



Case Study and Notes

THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STRESS RESILIENCE AND SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING OF UKRAINIAN STUDENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF WAR

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Relevance. Research into how stress factors affect the mental health of Ukrainian students is critically important for the development of targeted interventions and support systems for the resilience and mental recovery of Ukrainian youth, a population group directly linked to the future of our country.

The purpose of this article is to highlight the results of theoretical justification and empirical research on the relationship between stress resilience, subjective well-being, and war trauma among Ukrainian students in the context of full-scale military aggression.

Methodology. Empirical research methods include tools for assessing vulnerability to stress, levels of subjective well-being and the impact of war: the Stress Resistance Test (Maksymenko, S.D. et al.), The 'Modified BBC Subjective Well-Being Scale' methodology (adapted by L.M. Karamushka et al.), The 'War Trauma' questionnaire from the Rinat Akhmetov Foundation charity organisation. Descriptive statistics and Spearman's correlation analysis were used to analyse the data. Sample. 91 respondents aged 18-30 from different regions of Ukraine.

Results. It was found that 74.7% of the surveyed students demonstrated a low level of stress resistance, and 59.3% demonstrated a low level of overall subjective well-being. Correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant weak negative relationship between stress vulnerability (inverted resilience scale) and psychological well-being ($\rho=-0.325$, $p<0.01$). A direct relationship between high stress vulnerability and the severity of war trauma experienced by the subjects was also confirmed ($\rho=0.298$, $p<0.01$).

Conclusions. A higher level of stress resilience is a significant predictor of higher levels of subjective and psychological well-being and is associated with lower levels of psychological trauma among students. The results justify the need to develop targeted programmes to improve stress resilience and psychological well-being among young people in Ukraine.

Keywords: stress resistance, resilience, subjective well-being, psychological well-being, students, war.

Relevance

Stress resistance and subjective well-being are traditionally important topics in contemporary psychology research due to their impact on quality of life and mental



health. In the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine, these issues are becoming even more important, as external stressors are multiplying, creating serious challenges to people's psychological stability and well-being.

The topic of this article is relevant both for scientific analysis and for people's everyday lives, as all spheres of human life in Ukraine, a country at war, are in one way or another subject to stress factors that undoubtedly affect the subjective well-being of the population.

The empirical basis of the study is a demographic group that is vital for the future of the country — young students who face unique challenges every day in terms of the educational socialisation experience of this generation of Ukrainians, which significantly affects their psychological state. The hostilities and martial law in the country are a source of acute (shelling, displacement) and chronic (uncertainty, interrupted education, loss of normal life) stress for students. Understanding how these stress factors affect the mental health of modern Ukrainian students is important for predicting the prospects of the current struggle for independence and survival of the country and the prospects for its recovery.

Therefore, the research design not only aims to deepen academic knowledge, but also has practical significance for finding ways to improve the emotional state and mental health of students, which is vital for the country's recovery and its future. Thus, it is planned not only to investigate the relationships between the level of traumatisation, stress resilience and subjective well-being of Ukrainian students, but also to analyse the impact of the war on a particularly vulnerable demographic group of the country's population.

Theoretical background

Theories and methodologies for researching stress, stress resilience, and overall human well-being are fundamental pillars of the progressive development of modern psychological science. Over the past decade, the number of studies in these areas has grown significantly at both the global and national levels, driven by the need to understand the phenomenology of stress, which is destructive to human mental health, and to develop mechanisms for overcoming it. Despite this momentum, the complexity and diversity of interpretations of stress continue to pose challenges for scientists.

Modern concepts of stress are based on classical theories developed in the 20th century. The eminent American physiologist Walter Cannon played a key role in defining the body's physiological response to threat, describing the well-known 'fight or flight' stress response as an adaptive, innate human mechanism necessary for maintaining the body's homeostasis — the internal stability of physiological variables such as blood pressure and respiration. Based on this, Austrian-Canadian physician Hans Selye officially introduced the term 'stress' in the 1930s, defining it as a non-specific response of the body to increased environmental demands. Selye's theory views stress as an integral part

of life; however, critical conditions arise only when stress leads to exhaustion, maladjustment, or loss of control, which hinders self-actualisation.

