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Attitudes towards the Value of Life among University Students in Wartime

Melnyk Y. B.^{1,2} , Stadnik A. V.^{1,2,3} , Mykhaylyshyn U. B.³ , Pypenko I. S.^{1,2} 

¹ Kharkiv Regional Public Organization “Culture of Health”, Ukraine

² Scientific Research Institute KRPOCH, Ukraine

³ Uzhhorod National University, Ukraine

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Abstract

Background and Aim of Study: In wartime, the value of life takes on special significance for Ukrainian society. Along with other psychological resources (such as mental health and psychological resilience), it serves as one of the driving forces behind self-preservation, self-actualisation, overcoming difficulties and maintaining mental balance.

The aim of the study: to examine university students’ attitudes towards the value of life in wartime, and to determine its impact on their mental health and psychological resilience.

Material and Methods: In April 2026, a study was conducted among 89 students from Uzhhorod National University (Ukraine), aged between 18 and 35. The study used three psychological tests: the Value of Life Questionnaire (VLQ-12), the Mental Health Continuum – Short Form (MHC-SF), and the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale 10 (CD-RISC 10). These tests had been adapted and made available on the Google Forms platform.

Results: Our surveys revealed that there was no minimum level of life value among university students, with moderate and average levels predominating (76.4% and 15.8% respectively). Furthermore, the majority of students had a high (flourishing) level of mental health (73.0%); as well as above-average (37.1%) and high (24.7%) levels of psychological resilience.

Conclusions: The results indicate low levels of maladjustment, as well as satisfactory levels of mental health and psychological resilience. These findings are consistent with median life satisfaction scores. These findings lend weight to our hypothesis that psychological resilience and mental health are rooted in the value of life. In the present study, the Value of Life Questionnaire was used to examine university students in stressful circumstances associated with a prolonged war. This proved to be an effective method of conducting psychological research into the value of life. It can also be employed as part of a system for evaluating mental state and determining the impact of stressful circumstances on mental health and psychological resilience.

Keywords: the value of life, mental health, psychological resilience, students, war.

Information about the authors:

Melnyk Yuriy Borysovych (Corresponding Author) – <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8527-4638>; ybm.office@gmail.com; Doctor of Philosophy in Pedagogy, Affiliated Associate Professor; Founder and Chairman of the Board, Kharkiv Regional Public Organization “Culture of Health”; Director, Professor, Scientific Research Institute KRPOCH, Kharkiv, Ukraine.

Stadnik Anatoliy Volodymyrovych – <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1472-4224>; Doctor of Philosophy in Medicine, Affiliated Associate Professor, Kharkiv Regional Public Organization “Culture of Health”, Scientific Research Institute KRPOCH, Kharkiv, Ukraine; Associate Professor, Uzhhorod National University, Uzhhorod, Ukraine.

Mykhaylyshyn Ulyana Bohdanivna – <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0225-8115>; Doctor of Psychological Sciences, Full Professor; Head of the Department of Psychology, Uzhhorod National University, Uzhhorod, Ukraine.

Pypenko Iryna Sergiivna – <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5083-540X>; Doctor of Philosophy in Economics, Affiliated Associate Professor, Secretary of Board, Kharkiv Regional Public Organization “Culture of Health”; Scientific Research Institute KRPOCH, Kharkiv, Ukraine

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Introduction

In today's world, which is characterised by high levels of uncertainty, rapid social change, information overload and increasing anxiety and chronic stress, the question of the value of life becomes particularly significant. In the context of war, this problem is even more acute for Ukrainian society, as daily encounters with danger, loss, trauma and uncertainty force people to reconsider their life values (Melnyk et al., 2025; Mykhaylyshyn et al., 2025; Pypenko et al., 2025; Stadnik et al., 2025).

