University staff's mental health in wartime

Personal experiences, emotional well-being, and support mechanisms

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abstract

The ongoing full-scale war in Ukraine has significantly transformed the higher education system, placing increased professional demands on faculty members under prolonged stress. This study empirically examines the psycho-emotional well-being and burnout-related symptoms of 94 academic staff from Kharkiv, Sumy, and Dnipro. Data collected via adaptive self-report instruments were analyzed using Spearman's rank correlation. Results indicate substantial emotional strain, with 79.8% of respondents reporting moderate-to-high emotional exhaustion. The correlation analysis showed that respondents with direct personal connections to the war, such as relatives in the Armed Forces, were significantly more stressed and emotionally exhausted. Interestingly, despite high emotional exhaustion, negative affective reactions remained low, reflecting how collective professional identity and civil obligation as non-material resources mitigate cynicism and counteract the traditional Maslach Burnout Inventory model. Furthermore, functional impairment correlated powerfully with internal emotional exhaustion rather than external infrastructural disruptions. Consequently, support strategies must address individual trauma loads, reinforcing mission and purpose as key non-material resources to reduce long-term professional attrition.

KEYWORDS: University lecturers, wartime Ukraine experience, occupational burnout, work-related functioning, wartime stressors.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine has forced university lecturers into working conditions that few education systems in the world have ever encountered. Alongside routine academic responsibilities, they now navigate air-raid alerts, displacement, infrastructural instability, separation from family members serving in the Armed Forces, and the ongoing uncertainty of daily life. In this environment, the professional role of a lecturer becomes inextricably linked to the personal experience of war. Moreover, their academic work, including teaching and advising, persists amidst an existential threat. This underscores that learning continues within universities not because conditions allow it, but because society demands it and, crucially, because it serves as a vital existential necessity for the lecturers themselves. The images show university professors in their damaged and ruined universities trying to collect and save their professional and personal stuff.

This convergence of professional and personal pressures has no close analogue in pre-war occupational stress. For international scholars, the Ukrainian case provides a unique lens through which to observe how educators maintain professionalism when the usual balance between demands and resources is radically disrupted. It raises some questions that transcend national borders: How does academic work adapt when crisis becomes the norm? What allows lecturers to continue teaching under conditions that would typically paralyze institutional functioning? And which psychological resources remain vital when material and organizational supports erode?



Interior of the H. S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University building after being shelled by the Russian Federation: university faculty members arrived to retrieve their remaining belongings and clean up shattered glass in the classrooms. PHOTO: PRIVATE ARCHIVE

Burnout, which is classically defined by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment,[1] provides a central framework for understanding these processes. While burnout has long been recognized as a chronic challenge in global higher education, research in stable environments assumes that job demands and institutional resources exist within relatively predictable boundaries. The Job Demands-Resources model[2] explains this dynamic well under normal circumstances. However, in wartime, the "demands-resources" equation undergoes a profound change. Demands multiply in both intensity and unpredictability, while some resources, like emotional, organizational, and infrastructural, erode simultaneously.

RECENT STUDIES FROM Ukraine[3] clearly highlight this shift. Emotional Exhaustion among university faculty has risen dramatically, reflecting the dual burden of professional instability and personal threat exposure. The depersonalization, as the cynicism component, is typically expected to increase in parallel. However, it remains strikingly low in several wartime samples, as established during the study. This suggests that non-material resources, such as civic duty (teaching), moral responsibility, professional identity, and solidarity, may serve as protective mechanisms, enabling lecturers to sustain their professionalism despite deep emotional strain. This phenomenon challenges linear models of burnout and invites a reconsideration of how resilience operates under extreme conditions.

Despite growing qualitative accounts, one significant gap persists: we still lack systematic quantitative evidence linking specific wartime stressors, for instance, relocation, institutional damage, proximity to violence, and personal involvement in the war, to measurable psycho-emotional outcomes among lecturers. Similarly, the direct correlational mechanism through which emotional exhaustion leads to functional impairment remains insufficiently examined in the current wartime context. Addressing these gaps is not only scientifically important but also essential for informing university policies that support academic staff working under crisis conditions. Therefore, this study proceeds with an empirical investigation to provide the necessary correlational data on the mechanisms through which extreme war conditions influence stress, burnout, and functional impairment among faculty in the most affected regions of Ukraine.

