



Psychological Resilience amidst War

Authors: Andrii Dryga & Nestor Cheryba | April 2022

War-related threats and adversities are multi-systemic – from loss of the close ones, physical injuries, casualties of the financial resources to the deterioration of the psychological well-being and frustration. At the moment, almost everyone in Ukraine is exposed to warfare or its consequences in this way or another.

We have based our analysis on the Social Cohesion, Resilience and Reconciliation Index (SCORE)¹ data collected back to 2021 among people living in the 15-kilometre areas along the Contact line of government-controlled territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. We have revealed life skills and other capacities that helped people reduce the impact of war, depression and anxiety during wartime. The following results can help understand what needs to be considered when creating programs to improve the psychosocial adaptation of people suffering from war but not directly involved in hostilities.

SCORE indicators	Resilience coefficients²
<i>Empathy</i>	-.257
<i>Being a pensioner</i>	-.133
<i>Executive functioning skills</i>	.323
<i>Men</i>	.153
<i>Distress tolerance</i>	.122
<i>Social tolerance</i>	.077
<i>Civic duty</i>	.07

The results of the study showed that the most vulnerable groups to depression and anxiety are retired people and people with a high level of empathy. Commiseration and desire to help those

¹ Social Cohesion, Resilience and Reconciliation Index (SCORE) Ukraine 2021 is a joint initiative funded by USAID, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the European Union, implemented by the Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (Seed). For more information visit: <https://app.scoreforpeace.org>

² The resilient coefficient is a beta coefficient, the degree of significant change in the outcome variable for every 1-unit of change in the predictor variable. In other words, one-point change in empathy would create a -0.257 point-change in psychological resilience.

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less fortunate than others, enhanced by personal war exposure or consumption of military news or personal stories of the war crime victims, significantly deepen internal mental problems and affect a person's psychological well-being.

The drivers of psychological resilience are feelings of civic duty, social tolerance to others, including underrepresented groups, and the development of personal life skills that help cope with stress and provide an inner resource for purposeful executive functioning.

Executive functioning skills are the most potent resilience factor in challenging wartime conditions. The ability to control impulses, learn new activities, plan tasks, focus attention and multi-task is the key to rapid adaptation to changing contexts.

Men showed greater psychological resilience during the war. One of the explanations could be that men showed less sincerity in the research studies about their mental health or, at least, self-assess it less carefully than women.

The sense that your voice and action matter enhances an understanding of the contribution to the common victory and provides a powerful internal resource for overcoming depression and anxiety. At the same time, acceptance and tolerance towards all people, regardless of their ethnic, religious, or other differences, is essential for harmonizing one's inner peace. Moreover, it also helps increase social cohesion in society, which is critical during the great trials for the country, such as Russia's military aggression.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Callous-unemotional traits increase during prolonged military conflict, becoming a protective mechanism for a person's mental health. Still, it can also have negative consequences, reducing empathy and the desire to help others. On the other hand, deep compassion and the feeling that a person does not provide enough help to those who find themselves in worse conditions also negatively affect psychological well-being.
- Enhancing civic duty, a sense that everyone matters and can influence, and tolerant attitudes towards others will help find balance and at least slightly normalize the psycho-emotional state during the war.
- Developing life skills that help focus on the goal, adapt quickly, restrain impulses and find the strength to move on after complex events will help cope with the psychological challenges of war.