It should be noted that the question of the value of life is one of the most enduring and, at the same time, highly relevant issues in the field of psychology. Human beings are not just biological beings; they also constantly reflect on their existence, determine its significance, seek meaning and develop attitudes towards life itself. This awareness forms the foundation of personal development, moral decision-making, psychological adaptation and maintaining mental health. The value of life, along with the human body's other psychological resources (such as psychological resilience and mental health), is one of the factors that motivates self-preservation, self-actualisation, the overcoming of difficulties and the maintenance of mental balance. The loss of such a resource is often accompanied by depression, apathy, suicidal thoughts, and other forms of psychological maladjustment (Drob, 2026; Schwartz, 2011).

The aim of the study

To examine university students' attitudes towards the value of life in wartime, and to determine its impact on their mental health and psychological resilience.

Materials and Methods

The survey was conducted among 89 students aged between 18 and 35 at Uzhhorod National University in April 2026. Of these, four (4.5%) were male and 85 (95.5%) were female. The small number of male respondents is due to them serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. This situation arose from the imposition of martial law in Ukraine at the time of the survey.

Due to the war in Ukraine, the study was conducted by making psychological questionnaires available to potential participants via Google Forms. All student groups at the university were also observed during both online and face-to-face classes. Individual interviews were conducted where necessary.

The Value of Life Questionnaire (VLQ-12) was used to assess the value of life. This original method was developed at the KRPOCH Research Institute by Melnyk and Stadnik (2026). It was then evaluated by experts and approved by the organisation's ethics committee. The VLQ-12 is a diagnostic toolkit that can be used for its intended purpose and as an auxiliary tool for diagnosing the mental state of an individual. The questionnaire can be used to study persons of different age groups. It is particularly valuable during periods of life crises and in extreme circumstances, when a person's priorities in life or their attitude towards the value of their own life may change. The VLQ-12 questionnaire comprises 12 items, which are rated on a scale proposed by the authors. This scale has three negative responses: "Strongly disagree", "Disagree" and "Somewhat disagree", as well as three positive responses: "Somewhat agree", "Agree" and "Strongly agree". The total score is calculated by adding up the points for all 12 items, taking into account the correction coefficient. The total possible score across all statements ranges from 12 to 144 points. The level (degree) of manifestation of the indicators of the value of life is determined by the number of points scored, and there are four levels: minimal (12-36 points), moderate (37-77 points), average (78-118 points), high (119-144 points). The VLQ-12 questionnaire includes four criteria: individual characteristics, personal experience, social environment, and cultural-historical context. Three statements have been formulated for each criterion that reflect the level at which the indicators of the value of life are manifested. This count is minimal, but it is both sufficient and necessary for investigating how a person views the value of their own life. These criteria should primarily be considered in conjunction with one another. Low indicators for a specific criterion do not constitute grounds for considering this to be a deviation from the norm. Further verification using specialised research methods is required for this.

The Mental Health Continuum – Short Form (MHC-SF) was used to assess emotional, psychological and social well-being (Keyes, 2009). In the present study, the adapted Ukrainian version of the questionnaire by Stadnik and Melnyk (2023) was used. The questionnaire consists of 14 items and considers the phenomenon of "mental health" in terms of the frequency of experiencing signs of social, emotional and psychological well-being. Emotional well-being (EWB) is measured by three items related to positive emotions and life satisfaction. Psychological well-being (PWB) is assessed by six items that address goals related to self-perception, positive relationships with others, autonomy, mastery of the environment, purpose in life and personal growth. Social well-being (SWB) is measured by five items related to social coherence, social acceptance, social relevance, social contribution and social integration. Responses are given on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 0, "never", to 5, "every day". The following levels of mental health were assessed using the MHC-SF questionnaire: - flourishing mental health – a high level of mental health was diagnosed if participants experienced at least 1 of the 3 EWB symptoms and 6 of the 11 PWB/SWB symptoms "every day" or "almost every day" in the past month; - languishing mental health – a low level of mental health, defined as participants experiencing at least 1 out of 3 EWB symptoms and 6 out of 11 PWB/SWB symptoms "never" or "once or twice" in the past month; - moderate mental health – a satisfactory level of mental health observed in participants not included in previous groups.

