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POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH IN WARTIME: ASSOCIATIONS WITH ANXIETY, DEPRESSION, AND WELL-BEING

The full-scale war has placed the population of Ukraine under conditions of prolonged stress, uncertainty, and repeated traumatic exposure. In such circumstances, mental health should be considered not only through symptoms of distress but also through indicators of positive mental health and well-being. This integrated perspective is consistent with the dual-continua model and allows for a more nuanced account of psychological functioning under prolonged societal strain. The aim of the study was to examine how state and trait anxiety were associated with depressive symptoms, positive mental health, subjective well-being, psychological well-being, and relationship satisfaction in Ukrainian adults surveyed during the war. The study used a cross-sectional anonymous online survey conducted throughout 2024 among 168 adults aged 18–56 years, including students and academic staff from Vinnytsia and Vilnius. The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, the Burns Depression Checklist, the Positive Mental Health Scale, and the Modified BBC Subjective Well-being Scale were used. Descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation analysis were applied. The findings showed that higher levels of state and trait anxiety, as well as more pronounced depressive symptoms, were consistently associated with lower positive mental health, subjective well-being, and psychological well-being. A pronounced association was also observed between subjective and psychological well-being, suggesting a substantial overlap between these dimensions under conditions of prolonged wartime strain. Relationship satisfaction was linked to lower distress and better well-being. The findings indicate that, in populations living under wartime conditions, mental health assessment should include not only distress symptoms but also indicators of positive functioning and interpersonal resources.

Key words: anxiety, depression, positive mental health, subjective well-being, psychological well-being, relationship satisfaction, wartime, Ukraine, war-related stress, dual-continua model.

Introduction and the current state of the research problem. The full-scale war in Ukraine has created a prolonged context of chronic stress, uncertainty, and repeated exposure to both traumatic events and constant information about them (Greenglass et al., 2024; Kolisnyk & Mehlsen, 2025; Măirean et al., 2025). Under such conditions, psychological functioning cannot be understood solely through direct traumatic experience. Everyday life in wartime itself becomes a persistent background condition shaping subjective well-being, relationship quality, and positive mental health (Greenglass et al., 2024; Kolisnyk & Mehlsen, 2025). Although international research consistently shows that anxiety and depression are associated with lower well-

being, evidence collected directly in the Ukrainian wartime context remains limited (Matlock et al., 2024; Weijers et al., 2021; Zvolensky et al., 2024).

Anxiety is commonly conceptualized through two related but non-identical dimensions. State anxiety reflects a person's current emotional state in response to a situation, whereas trait anxiety refers to a more stable tendency to perceive circumstances as threatening (Spielberger et al., 1983). In adult samples, both dimensions are often linked to higher levels of depressive symptoms and poorer quality of life (Matlock et al., 2024; Zvolensky et al., 2024).

Contemporary mental health research also increasingly emphasizes that well-being is not simply the absence of

symptoms. Within the dual-continua model, distress and positive mental health are related yet relatively independent dimensions (Franken et al., 2018; Weijers et al., 2021; Winzer et al., 2014). This means that low symptom severity does not necessarily coincide with high well-being, and individuals experiencing elevated distress may still retain some resources of positive functioning (Franken et al., 2018; Winzer et al., 2014).

Relationship satisfaction is another important domain of adult psychological functioning. Under prolonged stress, close relationships may help preserve emotional balance and everyday stability, whereas chronic anxiety and depressive symptoms may undermine communication, trust, and the sense of support (D'Urso et al., 2023; Neumann & Rohmann, 2024; Onorato et al., 2025).

The available literature therefore points to a relatively stable association between distress and well-being; however, studies examining these indicators simultaneously within one Ukrainian adult sample during the ongoing war remain scarce. In addition, the present study captures two war-related contexts: living in Ukraine under conditions of constant threat and studying or working in Vilnius in a situation of educational displacement or international academic mobility. Such a design makes it possible to take a broader view of psychological adaptation to a prolonged crisis.

Aim and tasks. The aim of the study was to determine how state and trait anxiety were associated with depressive symptoms, positive mental health, subjective well-being, psychological well-being, and relationship satisfaction in Ukrainian adults surveyed during the war.

To achieve this aim, the following tasks were set: 1) to describe the levels of anxiety, depressive symptoms, positive mental health, and well-being in the studied sample; 2) to examine the associations between indicators of distress and positive functioning; 3) to clarify the place of relationship satisfaction within the overall pattern of psychological functioning under wartime conditions.