Aim and objectives

The aim of this study is to empirically analyze the correlational links between specific, quantifiable wartime stressors and the primary dimensions of burnout (emotional exhaustion) and functional impairment among university lecturers in the conflict-affected regions of Eastern Ukraine. To achieve this aim, the following specific objectives were established: 1) to quantify the prevalent levels of perceived stress, emotional exhaustion, functional impairment (including negative affective reactions) among the surveyed lecturers; 2) to analyze the strength and direction of associations (using Spearman's rank correlational) between lecturers' personal wartime exposure (e.g., relocation status,

relatives in the Armed Forces) and their measured psycho-emotional outcomes (emotional exhaustion and perceived stress); 3) to examine and compare the strength of the correlations between emotional exhaustion and functional impairment, and between external structural stressors (e.g., university damages) and functional impairment, thus formulating practical recommendations for the academic community in crisis context.

Literature review

Occupational burnout among university faculty is widely conceptualized as a dysfunctional response to prolonged imbalance between job demands and available personal or organizational resources, typically manifesting through emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP), and reduced professional efficacy. Pre-war systematic reviews consistently demonstrate that burnout among academics is shaped by sociodemographic and psychosocial factors, with younger age, lower professional experience, elevated emotional labour, and organizational constraints being the strongest predictors of EE and DP.[4] Longitudinal syntheses from 2005 to 2020 similarly highlight the persistent vulnerability of university lecturers to emotional depletion due to increasing workload demands and declining institutional support.

This pattern is reinforced by a recent systematic review and meta-analysis, which confirmed that job stress is a robust and consistent burnout predictor across higher education settings globally.[5] Empirical studies in stable contexts further confirm that EE plays a central role in deteriorating professional functioning. It is significantly associated with productivity loss, reduced teaching quality, absenteeism, and presenteeism.[6] Actual research on resilience additionally shows that internal resources can mitigate the progression from emotional fatigue to cynicism and impaired professional functioning.[7]

However, psycho-emotional risks for educators escalate not only in war but also in other large-scale crises. A recent comprehensive review covering the pandemic and post-pandemic years (2020–2023) revealed that teachers worldwide experienced substantial increases in burnout indicators, stress, workload, and emotional instability due to rapidly changing teaching conditions and heightened demands.[8] Studies conducted during the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine after 2014 already documented that proximity to hostilities, personal danger, displacement, and infrastructural disruption substantially intensify stress levels and accelerate the development of burnout among educators.[9]

SIMILARLY, STUDIES AMONG Ukrainian students show that exposure to wartime conditions leads to heightened perceived stress and anxiety, emphasizing the broad psychosocial impact of conflict within educational communities.[10] Really, the full-scale invasion in 2022 amplified these risks to an unprecedented degree, combining extreme personal stressors, as home loss, repeated evacuations, threats to life, service of relatives in the Armed Forces, in other words, with radically altered work conditions.

Multi-wave wartime investigations (2022–2024) demonstrate a continuous intensification of EE and a gradual rise in DP, suggesting that prolonged exposure to traumatic events and chronic instability depletes emotional resources in line with the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory.[11] These conclusions are corroborated by studies reporting that Emotional Exhaustion is the most persistent and dominant component of burnout among lecturers during the war.[12]

The war also introduced a set of environmental and technological stressors that further burden academic staff: sudden transitions to fully remote teaching, disrupted internet connectivity, power outages, infrastructural instability, and increased administrative complexity. Investigations of technology integration and pedagogical practice in wartime institutions reveal that these conditions substantially increase cognitive load, compromise teaching quality, and heighten emotional strain.[13]

“ACTUAL RESEARCH ON RESILIENCE ADDITIONALLY SHOWS THAT INTERNAL RESOURCES CAN MITIGATE THE PROGRESSION FROM EMOTIONAL FATIGUE TO CYNICISM AND IMPAIRED PROFESSIONAL FUNCTIONING.”