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 questionnaire by Stadnik and Melnyk (2025) 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 has strong psychometric properties (Mykhaylyshyn et al., 2025) and is widely used in stress-related student research and practice (Pypenko et al., 2025).

The collected data were analysed statistically. This was done using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The version used was 31.0. The scales used in the present study showed good internal consistency, which is an important quality for any measurement tool.

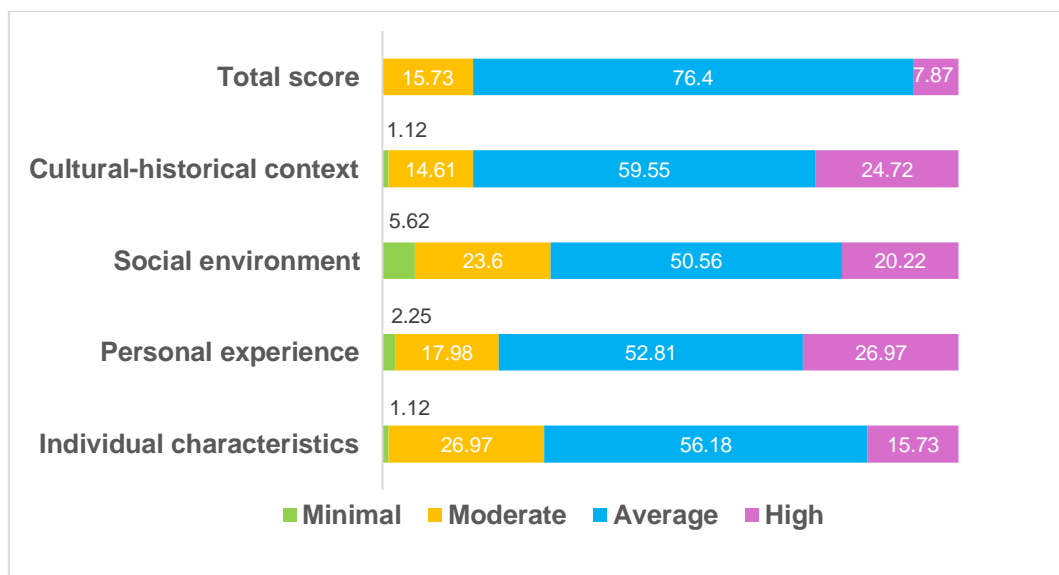
The psychological methods and research procedure used in the study were approved by the Committee on Ethics and Research Integrity of the Scientific Research Institute KRPOCH (protocol No. 027-1/SRIKRPOCH dated 10.08.2025).

Results

The indicators of the value of life among university students during the war are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Levels of the Value of Life among University Students during the War according to the VLQ-12 Criteria (%)



The results show that during the war, the vast majority of university students achieved an average (76.4%) or moderate (15.7%) overall score for the value of life. Meanwhile, only 7.9% of students achieved a high score, and no students achieved the lowest possible score. This suggests that the vast majority of students have normal psychophysiological indicators, adapt well to new situations and maintain positive relationships with their families and friends. They are interested in the achievements of their national culture and religion, and are concerned about their personal health and lives. It should be noted that the absence of a minimum overall score for the value of life among university students suggests that they are able to find meaning in life amidst the difficult conditions of war, and that they have life goals and intrinsic motivation.

