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The Necessity of Improving Psychological Resilience and Life Satisfaction among Youth during Wartime

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Abstract

Background and Aim of Study: The war in Ukraine is having a significant impact on the mental health of all its residents. This influence is particularly noticeable among young university students, who during their studies are forced to seek refuge both within and outside the country.

The aim of the study: to identify the characteristics of life satisfaction and psychological resilience among university students in different learning environments during wartime.

Material and Methods: The study was conducted at Uzhhorod National University (Ukraine) using adapted psychological tests, Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale 10 (CD-RISC 10), via the Google Forms platform in May 2025. Respondents aged 18-35 were divided into two groups. Group 1 consists of 116 students, 21.6% of whom are male and 78.4% of whom are female. None of them has changed their place of residence (Ukraine). Group 2 consists of 108 students, 19.4% of whom are male and 80.6% of whom are female. They were all forced to relocate to other regions, including the European Union and Ukraine.

Results: The levels of absolute and general dissatisfaction with life reported by students in Group 1 are almost 1.4 times higher than those reported by students in Group 2. At the same time, however, this indicator is significantly higher among men than women are. This suggests that their psychological well-being is low. On average, students in Group 1 are more psychologically stable than those in Group 2. The respective percentages are 25.5% and 23.6%. Additionally, the proportion of students in Group 2 with low psychological stability is almost twice that in Group 1. In terms of gender characteristics, women in Group 1 demonstrate a higher level of psychological stability (29.7%), while men in Group 2 exhibit a lower level of psychological stability (14.3%). These are the highest levels across all gender groups.

Conclusions: Among university students during wartime, psychological resilience correlates positively with life satisfaction. There was a significant decrease in psychological stability among students in Group 2, who had relatively low levels of life satisfaction. Therefore, it is necessary to develop programmes that actively promote psychological intervention, social support and assistance to improve the mental state and learning effectiveness of university students.

Keywords: mental health, life satisfaction, psychological resilience, quality of life, students, war

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Introduction

The war in Ukraine is the most challenging time in the lives of its people. The war has affected everyone in the country, whether through mobilisation and direct participation in combat operations, the loss of loved ones, homes and property, or forced displacement. People have suffered from air raids and shelling, power shortages and more. Active hostilities forced a significant number of people to leave their homes and normal lives behind in order to seek refuge, both within the country and abroad. This applies to university students too (Melnik et al., 2024; Mykhaylyshyn et al., 2024; Pypenko et al., 2023; Stadnik et al., 2023; 2025).

Fear of death, anxiety and concern for loved ones, as well as being forced to relocate to safer areas, all have a negative impact on mental health and life satisfaction. As is well known, life satisfaction is essentially an attitude towards reality formed through emotions and feelings, and it significantly impacts a person's mental health (Samir AlKudsi et al., 2022; Melnyk et al., 2025).

On the other hand, personal resilience is an important factor in the mental well-being of every university student. Newman (2002) defines psychological resilience as “the process of adapting and recovering when faced with adversity, tragedy, trauma, or stress”.

Psychological resilience is a complex concept determined by a combination of personal, social and cultural factors (Melnik et al., 2020; Mykhaylyshyn et al., 2025; Southwick et al., 2014). Recent studies (Jackson et al., 2007) have shown that resilience can be strengthened through training and education. This improves the mental health and learning effectiveness of university students during wartime.

The aim of the study

To identify the characteristics of life satisfaction and psychological resilience among university students in different learning environments during wartime.

Materials and Methods

In May 2025, a survey was carried out among students aged 18 to 35 at Uzhhorod National University. The students participating in the study were divided into two groups:

Group 1 consists of 116 university students from Western Ukraine who do not leave their usual place of residence during the war. Of these students, 25 (21.5%) are men and 91 (78.4%) are women.

Group 2 consists of 108 university students who are displaced persons residing temporarily in Ukraine and European Union countries. Of these students, 21 (19.4%) are men and 87 (80.6%) are women.

