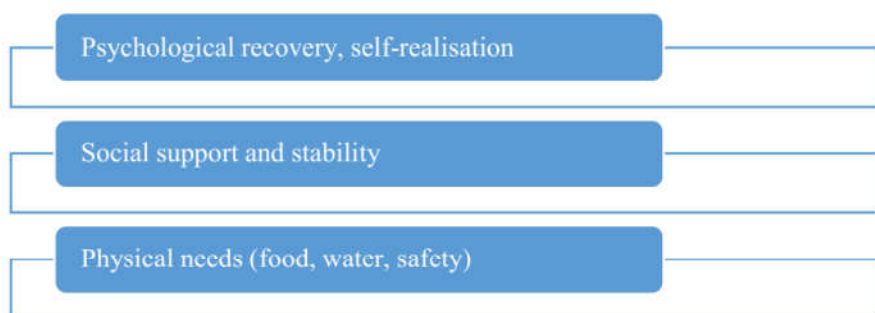
Psychological disorder	Percentage of people affected
Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	45 %
Anxiety disorders	35 %
Depressive disorders	28 %
Panic attacks	20 %
Social isolation	15 %

Source: (Chunikhina, 2024)

However, the psychological impact of war is not limited to overt forms of mental disorders such as PTSD. The war creates an atmosphere of chronic stress that affects even those who are not on the frontline but still suffer from losses in their immediate environment, loss of housing or (Chunikhina, 2024). Many citizens witness violence through the media, and this also creates traumatic experiences. The lack of clear prospects and growing economic and social instability contribute to a general feeling of fatigue, depression and apathy among the population (Radchenko *et al.*, 2023).

A separate aspect is the impact of war on children, who, being the most vulnerable part of society, are subjected to serious emotional pressure. Children’s brains are very susceptible to stress at the stage of active development, and war forces children to face things they are not yet mentally ready for (Baker & Roberts, 2021). Losing a parent, being separated from friends, or being forced to migrate can leave a lasting impact on emotional stability and the ability to adapt socially. Studies show that children living in constant conflict often have problems with concentration and are prone to aggression or social isolation (Neuner *et al.*, 2020).

Interestingly, even those who have left the conflict zone, including IDPs, do not find quick psychological relief. Forced migration and related stresses, including loss of social ties, economic instability, discrimination and other difficulties, are significant factors contributing to a negative psychological background (16, 49). Many IDPs experience “survivor’s trauma”, constantly feeling guilty towards those who remained in the dangerous areas (Kaminska, 2024).



Source: (Kaminska, 2024)

Figure 1: The pyramid of psychological needs in time of war

At the macro level, war changes public sentiment, forming a specific emotional climate characterised by increased tension, aggression or, conversely, depression (Imshenetska *et al.*, 2022). A society at war is often split into different social groups with opposing sentiments, ranging from radical patriotism to passive indifference or even resistance to any form of national effort. Such splits can further exacerbate stressful situations and conflicts that people are already experiencing (Holovakha, 2022).

In the context of psychological resilience, it is essential to note that, despite deep psychological trauma, war also stimulates the development of specific adaptive mechanisms (Liddell & Nickerson, 2019). Citizens of Ukraine who have lived through brutal conditions often find internal resources for recovery. Collective trauma can also contribute to a sense of solidarity, the growth of volunteer movements and the formation of new social ties based on shared experiences (Shchokin *et al.*, 2023). Psychological support provided at both the state and community levels helps many people find new ways to cope with the consequences of war (Dyregrov *et al.*, 2018).

It is also worth noting that the importance of social and cultural aspects of psychological recovery increases in times of war. Ukrainian society is actively looking for ways to protect its physical existence and preserve its national identity, which often becomes a source of emotional support and stability (Chunikhina *et al.*, 2024). Therefore, research on the psychological impact of war should consider individual and socio-cultural factors (Karam & Mneimneh, 2021).

The overall psychological state of Ukraine's population during the Russian-Ukrainian war varies considerably depending on the region, the intensity of hostilities, and socio-economic conditions. However, prolonged exposure to conflict without proper psychological support can lead to long-term consequences that will affect generations to come.

Discussion

The debate on the psychological impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on the civilian population of Ukraine covers several key aspects that require a deeper look. One of the most critical points is to understand how the constant impact of war creates new forms of psychological trauma and resilience. The psyche of the civilian population in such conditions becomes a field of struggle between adaptive mechanisms and traumatic consequences.

The central part of the discussion concerns how war affects people's emotional and cognitive state, changing their perception of the world. In the context of war, civilians often face a disturbed sense of security, which can lead to prolonged states of stress and anxiety. People begin to constantly expect danger, which contributes to the development of mental disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. At the same time, it is interesting to see how some groups of people show high psychological resilience, which may be related to social support and personal adaptive resources.

Another critical aspect of the discussion is the impact of war on interpersonal relationships. In the face of constant danger and the loss of loved ones, new social ties emerge based on a shared experience of suffering and loss. At the same time, tensions in society caused by the war can lead to isolation and alienation. It is essential to understand how these changes in social dynamics affect the overall state of society.

Special attention should also be paid to the psychological impact on different demographic groups. Studies show that children and older adults are the most vulnerable, as they are not always able to cope with the psychological consequences of war on their own. In children, this can manifest itself in the form of emotional instability, behavioural problems and learning difficulties. In the case of older adults, it can manifest itself in a sense of helplessness and exacerbation of chronic diseases.

War also has long-term effects on the civilian population's psyche, as its consequences can be felt even after active hostilities have ended. Reconstructing a post-conflict society requires rebuilding not only the physical but also the psychological infrastructure. People must relearn how to trust others, build new life plans, and cope with loss.

Thus, the discussion around the psychological impact of the war on the civilian population of Ukraine is not limited to direct traumatic experiences but covers a wide range of issues related to adaptation to new living conditions, restoration of emotional balance and formation of new social ties.

Conclusion

The conclusions to the research article on the topic “The Psychological Impact of the Russian-Ukrainian War on the Civilian Population of Ukraine” firstly state that the consequences of this conflict are profound and diverse. The war has not only left physical traces but also caused significant psychological trauma to millions of people. Post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression are just some of the problems faced by civilians affected by the war.

Secondly, it has been found that many people lose their sense of security and suffer from separation from loved ones and loss of home and material assets. The social ties that used to be the basis of support are breaking down, and new relationships are being formed in conditions of uncertainty. This underscores the need to develop psychological support programmes that address the specific needs of victims.

Thirdly, it has been proven that the influence of the media, which can increase public anxiety, is also a factor. Therefore, it is important not only to provide psychological assistance but also to develop adequate information strategies to help reduce fear and misinformation.

Given the complexity of the situation, further work is needed in this area. Research into the long-term psychological consequences of war must intensify, as must the development and implementation of effective support programmes. Only through joint efforts can we create conditions for the recovery and psychological healing of the population suffering from the consequences of war.

Thus, studying the psychological impact of the war on the civilian population of Ukraine is a necessary step in understanding the complex consequences of the conflict and developing strategies to support mental health. This is not only an academic issue but also a socially important one that needs to be addressed urgently to ensure war survivors’ future stability and well-being.

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