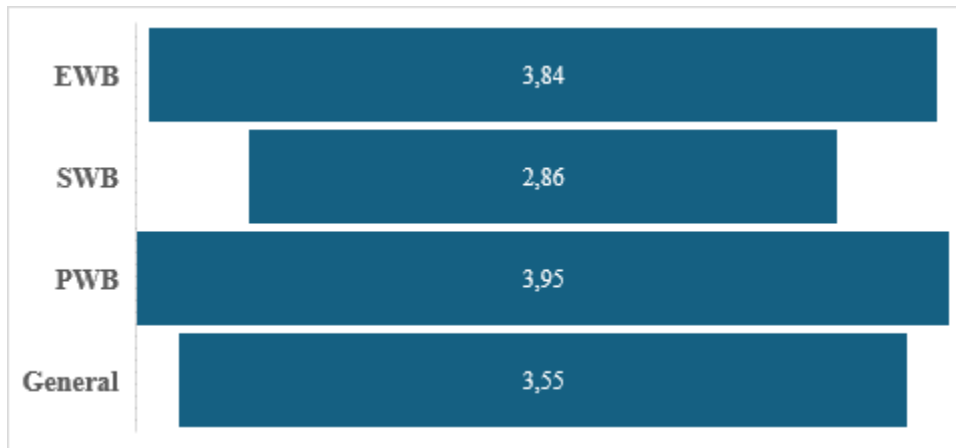
Let us take a closer look at the components of the value of life. The results indicate that, among the respondents, the highest proportions of those who place a high or moderate value on life are found in relation to factors relating to cultural and historical context and personal experience (26.9% and 52.8% respectively). This means that upbringing and education, one’s own knowledge and experience, national cultural heritage and religious beliefs are an integral part of an individual’s worldview, which has a significant influence on their understanding of the value of life.

In the next stage of the study, we assessed the students’ mental health using the Mental Health Continuum – Short Form (MHC-SF). This tool is based on self-ratings of mental health according to the criteria of social (SWB), emotional (EWB) and psychological (PWB) well-being. This understanding of mental health among students is based on the idea that mentally healthy individuals do not suffer from mental health conditions and derive satisfaction from life, demonstrating positive functioning. In other words, they consider themselves psychologically well and socially adapted (Melnyk et al., 2024).

Figure 2 shows the results of the mental health assessment among university students during the war.

Figure 2

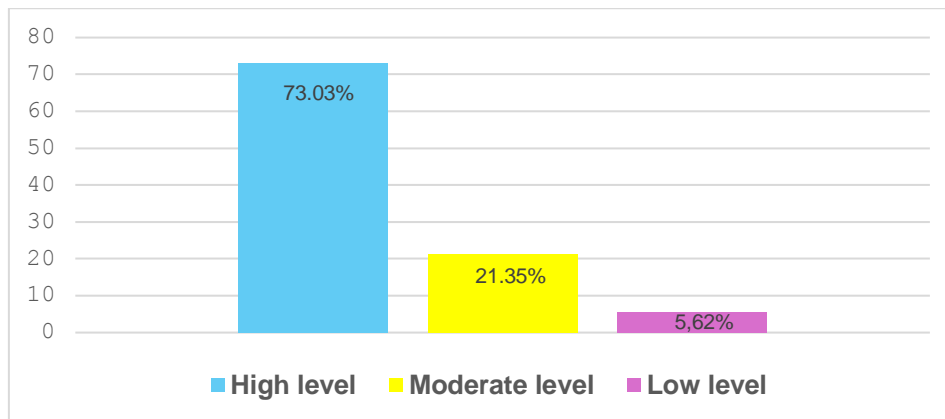
Levels of Well-Being Criteria among Students during the War, as Measured by the MHC-SF



As we can see, students scored highest for the psychological and emotional components of mental health (3.7 and 3.8 points, respectively), reflecting low levels of maladjustment, anxiety, and depression. The social component scored significantly lower at 2.9 points, suggesting that students experience problems with social support in wartime conditions. Figure 3 shows the levels of mental health among university students during the war.