Complementary research on university employees’ psychological state highlights widespread anxiety linked to personal and familial threat, uncertainty about the future, instability of living conditions, and the need for frequent relocation or sheltering during bombardments.[14] These stressors collectively contribute to sleep disturbances, emotional instability, decreased motivation, and loss of professional continuity, which are frequently reported by Ukrainian academic staff during the ongoing crisis.[15] Additional findings indicate that demands associated with distance learning intensify both EE and DP through blurred work-life boundaries and constant monitoring pressures.[16]

Despite the severity of these conditions, a distinct pattern has been consistently observed in Ukrainian wartime studies: while EE levels are significantly elevated, DP remains comparatively low. This atypical divergence from classical MBI trajectories suggests that moral obligation, professional identity, and civic responsibility serve as important non-material resources buffering the transition from emotional depletion to cynicism.[17] Within the Conservation of Resources (COR) framework, these internal resources may function as protective factors that slow or prevent the degradation of emotional exhaustion into professional disengagement and negative affective reactions.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that extreme war conditions produce a unique psychosocial profile among university lecturers: high levels of emotional exhaustion, closely tied to personal wartime stressors, coexist with a preserved or even strengthened professional identity, which inhibits the develop-



Ihor Hrynchenko, PhD in Education and Associate Professor at the Department of Olympic and Professional Sport, Sports Games and Tourism, stands at the main entrance of H. S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University, destroyed by Russian shelling. PHOTO: PRIVATE ARCHIVE

ment of depersonalization. However, despite the breadth of research on burnout during the war, a notable lack of systematic quantitative evidence remains regarding the specific wartime stressors (e.g., personal involvement in the war, relocation, university damage) that link to distinct psycho-emotional outcomes.

Crucially, the direct correlational pathway between emotional exhaustion and functional impairment (FI) has not been sufficiently examined in the wartime context. These gaps underscore the need for an empirical correlational study that can elucidate the mechanisms by which extreme war conditions affect stress, emotional exhaustion, and functional impairment among lecturers in regions directly impacted by the conflict.

Research hypotheses

Based on the review of the literature on occupational stress and crisis management, the following hypotheses were formulated for empirical testing. The primary hypothesis (H1) posits that there is a positive and significant correlation between the personal proximity to wartime stressors (e.g., relatives in the Armed Forces, relocation) and the intensity of negative psycho-emotional outcomes (perceived stress, emotional exhaustion). Secondly, we hypothesize (H2) that the strength of the correlation between emotional exhaustion and functional impairment will be stronger than the correlation between functional impairment and external structural stressors (e.g., university damages), indicating that functional decline is primarily an internal consequence of depletion.

Methodology

This study was conducted as an anonymous online survey with a quantitative empirical design. This approach was chosen due to security constraints associated with martial law, as well as the need to reach respondents from different regions. This survey is targeted at university lecturers from the Kharkiv, Sumy, and Dnipro regions, regions located in eastern Ukraine, and exposed to constant shelling and heightened danger throughout the study period.

Data were gathered through a Google Form questionnaire developed by the authors, consisting of two main thematic sections. The first section covered participants' socio-demographic characteristics and their experience of living and working under wartime conditions. The second section assessed their psycho-emotional state and teaching practice under prolonged stress conditions. This component included items conceptually adapted from internationally validated psychometric instruments. Specifically, perceived stress was assessed using a single-item measure conceptually derived from the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10).[18]

Emotional exhaustion was measured using a composite index of 2–3 items based on the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Educator Survey,[19] adapted to facilitate rapid evaluation of faculty experiences under high-stress wartime conditions. To accurately reflect the unique wartime professional context, functional impairment (FI) was assessed through a composite index capturing work-related difficulties (e.g., reduced concentration) and motivational decline in teaching activities. Additionally, negative affective reactions (NAR) were captured through items measuring increased irritability toward students and colleagues, reflecting an adapted form of the cynicism component of burnout. All items were ranked using 5-point or 10-point Likert-type scales, enabling both descriptive and correlation statistical analyses.