Research methods. The study had a cross-sectional design and was conducted as an anonymous online survey. Data were collected throughout 2024 using Google Forms. The sample included adult students and academic staff recruited in Vinnytsia (Ukraine) and Vilnius (Lithuania). The inclusion criteria were age 18 years or older, voluntary informed consent, student or staff status, and fully completed questionnaires. The final analytical sample consisted of 168 adults aged 18 to 56 years. The sample should therefore be regarded as a convenience academic sample rather than as representative of the entire adult population of Ukraine.

State and trait anxiety were assessed with the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI, Form Y) (Spielberger et al., 1983). The instrument contains 40 items rated on a four-point response scale and makes it possible to distinguish situational distress from a more stable tendency toward anxious responding. The validated Ukrainian adaptation by Yu. L. Khanin was used in the present study.

Depressive symptoms were assessed with the Burns Depression Checklist (Burns, 1989). This instrument was selected because it covers a broad range of depressive manifestations, from cognitive and emotional to somatic, and is suitable for self-assessment in a non-clinical adult sample.

Positive mental health was measured with the Positive Mental Health Scale (PMH-scale) (Lukat et al., 2016), which includes nine items rated on a four-point scale. This measure was included in order to represent the positive dimension of mental health within the dual-continua framework (Franken et al., 2018; Lukat et al., 2016).

Subjective well-being, psychological well-being, and relationship satisfaction were assessed with the Modified BBC Subjective Well-being Scale (BBC-SWB) (Pontin et al., 2013). The instrument provides both an overall index of subjective well-being and separate subscales for psychological well-being and relationship satisfaction.

For all variables, descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum, were calculated. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to analyse associations between the continuous variables. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. Given the design of the study, the obtained coefficients were interpreted as indicators of association rather than causation.

Research results. The results make it possible to outline a clear psychological profile of the sample. Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. The mean level of state anxiety (STAI-S) was $M = 41.93$ ($SD = 11.85$; range 21–78), and the mean level of trait anxiety (STAI-T) was $M = 44.85$ ($SD = 10.76$; range 24–76). Both indicators fell within the moderate range; taken together, however, they point to a rather tense emotional background characteristic of life under prolonged external stress (Spielberger et al., 1983).

Indicators of positive mental health and well-being were not sharply reduced, yet neither did they suggest an unequivocally favourable psychological condition. The mean value of positive mental health was $M = 27.36$ ($SD = 5.25$; range 11–36). Subjective well-being averaged $M = 82.59$ ($SD = 16.38$; range 34–118), relationship satisfaction $M = 17.52$ ($SD = 4.38$; range 5–25), and psychological well-being $M = 43.12$ ($SD = 9.12$; range 16–60). Rather than indicating pronounced deterioration, these findings suggest a state of unstable balance in which inner resources remain present but already function under the noticeable pressure of constant tension.

Depressive symptoms deserve particular attention. The mean score on the Burns Depression Checklist was $M = 27.42$ ($SD = 18.76$; range 0–93), corresponding to a moderate level (Burns, 1989). At the same time, the wide spread of scores shows that the sample was internally heterogeneous: alongside participants whose psychological functioning remained relatively preserved, there were also individuals experiencing substantially higher levels of distress. Thus, even the descriptive statistics suggest that psychological adaptation to wartime conditions was not the same across the group.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics of the study variables (N = 168)

Variable	N	M	SD	Min–Max
State anxiety	168	41.93	11.85	21–78
Trait anxiety	168	44.85	10.76	24–76
Positive mental health	168	27.36	5.25	11–36
Subjective well-being	168	82.59	16.38	34–118
Relationship satisfaction	168	17.52	4.38	5–25
Psychological well-being	168	43.12	9.12	16–60
Depressive symptoms	168	27.42	18.76	0–93

Note. Values are presented as mean (M), standard deviation (SD), minimum, and maximum.

The correlation analysis presented in Table 2 revealed a coherent and internally consistent pattern of associations among the studied variables. State and trait anxiety were strongly and positively related to one another ($r = 0.701, p < 0.001$), which is an expected yet important finding: situational emotional tension in this sample was accompanied by a more stable anxious orientation. Trait anxiety showed pronounced negative associations with positive mental health ($r = -0.695, p < 0.001$), subjective well-being ($r = -0.656, p < 0.001$), psychological well-being ($r = -0.652, p < 0.001$), and relationship satisfaction ($r = -0.478, p < 0.001$).