Figure 3

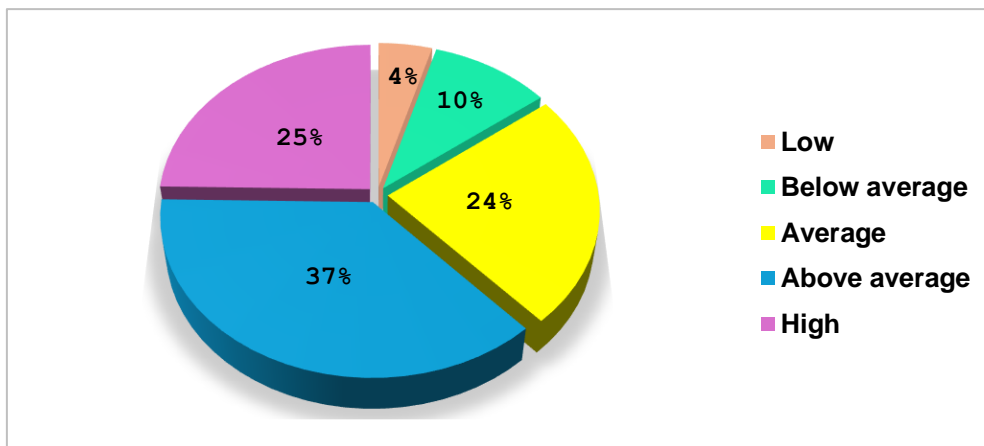
Levels of Mental Health among Students during the War, as Measured by the MHC-SF



In this study, the majority of students (73.0%) exhibited a high (flourishing) level of mental health. Meanwhile, only 5.6% exhibited a low (languishing) level, which suggests good psychological and emotional well-being despite the war. Further research aimed to determine the level of psychological resilience among university students during the war (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Levels of Stress Resilience among University Students during the War, as Measured by the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale



The results of the study showed that the majority of students had above-average (37.1%), high (24.7%) or average (23.6%) levels of psychological resilience. Meanwhile, only 4.5% of students had low psychological resilience. These findings suggest that students are well-adapted to the conditions of martial law, capable of withstanding stress and emotional strain, and able to maintain a positive attitude and function effectively in the face of challenges and uncertainty. Our research into mental health and psychological resilience showed that most students had a high level of mental wellbeing (73.0%), as well as above-average (37.1%) and high (24.7%) levels of psychological resilience.

Discussion

This study examined university students' attitudes towards the value of life in the context of stressful circumstances associated with a prolonged war. The study also aimed to determine the impact of these circumstances on mental health and psychological resilience.

The concept of the value of life originates from the existential-humanistic tradition of psychology. As part of logotherapy, Frankl (1985) argued that the search for meaning is the primary motivating force in human life. He believed that realising the value of one's own existence was a prerequisite for psychological survival, even in the most challenging of circumstances. Similar ideas were developed by Maslow, Rogers and other humanistic psychologists, who emphasised the human desire for self-actualisation and a meaningful existence (Bouman et al., 2018; Kasai et al., 2022).

An analysis of academic publications shows that most researchers regard quality of life as a complex, multifactorial, and structurally dynamic construct, which provides a generalised assessment of an individual's quality of life. Sagiv et al. (2017) define the value of life as an individual's attitude towards life being the most important human value. This is reflected in their awareness of the sanctity of life, their search for life's meaning, how they organise a fulfilling life based on creativity and optimism, and how they develop life skills. This creates opportunities for individuals to achieve dignified self-realisation in today's challenging society. Other scholars (Kaasa & Welzel, 2023; Schwartz, 2011; Vecchione et al., 2026) define the value of life as its intrinsic significance, a fundamental ethical concept holding that life is valuable in and of itself, regardless of external circumstances, quality of life, productivity, or social status.

Other researchers (Drob, 2026) emphasise that the value of life influences a person through indicators of meaning, purpose and life satisfaction. Research by Besika et al. (2022) shows that having a sense of purpose and searching for meaning in life are two separate concepts linked to different aspects of psychological well-being. Czekierda et al. (2017) confirmed that having a sense of purpose in life is a significant protective factor against depression and anxiety. Furthermore, numerous studies have confirmed that the value of life is influenced by adversity, psychological trauma, social bonds, and cultural and spiritual beliefs. Thus, exposure to combat and loneliness can undermine the value of life (Cacioppo et al., 2015; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), whereas a religious framework can reinforce it (Pargament et al., 2013). It should also be noted that low regard for life is associated with high suicide rates (O'Grady et al., 2020).