The study was conducted by posting psychological questionnaires on Google Forms due to the war in Ukraine. In addition, all groups of university students were monitored during both face-to-face and distance learning classes.

The Satisfaction with Life Scale, a 5-item scale, SWLS (Diener et al., 1985) was used to assess students' life satisfaction and quality of life. In the present study, the adapted Ukrainian version of the questionnaire by Stadnik and Melnyk was used (<https://forms.gle/9GoFoTZjWnMxrMW5A>).

The SWLS aims to measure the overall perception of quality of life. This allows each respondent to rate the importance of life domains according to their values and provides an overall judgement of life satisfaction. Each of the five items is rated on a seven-point Likert scale (1 - strongly disagree; 7 - strongly agree). Higher scores indicate greater life satisfaction. The SWLS scores showed good internal consistency.

The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale, a 10-item scale, CD-RISC-10 (Davidson, 2018) was used to assess psychological resilience, or a person's ability to recover from stressful events, tragedy or trauma. The adapted Ukrainian version of the Stadnik and Melnyk questionnaire (<https://forms.gle/d1TQ17tRoSeLy7RF8>) was used in the present study.

This scale has strong psychometric properties and consists of ten items, each of which is rated on a five-point scale from 0 to 4. Higher scores indicate greater resilience. Possible answers include: 0 – Not true at all; 1 – Rarely true; 2 – Sometimes true; 3 – Often true; 4 – True nearly all of the time. The total score is obtained by adding together the points awarded for each of the ten items.

The total score can range from 0 to 40 and is assessed as follows: 0–15 points: low level of resilience; 16–20 points: below average level of resilience; 21–25 points: average level; 26–30 points: above average level of resilience; 31–40 points: high level of resilience. The average psychological resilience score is found by taking the arithmetic mean of the total score.

This scale is widely used in research and practice related to stress. The CD-RISC-10 scale demonstrated good internal consistency.

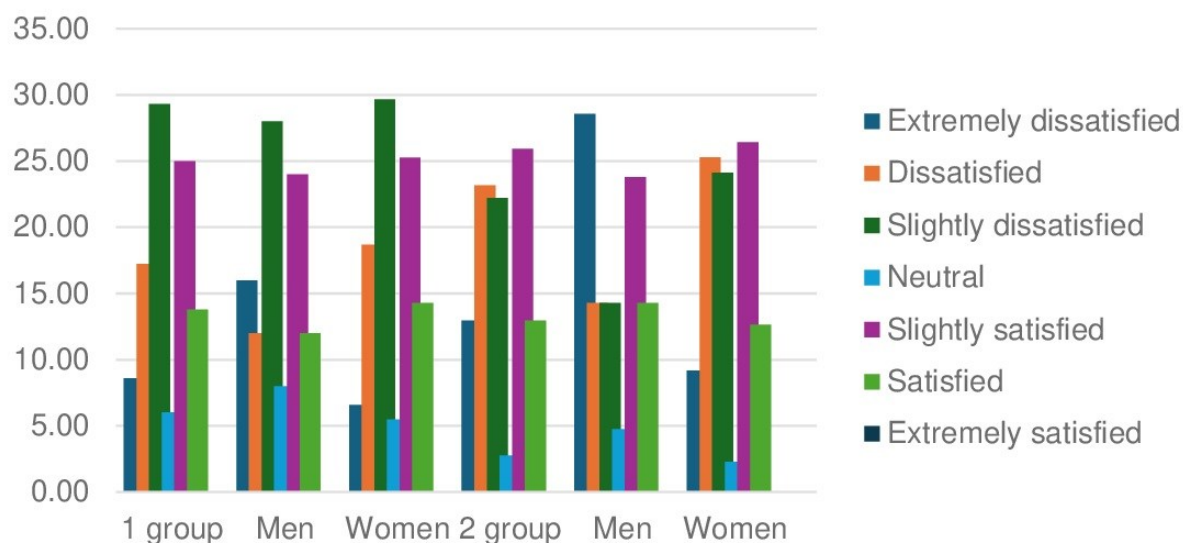
The collected data were analysed statistically using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 27.0.