A total of 94 university lecturers completed the survey. Data collection took place between May and July 2025. This timeframe was marked by intensive shelling and significant emotional strain on the civilian population. Data were processed in Microsoft Excel for initial data entry and descriptive statistics. All inferential

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of study participants (N = 94)

Variable	Category	*n*	%
Gender	Female	67	71.3
	Male	27	28.7
University type	State University	93	98.7
	Other	1	1.1
Age	Up to 25 years	1	1.1
	26–35	11	11.7
	36–45	20	21.3
	46–60	43	45.7
	Over 60 years	19	20.2
Academic Seniority	Up to 5 years	11	11.7
	6–10	7	7.4
	11–20	14	14.9
	21–30	38	40.4
	Over 30 years	24	25.5

Table 2. War-related contextual characteristics of study participants (N = 94)

Variable	Category	*n*	%
Relocation Status	Temporarily Relocated	36	38.3
	Remained in place	33	35.1
	Temporarily relocated and subsequently returned	25	26.6
Teaching Format	Online Learning	58	61.7
	Face-to-face	10	10.6
	Blended Format	26	27.7
Workload Change	Increased	56	59.5
	No Change	24	25.5
	Decreased	14	14.9
Institutional Damage	Confirmed Damage	67	71.3
	No Reported Damage	26	27.7

statistical analyses were subsequently conducted using Jamovi Cloud, an open-source platform built on the R programming environment. The platform was selected due to its transparency, reproducibility, and suitability for non-parametric statistical analysis. To test the formulated hypotheses, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (ρ) was employed to examine the strength and direction of the associations between the study variables.

Result of study

1. Demographic and professional characteristics of participants

The study involved 94 university lecturers from the Kharkiv, Sumy, and Dnipro regions. The cohort, consisting predominantly of female lecturers (71.3%, n = 67), and nearly all participants (98.7%) were employed at state universities. Owing to the categorical nature of the demographic variables, age and academic seniority (teaching experience, TE) were summarized by frequency distribution. The most represented age group was 46–60 years (45.7%), followed by the 36–45 years' group (21.3%) and the respondents over 60 years (20.2%). Similarly, the largest professional experience groups were those aged 21–30 years (40.4%) and those with more than 30 years of experience (25.5%), indicating a mature cohort with established careers and their own teaching style based on the appropriate moral values. Contextual data related to wartime experience revealed pronounced disruption in participants' personal and professional lives.

Specifically, 38.3% (n = 36) reported having temporarily relocated from their permanent place of residence, while an additional 26.6% (n = 25) experienced displacement but later returned. Approximately 35.1% (n = 33) remained in their original location throughout the study war period. Considering the prevailing security environment in these frontline regions, the most prevalent teaching modality was online learning (61.7%), followed by a blended format (10.6%).

Furthermore, a considerable portion of our participants, 71.3% (n = 65), confirmed that their educational institution had suffered direct physical damage or partial destruction due to shelling. The majority of participants (59.5%) reported that their workload had increased significantly or slightly since the start of the war. The reasons for it were not examined during this study. Notably, 79.8% (n = 75) of the respondents reported having family members or close acquaintances serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, underscoring the high level of personal involvement and continuous threat exposure within the sample, which is likely a source of vague apprehension and anxiety. These contextual variables illustrate the acute and multifaceted stressors that influence the participants' psycho-emotional state. In our research, they were named as war-related contextual characteristics. A detailed breakdown of the socio-demographic and war-related contextual variables, including the specific categories for age and seniority, is provided in Tables 1 and 2.

2. Psycho-emotional state and job satisfaction in the wartime context

The conducted data analysis revealed significant findings regarding the psycho-emotional state of the faculty members under continuous wartime conditions, which were presented here.

The direct assessment of perceived stress, using a 10-point scale, showed a high mean score of M = 7.48 (SD = 2.26). This also aligns with the self-reported impact of the war on daily life, which averaged M = 8.26 on a 10-point scale (SD = 1.76). It confirms a profound disruption to routine and pervasive psycho-

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for psycho-emotional variables in the wartime context (N=94)

Variable	Scale range	Mean, M	Standard deviation, SD	Min	Max
Perceived stress	1–10	7.48	2.26	1	10
War's impact on daily life	1–10	8.26	1.76	3	10
Emotional exhaustion	0–4	2.43	1.13	0	4
Negative affective reactions	0–4	0.94	1	0	3
Generalised distress index	0–4	1.96	1.22	0	4
Functional impairment	0–4	1.81	1.23	0	4
Job dissatisfaction	0–4	1.69	0.97	0	4

logical distress within the sample as one of the infinite destructive consequences that war can have on people. (Note that the selected scale range for the burnout items was 0–4, where 4 represents the highest frequency/level.)