Going beyond a purely physiological view, American psychologist Richard Lazarus developed an innovative transactional model of stress and stress management. Lazarus argued that psychological stress is not simply an internal or external event, but a dynamic interaction between the individual and the environment. This process implies that psychological stress is characterised by unpredictable and individual human reactions, which distinguishes it from the very stereotypical physiological response to stress.

Ukrainian scientist T. F. Tsygul'skaya emphasises the critical role of cognitive assessment in the development of stress, arguing that a potential irritant becomes a stress factor based on the meaning that a person attaches to it.

In situations characterised by extreme stressors, which undoubtedly include the ongoing war in Ukraine, the concept of resilience becomes important. The concept of resilience, derived from physics, where it means the ability of materials to recover their shape, has entered psychological discourse to describe individuals who achieve success in life despite adverse circumstances, such as family or economic difficulties.

Theoretically (according to the ecosystem approach), resilience is considered a stable personality trait. Contemporary views, consistent with the methodology of the transactional approach, define resilience as a dynamic process that can be learned. The most common definition, approved by the American Psychological Association, describes the construct of resilience as 'the process of positive adaptation of a person in the face of adverse circumstances, trauma, tragedy, or significant stress.' This modern perspective goes beyond simply identifying protective factors in the human psyche and provides insight into the psychological processes that enable people to overcome adversity.

D. Fletcher and M. Sarkar emphasised that resilience is important not only for a person's response to acute traumatic events, but also for managing chronic stress in ongoing life. It develops through the acquisition of adaptive behaviours, problem-solving skills, and coping strategies such as cognitive reappraisal, humour, and social engagement.

T. V. Fedotova emphasised that resilience includes the ability of an individual to protect their integrity and build a fulfilling life in difficult conditions, which requires the acquisition of social skills. It is important to note that although a person's resilience is partly influenced by their individual characteristics, studies increasingly confirm the possibility of developing it through social-cognitive and behavioural methods.

A person's ability to cope with stress is closely related to their experience of well-being. Historically, the understanding of well-being is based on two main traditions: hedonistic and eudemonistic, which have formed two corresponding research approaches.

The hedonistic approach focuses on the human desire for pleasure and avoidance of suffering. This tradition, which originated with ancient philosophers, defines happiness as the attainment of pleasant emotional and physical states. The eudaimonistic approach



considers personal well-being through self-actualisation, virtuous living, and harmonious development. C. Rogers postulated the tendency towards self-actualisation as a person's natural desire for self-fulfilment and the development of their own potential. E. Fromm emphasised the difference between the existential aspirations of 'being' (self-actualisation) and "having" (material accumulation), concluding that people who are oriented towards 'being' experience greater happiness due to their reliance on inner values.

E. Diener, a classic of modern positive psychology, operationalised the concept of subjective well-being, defining it as a combination of positive emotions, the absence of negative emotions, and overall satisfaction with life. He views psychological well-being as a relatively stable personality trait that includes both cognitive and emotional self-perception. In addition, widely known studies by E. Diener and his followers have shown that psychological well-being depends on a harmonious balance (3/1) between positive and negative emotions.

Ukrainian scientists often contextualise psychological well-being through an axiological dimension, emphasising the role of value-semantic formations in this approach. Zh. P. Virna and Z. S. Karpenko emphasise that a person's value system is crucial for ensuring their well-being, as it mediates the satisfaction of needs and promotes harmonious relationships.

I. S. Gorbali defines psychological well-being as a dynamic cognitive-emotional assessment by a person of the quality of their own life, which is both the result of the realisation of life goals and a determining factor in future life strategies aimed at self-realisation.

Summarising the theoretical review, we can hypothesise that the development of stress resistance in students functions as a key factor in human adaptability, ensuring the long-term and harmonious maintenance of a young person's subjective well-being, especially in situations when they are forced to face extreme and chronic challenges in the form of psychotraumatic experiences caused by ongoing war.