Results

Figure 1 presents life satisfaction indicators among university students during wartime.

Figure 1

Life Satisfaction among University Students during the War (%)



Among students in Group 1, who did not leave their usual place of residence during the war, the indicators of absolute and general dissatisfaction with their lives are almost 40.0% lower than among those who did change their place of residence (8.6% and 17.2%, respectively). This manifested as a general sense of depression and a lack of motivation to study. It also caused difficulties in relationships and social interactions, as well as physical and emotional symptoms such as fatigue, sleep disturbances, and changes in appetite. Additionally, no statistically significant difference was found in life satisfaction scores between the studied groups (13.1% and 14.3%, respectively). It should be noted that none of the students in any of the groups were completely satisfied with their lives. This suggests a significant deterioration in the quality of life experienced by university students during the war.

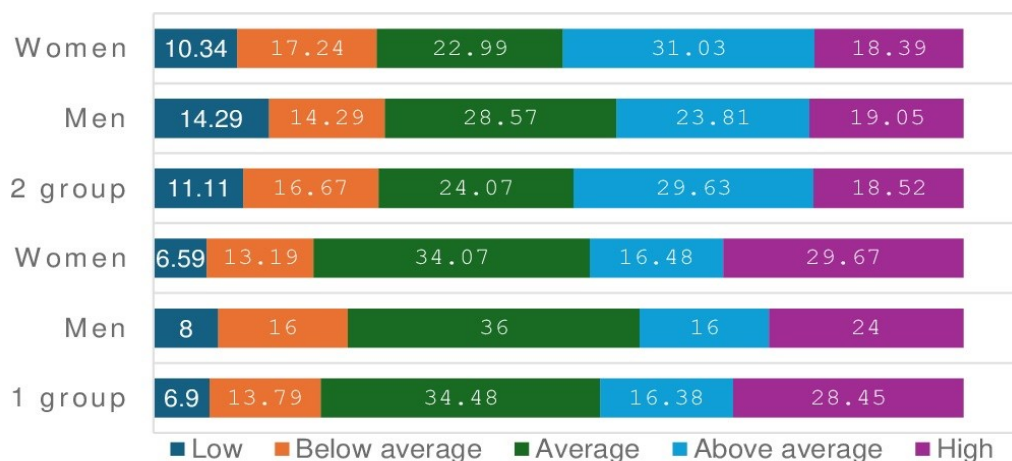
The gender-related findings of the study were as follows: absolute dissatisfaction with their lives was highest among men in Group 2 (28.6%), and this was significantly higher than the figure for women in Group 2 (9.2%). This indicates constant feelings of sadness, anxiety, depression and low self-esteem; social isolation and loneliness; neglect of self-care; and feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness.

Thus, life satisfaction is an integrative characteristic of an individual's living conditions, manifesting as their perception of and attitude towards changes in life, and determining their personal satisfaction with life. This characteristic may manifest as dissatisfaction with activities, relationships or general well-being. War is a powerful factor that has a negative impact on life satisfaction. The present study showed that living in safe conditions, even abroad, does not necessarily lead to high life satisfaction. University students who are internally displaced persons and reside in Ukraine or a European Union country show levels of absolute dissatisfaction (13.0%) and dissatisfaction (23.2%) with their lives that are almost 40.0% higher than those of students who have not left their usual place of residence. At the same time, this indicator is significantly higher among men than women, suggesting poorer psychological well-being among men.