In the present study, we adopt the following interpretation of the term: **the value of life** is a complex component of the concept of the individual, representing a personal evaluative attitude towards life that is shaped by individual characteristics, personal experience, social environment and cultural-historical context, which determines the quality of personal functioning, the capacity for adaptation and self-realisation, and helps a person to comprehend the value of their own existence and surroundings (Melnyk & Stadnik, 2026).

The value of life is an internal psychological resource which can help reduce anxiety and depression, lower the risk of suicidal behaviour and encourage the development of positive self-perception and adaptive coping strategies. It can also have a positive impact on mental health and psychological resilience. These qualities are particularly important for individuals in extreme conditions, such as those encountered during military operations (Krut et al., 2026).

Our surveys revealed that university students had moderate to average levels of regard for life, with no minimal level present. This suggests that they have life goals and the inner motivation to find meaning in life despite the hardships of war.

Additionally, life values relate not only to what is good and worthy, but also to much broader, trans-situational goals. This leads us to hypothesise that the values of life form the basis of psychological resilience and mental health.

The current scientific view is that mental health is not merely the absence of pathology or mental illness, but an integral part of overall health and well-being. The World Health Organization (World Health Organization, 2022) defines mental health as a state of well-being in which an individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.

However, research into mental health has largely centred on mental illnesses and their associated risk factors. The key factors that negatively impact mental health include rapid social change, emotional distress, and stressful situations. Mental health is a vital part of a person's overall well-being and quality of life. It is determined by one's mental, emotional and social well-being, and is of immense importance to individuals, their families, their communities and society as a whole. In this study, we define mental health as an ever-changing state of inner balance that allows individuals to utilise their abilities in harmony with society's universal values.

Galderisi et al. (2015) argue that the following are key components of mental health, contributing to a state of inner balance to varying degrees: basic cognitive and social skills; the ability to recognise, express and regulate one's own emotions, as well as empathise with others; resilience; and the capacity to cope with adverse life events and fulfil social roles. They also suggest that a harmonious relationship between body and mind is important. Research has shown that religiosity and ideology can influence mental health. For example, religiosity has been found to be associated with lower levels of depression and anxiety, while ideology has been found to be associated with higher levels of depression and

lower levels of anxiety (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2012). Research by Wen et al. (2019) demonstrates a significant correlation between psychological resilience and positive indicators of mental health. This is consistent with our findings. Further analysis of the academic literature on the subject reveals a wide range of views on the concept of “psychological resilience”. According to Ungar (2011), psychological resilience is defined as a person’s ability to find their place in society – psychologically, socially, and culturally – despite the impact of dramatic events. In developing the widely used CD-RISC scale, Connor and Davidson (2003) defined psychological resilience as comprising personal competence, tolerance of negative emotions, acceptance of positive change, a sense of control, and spiritual influences. Other authors (Abudayya et al., 2023) have defined psychological resilience as the process of adapting and recovering when faced with difficulties, tragedy, trauma or stress. This ability is determined by a combination of personal, social and cultural factors. Psychological resilience provides a mechanism for overcoming difficulties, enhancing acceptance of irreversible circumstances and situations, regulating emotions, and promoting healthy interpersonal relationships (Nooripour et al., 2021). Furthermore, resilience comprises a variety of complex protective factors and processes that are crucial to understanding health and illness (Abudayya et al., 2023; Melnyk & Stadnik, 2018). Ayed et al. (2019) have shown through their research that life experience can influence how a person copes with life events, alongside their innate characteristics. The current understanding of psychological resilience is multi-level, encompassing trait, process and outcome resilience (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2013). Bonanno (2004) identified four possible responses to trauma: resilience, recovery, chronic dysfunction, and delayed distress. Resilience was found to be the most common.