A similar pattern was found for state anxiety: it was negatively correlated with positive mental health ($r = -0.719$), subjective well-being ($r = -0.617$), psychological well-being ($r = -0.588$), and relationship satisfaction ($r = -0.498$) (all $p < 0.001$). Depressive symptoms, in turn, were positively associated with both trait anxiety ($r = 0.735$) and state anxiety ($r = 0.647$), and negatively associated with all indicators of well-being. Particularly noteworthy was the pronounced association between subjective and psychological well-being ($r = 0.946, p < 0.001$), which may indicate substantial overlap between these aspects in the studied sample.

Discussion. Taken together, the results offer a coherent picture of the participants’ psychological condition. Higher levels of state and trait anxiety, as well as more pronounced depressive symptoms, were consistently associated with

lower positive mental health, lower well-being, and lower relationship satisfaction. In other words, the more strongly participants experienced tension, low mood, and inner anxiety, the less they felt inner support, satisfaction with life, and psychological integrity. Overall, this pattern is consistent with other studies in which anxiety and depression were likewise associated with lower well-being and reduced quality of life (Matlock et al., 2024; Weijers et al., 2021; Zvolensky et al., 2024).

These findings gain particular importance because of the context in which they were obtained. The survey was conducted in 2024 among Ukrainian adults who either remained in the country under conditions of constant threat or were studying and working in Vilnius in a situation of educational displacement and academic mobility. The results are therefore important not only as another confirmation of the established association between distress and well-being, but also as empirical evidence of how everyday psychological functioning changes under real wartime conditions (Greenglass et al., 2024; Kolisnyk & Mehlsen, 2025; Mäirean et al., 2025).

Compared with empirical studies conducted in non-wartime and crisis-related contexts, the present findings further support the view that positive mental health and distress are not opposite ends of a single continuum but coexist as interrelated components of psychological functioning. In line with Franken et al. (2018), Weijers et al. (2021), and Winzer et al. (2014), lower levels of distress in our sample should not be interpreted automatically as evidence of high positive functioning. At the same time, the well-being indicators in this wartime sample proved sensitive to increasing anxiety and depressive symptoms, which brings our results closer to those reported by Matlock et al. (2024) and Zvolensky et al. (2024), where distress also emerged as an important predictor of reduced well-being and quality of life.

One of the most interesting findings concerned the link between subjective and psychological well-being. In peacetime, these dimensions are usually described as closely related but not identical (Franken et al., 2018; Winzer et al., 2014). In the present sample, however, they were almost inseparable. This may suggest that under prolonged stress people do not experience their condition through subtle distinctions between separate dimensions of

Pearson correlation coefficients between the study variables (N = 168)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. TA	–						
2. SA	.701***	–					
3. PMH	-.695***	-.719***	–				
4. SWB	-.656***	-.617***	.817***	–			
5. RS	-.478***	-.498***	.607***	.797***	–		
6. PWB	-.652***	-.588***	.802***	.946***	.650***	–	
7. DS	.735***	.647***	-.651***	-.673***	-.551***	-.644***	–

Note. Pearson’s r. TA – trait anxiety; SA – state anxiety; PMH – positive mental health; SWB – subjective well-being; RS – relationship satisfaction; PWB – psychological well-being; DS – depressive symptoms. *** $p < 0.001$.

well-being, but rather as an overall sense of whether they still have the strength to live, maintain inner balance, and cope with everyday demands. At the same time, this result may also reflect the conceptual proximity of the respective subscales and should therefore be interpreted with caution.

No less important was the association with relationship satisfaction. Higher satisfaction with close relationships was linked to lower distress and better well-being. In a situation where familiar social supports are disrupted, the quality of close relationships may become the sphere in which a person receives emotional confirmation of safety, support, and belonging. A similar role of interpersonal ties in sustaining well-being has been demonstrated in other studies as well (D'Urso et al., 2023; Neumann & Rohmann, 2024; Onorato et al., 2025).

The wide spread of depressive symptom scores also deserves particular attention. It shows that even within a relatively similar social context, people experience the wartime period differently. For some participants, functioning remained relatively preserved, whereas for others the psychological burden was substantially greater. This means that, in practice, it is important to see not only symptoms of exhaustion but also the resources that help a person maintain everyday balance and preserve adaptive potential (Koh et al., 2025).

The interpretation of the results should take several limitations into account. First, the cross-sectional design does not allow causal conclusions about the direction of the detected associations. Second, all indicators were obtained through self-report measures, which may affect response accuracy. Third, the sample was a convenience academic sample, and no separate comparative analysis of participants from Ukraine and Lithuania was conducted. In addition, the intensity of wartime experience was not measured directly; therefore, the conclusions should be interpreted as referring to people assessed during the war rather than to the level of individual wartime exposure as a separate variable.