Further research aimed to determine the level of psychological resilience among university students during the war. The results are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Psychological Resilience Level among University Students during the War (%)



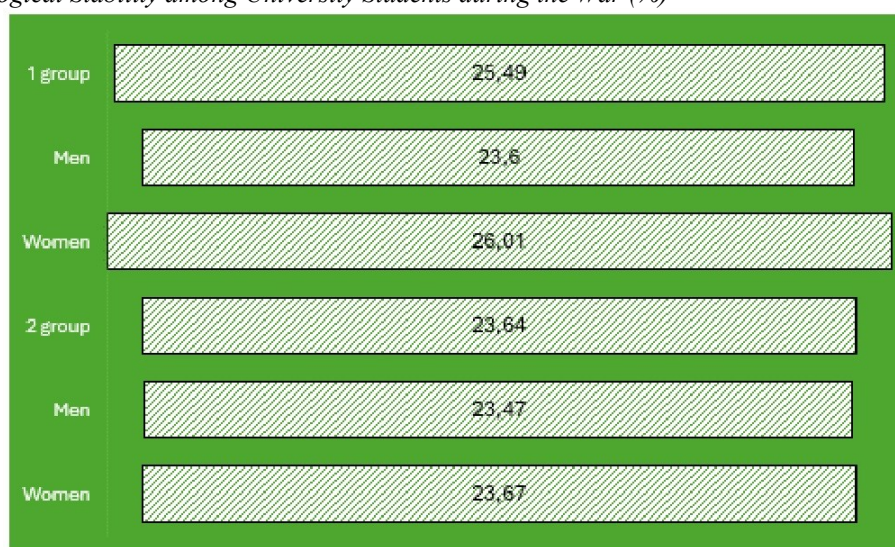
The total number of students in the study groups who demonstrate high or above-average psychological stability is quite high and does not differ significantly in statistical terms (Group 1: 28.5% and 16.4%; Group 2: 18.5% and 29.6%, respectively), indicating an equal ability to withstand stress and emotional tension. It should be noted that the proportion of students in Group 2 with low psychological stability is almost twice that in Group 1. Specifically, 11.1% of students in Group 2 have low psychological stability, compared to 6.9% in Group 1. This suggests that a significant proportion of Group 2 students are unable to adapt to stressful situations, recover from difficulties and setbacks, maintain a positive attitude and function effectively in challenging and uncertain circumstances.

The gender characteristics of the study reveal that high psychological stability is more prevalent among women in Group 1. Their relatively high resilience is indicated by their highest high (29.7%) and lowest low (6.6%) levels of psychological stability among all gender groups. This manifests as emotional and behavioural flexibility; the ability to seek support and maintain optimism and positive thinking despite the difficulties of martial law. It should be noted that the largest proportion of men in Group 2 have low psychological stability (14.3%), which is the highest proportion of all gender groups. This manifests as difficulty maintaining psychological balance, indicating mental maladjustment and hidden depression.

Figure 3 shows the average level of psychological stability among university students during the war.

Figure 3

Average Psychological Stability among University Students during the War (%)



On average, students in Group 1 are more psychologically stable than those in Group 2. The respective percentages are 25.5% and 23.6%. This suggests that they are optimistic and positive thinkers who can adapt their behaviour to different situations and find new solutions to problems. At the same time, this indicator is significantly higher among women in Group 1 (26.0%) than among men in Group 1 (23.6%). This shows that they can successfully adapt to life's difficulties. The lowest average score for psychological stability was found among men in Group 2 (23.5%). We believe this is due to the presence of acute psychogenic factors associated with possible mobilisation, loss of relatives, air raids and shelling, employment difficulties, etc. This may be expressed as substance abuse, somatic disorders, or antisocial behaviour, and requires further research.

Consequently, we observed a significant decrease in the psychological resilience of students who were forced to relocate during the war. On average, students in Group 1 are more psychologically stable than those in Group 2. The respective percentages are 25.5% and 23.6%. Additionally, the proportion of students in Group 2 with low psychological stability is almost twice that in Group 1. The gender characteristics reveal that women in Group 1 demonstrate a higher level of psychological stability (29.7%), while men in Group 2 exhibit a lower level of psychological stability (14.3%). These figures represent the highest and lowest levels observed across all gender groups.

