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THE UKRAINE WAR AND ASSOCIATED MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Authors. Diyar ALTAY (II year, Medicine), Nazar HAPONCHUK (II year, Medicine), John Lennart STEINBECK (II year, Medicine).

Supervisor. Assoc. prof. Marija JAKUBAUSKIENĖ, Department of Public Health, Institute of Health Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, Vilnius University.

Background and aim. This paper deals with the worsening mental health amongst Ukrainian students in regard to the Russo-Ukrainian war.

Materials and methods. A survey was constructed to measure the mental health status of Ukrainian citizens living in Ukraine at the time of the major escalation of the war, on the 24th of February 2022.

Results. A majority of participants, at 92%, encountered news at least two times per day. The conflict affected 80% of those surveyed in various ways, primarily manifesting as anxiety, insomnia, appetite loss, or binge eating occurrences. The average use of alcohol, nicotine, and illegal drugs among participants rose by 10%. In relationships, 44% of participants were married or partnered, with 25% stating their relationships had improved, and 35% reporting a decline. Breakups occurred for 15% of respondents in relationships. In terms of family connections, 45% experienced no change, 27% noted strengthened bonds, and 16% observed deteriorating relationships. Before the war, participants rated an average sleep quality rating of 7.54, which decreased to 5.62 after the invasion. Prior to the conflict, 30% sought professional mental health support. Importantly, 70% of respondents revealed that their mental health often interfered with their ability to carry out work and pursue hobbies. Over a month-long period of feeling down was reported by 63% of participants. Since the beginning of the war, 70% of the respondents either knew someone or were personally impacted by anxiety disorders, panic attacks, or PTSD. Among this group, a substantial 84% did not use any type of medication to manage their mental health issues.

Conclusions. Broadly speaking, a decline in mental health is apparent. Factors such as instability and displacement lead to the disintegration of crucial social services like healthcare and education. Displaced individuals frequently find themselves unable to pursue work in their professions or engage in fruitful activities. Exacerbated by an insufficient social safety net, these individuals are more likely to experience poverty or dependency on humanitarian support, as well as increased vulnerability to emotional trauma. Collaboration between healthcare providers and other sectors beyond healthcare is crucial. Considering the persistent conflict and its nature, it is highly likely that the mental health of those living in conflict-affected regions of Ukraine will persistently deteriorate.

Keywords. War; Mental Health; Ukraine; Conflict; Public Health.