Moreover, this finding is strongly corroborated by the assessment of other symptoms related to professional burnout. A substantial number of lecturers (52.1%, n = 49) reported noticing some common symptoms (fatigue, apathy, irritability), and a striking number of those respondents (73.5%, n = 36) directly linked their diminished condition to the military events in Ukraine. They stated that their fatigue, apathy, and irritability were solely dependent on war conditions. The emotional exhaustion (EE) score was markedly elevated, with a mean of 2.43 (SD = 1.13), indicating a high frequency of feeling emotionally drained. In contrast, negative affective reactions (NAR) (reflecting cynicism and irritability and were considered in this study as a combined index NAR) were found to be relatively low, averaging M = 0.94 (SD = 1.0), suggesting the preservation of professional empathy despite the personal difficulty and war threats.

Furthermore, the analysis of specific psycho-emotional symptoms showed high levels of non-specific distress. The composite index for generalized distress (anxiety, sleep disturbance, and hopelessness) averaged M = 1.96 (SD = 1.22), which forms a persistent emotional background for academic activity. The high standard deviation indicates significant variability in individual trauma processing, suggesting that while some faculty members maintain resilience, a substantial subgroup operates at the limit of their psychological endurance. This distress serves as the latent kick for emotional exhaustion, explaining why professional functioning becomes increasingly challenging to sustain without targeted psychological interventions.

A comparison of the results shows that the level of functional impairment (M = 1.81, SD = 1.23) is slightly higher than job dissatisfaction (M = 1.69, SD = 0.97). This suggests that while lecturers face significant cognitive challenges, such as difficulty concentrating, their professional identity remains largely intact. The emotional strain is evident, as 18.1% of the respondents reported frequent crying, which highlights the substantial effort required to continue working under such conditions. Ultimately, these findings indicate that academic work provides a sense of stability and normalcy. Although the war limits their capacity to perform specific tasks, it does not undermine their professional commitment, suggesting that maintaining work duties is a key practical way of coping with the ongoing war. A summary of the descriptive statistics for all measured psycho-emotional variables is presented in Table 3.

TO PROVIDE A MORE granular assessment of professional burnout within the faculties, the frequency distribution for emotional exhaustion (EE) and negative affective reactions (NAR) was categorized into three established levels (low, moderate, high), consistent with the Maslach Burnout Inventory scoring framework. The cutoff points for these levels were determined using the quartile method (Q_1 and Q_3) applied to the sample's scores. The analysis revealed a critical level of strain regarding emotional resources, where a significant majority of the sample reported high or moderate exhaustion.

"WHILE MOST LECTURERS CONTINUE TO FULFIL THEIR PROFESSIONAL DUTIES, THEY DO SO AT A HIGH PERSONAL COST, APPROACHING THE LIMITS OF THEIR EMOTIONAL ENDURANCE."

The distribution analysis of emotional exhaustion (EE) highlights the widespread nature of the crisis within the academic community. With 79.8% of participants falling into the moderate or high EE categories, it is clear that most faculty members operate within a "high-risk zone". While only 20.2% of respondents remain in the low-risk category, the prevalence of moderate exhaustion (59.6%) suggests a state of chronic strain. Therefore, it can be assumed that, while most lecturers continue to fulfil their professional duties, they do so at a high personal cost, approaching the limits of their emotional endurance.

In sharp contrast, the distribution of negative affective reactions (NAR) revealed significant preservation of professional empathy. The very low mean score of M = 0.94 (SD = 1.0) confirms that cynicism and detachment are now rare among faculty members. Specifically, approximately 75.5% (n = 71) of our questionnaire participants reported low or minimal levels of negative affective reactions (scores of 1 or less). In comparison, only 24.5%

Table 4. Spearman's rank correlation matrix of wartime stressors, burnout indicators, and professional functioning

Variables	Age	TE	RE	UD	RAF	SL	EE	NAR	FI	JDS
Age	1									
TE	0.780***	1								
RE	0.085	0.003	1							
UD	0.112	0.012	0.518***	1						
RAF	-0.212*	-0.094	-0.065	-0.010	1					
SL	-0.091	-0.006	0.132	0.123	0.403***	1				
EE	-0.195	-0.154	0.191	0.16	0.317**	0.586***	1			
NAR	-0.286**	-0.162	0.056	-0.118	0.180	0.263*	0.465***	1		
FI	-0.121	-0.145	0.214*	0.148	0.160	0.408***	0.737***	0.562***	1	
JDS	-0.025	0.055	-0.04	-0.075	0.207*	0.306**	0.294**	0.471***	0.451***	1