Future research would benefit from longitudinal designs tracing how anxiety, depression, and well-being change across different stages of the war and the post-war period (Kolisnyk & Mehlsen, 2025; Zvolensky et al., 2024). It would also be valuable to use multifactorial analytical models allowing for the consideration of displacement status, exact location, previous traumatic experience, and the degree of direct or indirect wartime exposure.

Conclusions. The findings show that, under conditions of ongoing war, anxiety and depressive symptoms do not exist in isolation but form part of a closely interconnected system of psychological experiences. State and trait anxiety were strongly related to one another and, in both cases, accompanied by lower levels of positive mental health, subjective well-being, and psychological well-being. This suggests that under prolonged stress anxiety is associated not only with emotional tension itself, but also with a broader weakening of psychological stability and inner balance.

Depressive symptoms likewise proved to be an important part of this picture. Their increase was linked

both to higher anxiety and to lower scores on all studied indicators of well-being. This indicates that, under wartime conditions, depressive manifestations should be considered not merely as a separate symptomatic block, but as a state that affects a person's everyday well-being, the ability to experience satisfaction in life, remain psychologically composed, and preserve inner resources.

The close alignment between subjective and psychological well-being suggests that, under prolonged wartime strain, different aspects of positive functioning may be experienced more holistically than under ordinary circumstances. At the same time, this inference should be treated cautiously, since the observed relationship may partly reflect overlap between the constructs measured by the instrument.

Relationship satisfaction also occupies an important place within this system of associations. Its positive link with well-being and negative link with distress underscore the importance of close relationships as a source of everyday support. Under conditions of prolonged instability, the quality of meaningful relationships may help a person endure psychological strain, preserve a sense of belonging, and avoid facing difficult experiences in isolation.

The practical implication of these findings is that the assessment of the mental state of people living under wartime conditions should not be reduced to measuring anxiety or depressive symptoms alone. A fuller and more accurate understanding of psychological functioning requires the combined assessment of distress, positive mental health, well-being, and interpersonal resources. Such an approach makes it possible to see not only where a person is becoming exhausted, but also what they may still rely on in the process of adaptation.

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ПОЗИТИВНЕ МЕНТАЛЬНЕ ЗДОРОВ'Я У ВОЄННИЙ ЧАС: ЗВ'ЯЗКИ З ТРИВОЖНІСТЮ, ДЕПРЕСІЄЮ ТА БЛАГОПОЛУЧЧЯМ

Актуальність дослідження зумовлена тим, що повномасштабна війна поставила населення України в умови тривалого стресу, невизначеності та повторюваного травматичного впливу. За таких обставин психічне здоров'я доцільно розглядати не лише через симптоми дистресу, а й через показники позитивного ментального здоров'я та благополуччя. Такий підхід узгоджується з моделлю подвійного континууму та дає змогу точніше описати психологічне функціонування людини в умовах тривалого суспільного кризового навантаження. Метою статті було з'ясувати, як реактивна та особистісна тривожність пов'язані з депресивними симптомами, позитивним ментальним здоров'ям, суб'єктивним благополуччям, психологічним благополуччям і задоволеністю стосунками у дорослих українців, опитаних під час війни. Методи дослідження включали крос-секційне анонімне онлайн-опитування, проведене упродовж 2024 року серед 168 дорослих віком від 18 до 56 років – студентів і науково-педагогічних працівників із Вінниці та Вільнюса. Було використано опитувальник *State-Trait Anxiety Inventory*, *Burns Depression Checklist*, *Positive Mental Health Scale* та *Modified BBC Subjective Well-being Scale*. Застосовано описову статистику і кореляційний аналіз Пірсона. Результати показали, що вищі рівні реактивної й особистісної тривожності, а також більш виражені депресивні симптоми послідовно поєднувалися зі зниженням позитивного ментального здоров'я, суб'єктивного і психологічного благополуччя. Виявлено також дуже тісний зв'язок між суб'єктивним і психологічним благополуччям, що може свідчити про їх значне перекриття в умовах тривалого воєнного напруження. Задоволеність стосунками була пов'язана з нижчим рівнем дистресу та кращими показниками благополуччя. Висновки полягають у тому, що для людей, які живуть в умовах війни, доцільним є комплексне оцінювання не лише симптомів дистресу, але й показників позитивного функціонування та міжособистісних ресурсів.

Ключові слова: тривожність, депресія, позитивне ментальне здоров'я, суб'єктивне благополуччя, психологічне благополуччя, задоволеність стосунками, воєнний час, Україна, воєнний стрес, модель подвійного континууму.

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