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STRESS DYNAMICS AND COPING STRATEGIES IN UKRAINIAN STUDENTS DURING WARTIME

In today's world, the importance of maintaining emotional well-being remains a pressing concern, particularly in regions and countries affected by prolonged conflict. As Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine enters its fourth year, its psychological toll on individuals and communities deepens, shaping new patterns of stress, adaptation, and resilience. Over the past six months, the ongoing crisis has further influenced people's mental states, making it essential to reassess their coping mechanisms and emotional needs.

Stress is a natural response to challenging circumstances, helping individuals navigate difficulties. However, when stress becomes prolonged or overwhelming, it can have serious consequences for both mental and physical health. The ongoing war has intensified these effects, making emotional recovery essential to overall well-being [2].

Given the evolving nature of these psychological challenges, it is crucial to examine how individuals' emotional states have changed over time. To gain insight into these shifts, we conducted a follow-up study to compare current psychological indicators with those recorded one year ago. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how prolonged exposure to conflict affects stress levels, resilience, and coping mechanisms.

To achieve this, we surveyed students at the State University of Trade and Economics using Google Forms. Our study aimed to assess how their stress levels, coping strategies, and emotional well-being have evolved, providing valuable data on the long-term psychological impact of war.

The results of the new survey, conducted one year after the initial study, offer an opportunity to observe any notable changes in the psychological and emotional well-being of students. A total of 372 respondents participated, marking a noticeable increase from the previous 270. This increase in participation may suggest growing concern about emotional health and a desire to share experiences. The demographic data showed the majority of respondents were 18 years old (65.6%), followed by 19 (22.8%), 20 (6.7%), and 21+ (4.8%). The gender distribution included 40.9% male and 59.1% female students. Most respondents were first-year students (55.9%), followed by second-year (34.9%), with a small representation from third, fourth, and fifth-year students.

The mode of education continues to vary due to the unstable wartime conditions. While 61.6% of respondents reported studying through a hybrid model, 31.7% studied online, and only 6.7% attended in person. These findings are consistent with the previous survey, indicating a continued reliance on remote learning.

In terms of academic stress, results indicated an increase compared to the previous study. 16.1% of respondents now report very high levels of academic stress (rating 5), up from 10.4% one year ago. Meanwhile, 34.4% selected a moderate level (rating 3), and 20.2% reported high levels (rating 4). These numbers reflect a slow but steady escalation in perceived academic stress, likely due to the ongoing instability and uncertainty surrounding education during wartime.

When asked to identify the primary sources of academic stress, 38.7% cited uncertainty about the future. Other significant stressors included offline learning challenges (22.8%) and deadlines (21.5%). This marks a

shift from the previous survey, where deadlines were the most frequently reported stressor. The change indicates that broader existential concerns are becoming more prominent as the war persists.

On a scale of 1 to 5, students were asked how much the war has affected their ability to focus on their studies. 36.6% of respondents selected 3, 19.9% selected 4, and 12.6% selected 5, demonstrating that many students still struggle with maintaining academic focus under prolonged stress.

In exploring students' coping mechanisms, talking with friends and family remains the most popular method (32.3%). Seeking professional psychological support and listening to music were both reported by 20.7% of respondents. Other common strategies included physical activity (14.5%), going for walks (14%), and sleeping (10.8%). These findings suggest that while social support continues to play a vital role in stress relief, more students are turning to professional help than previously recorded.

In terms of psychological symptoms experienced more frequently since the war began, anxiety remains the most common (34.1%), followed by sadness or depression (17.2%), lack of motivation (12.9%), and feelings of isolation (12.1%).

Regarding future plans, 57.3% stated that the war had altered their career or educational goals. This statistic reflects the enduring influence of the conflict on young people's outlook and life planning.

According to Dembitskyi et al., prolonged conflict tends to increase emotional fatigue and psychological disorientation in the population, creating long-term mental health implications. This insight highlights the urgency of monitoring emotional well-being during extended periods of instability [1].

In conclusion, this follow-up survey underscores that while students continue to face elevated levels of stress and emotional strain due to the ongoing war, many have developed or adopted new coping strategies. Although most still avoid formal psychological services, there has been a slight increase in those who do seek help. The results demonstrate that psychological resilience remains a complex and evolving process shaped by time, support systems, and individual adaptation.

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