The purpose of this article is to conceptually outline and empirically investigate the main arguments in favour of the proposed hypothesis, or to refute it.

Methodology

Methods. To achieve the goal, general scientific methods of theoretical research were used, in particular: analysis, synthesis, classification, generalisation of scientific literature, comparative analysis, and special empirical methods, including tools for assessing vulnerability to stress, subjective well-being, and the impact of war.

The survey was conducted using docs.google.com/forms. The form was distributed among students of various departments of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv and other universities in Kyiv.

Below is a brief description of the tools used in the study

1. Stress Resistance Test (Maksymenko, S.D., Karamushka, L.M., & Zaychikova, T.V.). The questionnaire includes 18 questions and is designed for rapid diagnosis of individual stress resistance based on self-assessment. Each question uses a 3-point rating scale (for example, 'rarely' — 1 point, 'often' — 3 points). The degree of stress resistance is calculated by counting the total number of points scored and comparing them with the normal range.

2. Methodology: "Modified BBC Subjective Well-Being Scale" (adapted by L.M. Karamushka, K.V. Tereshchenko, O.V. Kredentser). A questionnaire consisting of 24 questions designed to measure an individual's level of subjective well-being. Participants respond to each item on a 5-point scale (from 'not at all' — 1 point, to 'extremely strongly' — 5 points). The methodology includes three main subscales and calculates an overall indicator of subjective well-being: psychological well-being (assessment of control over life, optimism, confidence), physical health and well-being (satisfaction with health, sleep, working capacity) and relationships (level of comfort and satisfaction in interacting with other people and the quality of personal relationships). The overall subjective well-being score is calculated as the total score for all items in the methodology (range 24–120 points). Scale indicators of psychological, physical and social well-being and the overall subjective well-being indicator are calculated.

The War Trauma Questionnaire is based on a test developed by the Rinat Akhmetov Foundation charity organisation. The questionnaire consists of 20 questions and is designed to identify symptoms of psychological trauma associated with military action. Participants are asked to rate the frequency and intensity of their symptoms on a given scale. It covers a wide range of symptoms, including: re-experiencing, avoidance, negative changes in mood and thinking, hyperarousal, and physical symptoms. The total score serves as an indicator of the negative impact of military action, where: 20 points — no impact, 50 points — impact present, 100 points — 'war trauma'.

Jamovi 2.3.28 software was used for statistical processing of the primary source data, and descriptive statistics and correlation analysis methods were applied using Spearman's criterion. Before conducting the analysis, the consistency of the distribution with the normal distribution was determined for each of the scales using the Shapiro-Wilk criterion.

Sample. The total number of respondents was 91, including 72 women (79.1%), 16 men (17.6%) and 3 respondents who did not wish to indicate their gender (3.3%).

The study participants live both in Ukraine and abroad: 79 respondents (86.8%) live in Ukraine, far from the front line, 9 respondents (9.9%) live in Ukraine, close to the front line, and 3 respondents (3.3%) live in other countries.

Results

As part of the statistical processing of empirical content, frequency and correlation analysis of the following key indicators was applied: level of stress resistance



(conceptually converted to vulnerability level), level of subjective well-being, and presence of war trauma in respondents.

The distribution of frequencies of stress resistance, subjective well-being, and war trauma levels is presented in detail in Tables 1–3. The relationship between all the indicators studied is summarised in the correlation matrix (Table 4).

Table 1. Frequency indicators on the ‘Level of stress resistance’ scale

Level of stress resistance			
	Quantity	% of total quantity	Cumulative %
High	12	13,2%	25,3%
Medium	11	74,7%	100,0%
Low	68	12,1%	21,1%

According to the data obtained (Table 1), the largest number of students in the sample (68 people) demonstrate a low level of stress resistance, which is 74.7% of the total number of respondents. This is a fairly significant proportion. Only 12 students (13.2%) showed a high level of stress resistance. The number of students with an average level of resilience is the smallest — 11 people, which is 12.1%.