Discussion

A study of scientific publications has revealed that the majority of scientists view life satisfaction as a complex, multifactorial and structurally dynamic concept that provides a general evaluation of an individual's quality of life (Melnik et al., 2025; Mishra & Bharti, 2024; Sabatini et al., 2023).

Stappen (2012) understood life satisfaction as a concept encompassing the conditions and circumstances necessary for an individual to function fully, as well as their evaluation of their actual existence.

Other scientists define quality of life as comprising spiritual, material, socio-cultural, environmental and demographic components. In other words, it could be argued that quality of life encompasses all aspects of human existence (Degroote et al., 2014; Elshaer, 2023; Jovanovic & Brdar, 2018).

Additionally, researchers believe that satisfaction with certain aspects of life is linked to one's emotional attitude towards life and towards oneself and others (Veenhoven, 2001). This suggests that life satisfaction is an integral concept encompassing positive experiences and a positive attitude towards oneself and others (Milewska-Buzun et al., 2023).

We believe that life satisfaction is a state characterised by the fulfilment of one's current physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs in accordance with one's aspirations, opportunities, requirements and expectations in life.

The present study employed the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), which is the most widely used instrument for measuring life satisfaction. The psychometric properties of this scale (Emmerson et al., 2017) have been thoroughly analysed worldwide.

Our research showed that the rates of absolute dissatisfaction (13.0%) and dissatisfaction (23.2%) among students who are internally displaced persons are almost 40.0% higher than among those who did not leave their usual place of residence (8.6% and 17.2%, respectively). These findings are consistent with our previous research in this area (Melnik et al., 2025).

The data obtained indicate that staying in safer regions during wartime, even if they are difficult socio-economically and psychologically, causes mental health and psychological well-being disorders. At the same time, certain studies have suggested that improving life satisfaction and psychological well-being is possible by enhancing a person's psychological resilience (Eisenberg et al., 2016).

Various views on the concept of "psychological stability" are presented in current scientific periodicals.

According to McGinnis (2018), resilience is the psychological ability to withstand and overcome adversity in a positive way, thereby returning to the same level of well-being as before the negative event occurred.

Some researchers consider psychological resilience to be the ability of people to successfully adapt to life's difficulties (Carril & Liébana-Presa, 2017; Yates et al., 2015). This is associated with various factors, including efficiency, optimism, hope, greater opportunities for overcoming problems, greater professionalism, a more positive cognitive assessment and increased activity (Stewart & Yuen, 2011).

Other scholars characterise psychological resilience as a process of positive adaptation and development in situations involving significant threats to human life or functioning (Southwick, 2014).

Psychological resilience enables individuals to adapt actively to serious adversity, recover from the effects of stressors and maintain mental health (Meulen et al., 2020; Ssenyonga et al., 2013). Psychological resilience is a powerful personal resource that helps individuals adapt to change after experiencing trauma, allowing them to return to normal functioning. It should be noted that psychological resilience encompasses an individual's ability to access various resources in response to challenges (Chen et al., 2016). Some researchers have also found an association between psychological resilience and a better quality of life (Chow, 2021). Pypenko et al. (2020) and Melnik et al. (2022) explored the impact of distance learning on the social and psychological state of university students.

We believe that psychological resilience is not about being protected from stress, but about a person's ability to adapt well to a situation. Not everyone is resilient, nor do they all react to failure in the same way. The definition of psychological resilience depends on many factors.

The current study found a positive correlation between resilience and life satisfaction. We observed a significant decrease in psychological resilience among students in Group 2, who had relatively low levels of life satisfaction. Students in Group 1 have a higher average level of psychological stability (25.5%) than students in Group 2 (23.6%). Additionally, the proportion of students in Group 2 with low psychological stability is almost twice that in Group 1.