At the same time, psychological resilience acts as a mediator between life’s value and mental health. It enables people to adaptively process stressful events and protects them against developing psychopathological conditions. According to the theory of resource conservation, people seek to conserve valuable resources – material, social and personal. The findings are consistent with this theory. According to Hobfoll (2011), the meaning and value of one’s own existence is one of the key personal resources, the loss of which triggers a cascade of stress reactions.

It is important to note that this study focused on students who were forced to study and live in conditions of prolonged war (2014–2026), which is a distinctive feature of the study. This required all stakeholders in the educational process to coordinate their activities effectively in these extreme conditions. This was achieved by using modern technologies, artificial intelligence, and the latest logistics approaches in education (Melnyk et al., 2015; Melnyk & Pypenko, 2020; 2024). These measures help ensure an effective and relatively safe educational process for all involved. Furthermore, the extreme circumstances of war and social distancing faced by stakeholders in the higher education sector have highlighted the need to organise medical and psychological support for the educational process (Melnyk & Stadnik, 2020; Pypenko et al., 2020). The purpose of this support is to help resolve any problems that may arise in these circumstances.

The majority of students in the present study scored low on the social component of mental health, suggesting problems with social support in a wartime context. In addition, the majority of students (73.0%) had a flourishing level of mental health, and a high level of psychological resilience (37.1% above average and 24.7% high). This indicates a low level of maladjustment, as well as a sufficient level of mental health and psychological resilience. It correlates with median values for the value of life, thus confirming our hypothesis. However, these findings should be interpreted with caution, given the limitations.

Conclusions

In the context of war, the question of the value of life takes on particular significance for Ukrainian society, as all citizens face danger, loss, trauma and uncertainty daily, forcing them to reconsider their life values. The value of life, along with psychological resources such as resilience and mental health, drives motivation for self-preservation, self-fulfilment, overcoming difficulties, and maintaining mental balance.

The results indicate low levels of maladjustment and a satisfactory level of mental health and psychological resilience, which are consistent with median life satisfaction scores. This finding lends weight to our hypothesis that psychological resilience and mental health are rooted in the value of life. In the present study, the Value of Life Questionnaire was used to examine university students in the context of stressful circumstances associated with a protracted war. It proved to be an effective method of conducting psychological research into the value of life. This method can also be used as part of a system for evaluating mental state and determining how stressful circumstances affect mental health and psychological resilience.

Our theoretical analysis of academic sources and key concepts relating to the research topic has enabled us to clarify the essence of the concept of “the value of life”, identify this phenomenon’s defining characteristics, and examine its components’ indicators among students forced to study in a war-torn environment.

These findings have practical implications for the support of university students’ mental health. It is advisable to incorporate components that promote the value of life into psychoprophylactic and psychotherapeutic programmes, alongside stress management skills and the development of psychological resilience. This is particularly relevant in times of war, when questions about the meaning and value of one’s existence become especially urgent.

Limitations

This study has some potential limitations, primarily because it was conducted in a country under martial law. Consequently, the respondents were living amidst a real, protracted and brutal war involving air raid alerts, power cuts, heating and water shortages, and significant loss of life and injury. Secondly, the study’s scope is limited to students at a single university in Uzhhorod. The sample size is insufficient and heterogeneous, consisting mainly of women aged 18–

35. The third limitation also relates to the sampling procedure. It was carried out over a short period of three weeks, which reduced the number of participants. The fourth limitation is that students' self-reports may have been influenced by the desire to appear socially desirable. Despite these limitations, the present study undoubtedly holds theoretical and practical value.

Ethical Approval

The psychological methods and research procedure used in the study were approved by the Committee on Ethics and Research Integrity of the Scientific Research Institute KRPOCH (protocol No. 027-1/SRIKRPOCH dated 10.08.2025).

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