Most of the respondents (almost three-quarters of the sample) have a low level of stress resilience. This may be an important context for further analysis of their subjective well-being and the impact of war.

Table 2. Frequency indicators on the ‘Level of subjective well-being’ scale

Level of subjective well-being			
	Quantity	% of total quantity	Cumulative %
High	5	5,5%	64,8%
Medium	32	35,2%	100,0%
Low	54	59,3%	59,3%

According to Table 2, it was found that most students in the sample (54 people) have a low level of subjective well-being, which is 59.3% of the total number of respondents. This is more than half of the sample. Two students (35.2%) showed an average level of well-being. Only a small number of students (5 people), representing 5.5%, have a high level of subjective well-being.

Comparing these data with the results on stress resistance, it can be seen that a large number of respondents have both a low level of stress resistance and a low level of subjective well-being. This may confirm the expected relationship between these two indicators.

**Table 3. Frequency indicators on the ‘War Trauma’ scale
The severity of ‘war trauma’**

The severity of ‘war trauma’			
	Quantity	% of total quantity	Cumulative %
High	0	0,0%	0,0%
Medium	43	52,7%	52,7%
Low	48	47,3%	100,0%

According to the data obtained (Table 3), none of the students (0 people, 0%) showed a high level of war trauma. Most students (43 people) have a moderate level of war trauma, which is 52.7% of the total number of respondents. Almost half of the students (48 people) have a low level of war trauma, which is 47.3%.

The sample did not reveal any students with a high level of war trauma according to this questionnaire. Most students have a moderate level of impact from war events, and a slightly smaller but also significant proportion have a low level.

The final stage of the study is a correlation analysis based on the indicators ‘Stress Resistance,’ ‘War Trauma,’ ‘Subjective Well-being’ and its derivatives (Tab. 4).

To avoid potential confusion and facilitate interpretation of the correlation analysis results, especially when considering the relationship between stress resilience and other variables, I decided to rename the ‘Stress Resilience’ scale to ‘Stress Vulnerability’ exclusively in the context of the correlation matrix.

This renaming is a conceptual transformation, where high scores on the ‘Stress Vulnerability’ scale correspond to low resilience, which is consistent with the direction of measurement of other scales.

Pearson's parametric criterion was applied to the ‘Vulnerability to Stress’, ‘Subjective Well-being’, ‘Psychological Well-being’, ‘Physical Health’ and “Relationships” scales, and Spearman's criterion was applied to the ‘War Trauma’ scale.

The results of the correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant weak negative relationship between stress vulnerability and subjective well-being ($p=-0.288$, $p<0.01$), indicating that as stress vulnerability increases (lower stress resistance), the level of subjective well-being decreases.

A similar statistically significant weak negative correlation is observed between stress vulnerability and psychological well-being ($p=-0.325$, $p<0.01$).



Table 4. Correlation matrix of the relationships between indicators of the 'Stress Resistance,' 'War Trauma,' 'Subjective Well-being

	Vulnerability to stress	Subjective well-being	Psychological well-being	Physical health	Relationships	War trauma
Vulnerability to stress	1	-	-	-	-	-
Subjective well-being	-0,288**	1	-	-	-	-
Psychological well-being	-0,325**	-	1	-	-	-
Physical health	-0,194	-	-	1	-	-
Relationships	-0,127	-	-	-	1	-
War trauma	0,298**	-0,354**	-0,371**	-0,329**	-0,134	1

The relationship between stress vulnerability and physical health ($\rho=-0.194$, $p>0.01$) and relationships ($\rho=-0.127$, $p>0.01$) was weak and statistically insignificant.

Regarding the relationship between stress vulnerability and war trauma, a statistically significant weak positive relationship was found ($\rho=0.298$, $p<0.01$), indicating that higher stress vulnerability correlates with higher levels of war trauma experienced.