The current results complement existing studies on resilience and life satisfaction among university students in Romania (Hartley, 2012), Malaysia (Cazan & Truta, 2015), Greece (Samani et al., 2007), and Saudi Arabia (Aboalshamat et al., 2018).

Of the various factors interacting with psychological resilience, gender should be emphasised, as shown by the above-mentioned studies. Researchers (Allan et al., 2013; Erdogan et al., 2015; Zurita-Ortega et al., 2018) have indicated that male university students demonstrate higher levels of resilience than female students. At the same time, numerous studies conducted over many years indicate that gender does not affect resilience levels on the CD-RISC 10 scale. No statistically significant correlations were found (Arrogante et al., 2017; Cai et al., 2019; Mealer et al., 2016; Yu et al., 2020).

The present study revealed some peculiarities. On average, women in Group 1 are significantly more psychologically stable than men (26.0% and 23.6%, respectively). Meanwhile, for Group 2, the difference between the percentage of men and women with this indicator is negligible (23.5% and 23.7%, respectively). In our opinion, this is related to the living conditions experienced by university students during the war. Forced displacement reduces their ability to adapt successfully to life's difficulties, regulate their emotions, communicate with others, use social connections to overcome difficulties, maintain mental health and achieve success in various areas of life. Therefore, it is necessary to develop psychological intervention, social assistance and support programmes for university students more actively during wartime. These programmes should improve students' mental state and learning effectiveness.

Conclusions

The war in Ukraine is having a significant impact on the mental health of all its citizens. Like all Ukrainians, students are trying to adapt to the war, either by leaving their homes for safer regions of Ukraine or EU countries, or by staying put. Fear of death, anxiety and concern for loved ones, as well as being forced to relocate to safer areas, all have a negative impact on mental health, life satisfaction, psychological stability, etc.

Analysis of scientific publications shows that most researchers consider life satisfaction to be a complex and multifactorial construct that is subject to structural change and serves as a generalised assessment of an individual's quality of life. We believe that life satisfaction is a state characterised by the fulfilment of one's current social, physical, psychological and vital needs, in accordance with one's aspirations, opportunities, requirements and expectations in life.

The present study showed that living in safe conditions, even abroad, does not necessarily lead to a high quality of life. University students who are internally displaced persons and reside in Ukraine or a European Union country report levels of absolute and general dissatisfaction with their lives that are almost 1.4 times higher than those of students who have not left their usual place of residence. At the same time, this indicator is significantly higher among men than women, suggesting poorer psychological well-being among men. The data obtained suggest that staying in safer regions or abroad during wartime, even in difficult socio-economic and psychological conditions, contributes to psychological distress and dissatisfaction with life.

Psychological resilience is a person's ability to adapt well to situations, and it depends on many different factors. The present study found that students who were forced to relocate during the war experienced a significant decrease in psychological resilience. Students in Group 1 have a higher average level of psychological stability (25.5%) than students in Group 2 (23.6%). Additionally, the proportion of students in Group 2 with low psychological stability is almost twice that in Group 1. Gender differences include a higher prevalence of high psychological stability among women in Group 1 (29.7%) than men in Group 2 (14.3%), the latter of which is the highest prevalence among all gender groups.

Therefore, the current study found a positive correlation between psychological resilience and life satisfaction among university students during wartime. We observed a significant decrease in psychological resilience among students in Group 2, who had relatively low levels of life satisfaction. This is why it is necessary to develop programmes of psychological intervention, social assistance and support more actively during the war in Ukraine. These programmes should improve the mental state and learning effectiveness of university students.

Ethical Approval

The study protocol was consistent with the ethical guidelines of the 1975 Declaration of Helsinki as reflected in a prior approval by the Institution's Human Research Committee. Research permission was granted by the Committee on Ethics and Research Integrity of the Scientific Research Institute KRPOCH.

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