Also, statistically significant weak negative correlations were observed between war trauma and subjective well-being ($\rho=-0.354$, $p<0.01$), psychological well-being ($\rho=-0.371$, $p<0.01$) and physical health ($\rho=-0.329$, $p<0.01$). This means that higher levels of war trauma are associated with lower levels of well-being and poorer physical health.

The relationship between war trauma and relationships ($\rho=-0.134$, $p>0.01$) was very weak and statistically insignificant in this sample.

Thus, the results of the correlation analysis confirm the hypothesis. There is a statistically significant relationship, which indicates that higher levels of stress resistance are indeed associated with higher levels of subjective and psychological well-being and lower levels of vulnerability to war trauma among the student population studied.

Discussion

The results of the study are consistent with a 2015 study entitled 'Temporal Elements of Psychological Resilience: An Integrated Model for the Study of Individuals, Families, and

Communities' conducted by G. A. Bonanno, S. A. Romero, and S. I. Klein (Bonanno, G. A., Romero, S. A., & Klein, S. I., 2015).

The article by Bonanno, Romero, and Klein is conceptual, meaning that it does not present new empirical data but summarises existing research, proposing an integrated framework for understanding resilience.

The statistically significant relationship between vulnerability to stress and low subjective well-being ($\rho=-0.288$) found in our study fully correlates with the integrative frameworks of Western psychology.

In the work of Bonanno, Romero, and Klein, resilience is defined as a stable trajectory of healthy functioning after trauma. Our data confirm this model, demonstrating that it is low resilience in students (74.7% of the sample) that is a risk factor that prevents the establishment of such a stable trajectory.

In addition, the positive correlation we found between vulnerability and war trauma ($\rho=0.298$) empirically proves that resilience, as described by Bonanno and co-authors, does indeed serve as a protective mechanism that allows individuals to employ flexible coping strategies and thus avoid chronic psychological distress in conditions of prolonged conflict.

Furthermore, our findings, which confirmed a statistically significant relationship between low resilience and low well-being, are consistent with the current understanding of resilience as a dynamic process.

As D. Fletcher and M. Sarkar (2013) note in their critical review, resilience is not an immutable trait, but a complex of flexible cognitive strategies that allow individuals to achieve positive adaptation in conditions of significant stress. The high percentage of students with low resilience (74.7%) and, as a result, low subjective well-being (59.3%) that we found emphasises that these adaptive processes are deficient in conditions of chronic stress.

Thus, the results of our study are empirical confirmation of the need to develop procedural mechanisms of resilience to support the subjective well-being of students.

Conclusions

The results of theoretical and empirical research presented in this article allow us to conclude that stress resistance (resilience) is a key dynamic resource that critically determines the level of subjective well-being of Ukrainian students functioning in conditions of military conflict.

Theoretical analysis has shown that subjective well-being, which is an integrative cognitive-emotional assessment of quality of life, depends not only on the avoidance of suffering (hedonism), but also on self-realisation and reliance on internal values (eudemonism). While R. Lazarus' classical theory asserts that stress arises from a cognitive assessment of demands that exceed resources, resilience, according to the APA, is a



dynamic process of positive adaptation that allows a person to effectively manage this assessment.

Empirical data confirmed a critical deficit of this resource: 74.7% of students demonstrate low resilience, which is directly reflected in their psychological state, as 59.3% have low levels of overall subjective well-being.

Correlation analysis confirmed that higher vulnerability to stress (lower resilience) is statistically significantly associated with lower levels of subjective ($\rho=-0.288$, $p<0.01$) and psychological ($\rho=-0.325$, $p<0.01$) well-being.

Most importantly, low resilience was shown to be a risk factor, as it positively correlates with higher levels of war trauma experienced ($\rho=0.298$, $p<0.01$).

Thus, the study concluded that resilience functions as a key protective factor that allows young people to transform the destructive impact of war into maintaining inner balance and subjective well-being. The established links prove that the development of a young person's internal resources is a realistic way to preserve their mental health. The results obtained form the basis for the development of targeted psychological support programmes for Ukrainian students as a demographic group that is vital for the future of the country.

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