Note. Spearman's rank correlation matrix (ρ) between wartime stressors and psycho-emotional outcomes (N=94,df=92). Stressors: RAF (relatives/colleagues in the Armed Forces), RE (relocation after 24.02.2022), UD (university damages/closures), Age, TE (teaching experience). Outcomes: SL (perceived stress level), EE (emotional exhaustion), NAR (negative affective reactions), FI (functional impairment), JDS (job dissatisfaction). Significance levels: *p <.05; **p <.01; ***p <.001.

(n = 23) of them reported scores greater than 1, which indicates that it is a subgroup at risk for professional detachment. This divergence in burnout components highlights that the primary impact of the war is emotional exhaustion (EE), while negative affective reactions (NAR) show high resilience.

3. Correlation of wartime stressors and psycho-emotional outcomes

A correlation analysis was performed to empirically examine the hypothesized association between exposure to wartime contextual factors and the severity of psycho-emotional outcomes. Given the ordinal measurement level and the non-normal distribution of the data, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was applied.

To ensure rigorous interpretation of the result, the correlation strength was evaluated in accordance with widely recognized effect size criteria proposed by Cohen[20]: negligible (ρ<.10), weak (.10<ρ<.29), moderate (.30<ρ<.49), and strong (ρ>.50). The obtained correlation matrix, displaying the coefficients between all studied variables (N = 94), is presented in Table 4.

OUR CORRELATION MATRIX analysis revealed several statistically significant and theoretically essential relationships. Some details were considered. Firstly, it was proven that the key dependent variables, such as stress level (SL) and emotional exhaustion (EE), were the most sensitive to personal and existential threat factors. The strongest external correlation with stress was found for the war-related factor of "relatives or colleagues in the Armed Forces" (ρ=0.403, p <.001), indicating a moderate correlation. This factor also demonstrated a moderate relationship with emotional exhaustion (ρ=0.317, p <.01). Therefore, the results obtained confirm our initial hypothesis that the emotional burden and constant anxiety associated with having loved ones in high-risk zones are primary external determinants of psychosocial distress and personal imbalance. By contrast, objective structural losses, such as university damages/closures (UD), showed only a weak correlation with SL (ρ=0.123) and EE (ρ=0.161). This fact suggests that personal threat takes precedence over material loss in the lecturers' experience.

Furthermore, the analysis indicated that, although there is a weak link between relocation (RE) and stress level (ρ=0.132), there is a moderate correlation between RE and emotional exhaustion (ρ=0.191) and functional impairment (FI) (ρ=0.214,p <.05). It should be noted that more than 60% of respondents are forcibly displaced persons or have experienced displacement for a certain period of time. Therefore, despite forced displacement being a less acute stressor, it becomes a chronic source of exhaustion and a practical impediment to carrying out work duties.

In addition, significant internal links were identified between the psycho-emotional outcomes. Emotional exhaustion, for example, was found to have a strong correlation with stress levels (ρ=0.586, p<.001), as well as an exceptionally strong correlation with functional impairment (FI) (ρ=0.737, p<.001). The coefficient obtained was the highest observed in the correlation matrix (Table 4), suggesting a strong association between emotional exhaustion and certain cognitive difficulties, such as impaired concentration and reduced motivation.

THIS CONFIRMS OUR second hypothesis, demonstrating that internal depletion is the primary driver of functional decline. The analysis of the correlation matrix with regard to negative affective reactions (NAR) demonstrated weak and negligible correlations with most external factors, supporting the finding that NAR was present at low levels among the sample of respondents.

However, factor NAR revealed a moderate negative correlation with age (ρ=-0.286, p<.01). This suggests that younger lecturers may be more susceptible to cynicism and professional detachment than their older colleagues, reflecting differences in professional resilience that accrue across generations.

In summary, the correlational analysis provides robust evidence of a clear, sequential pathway of distress among academic staff. Moreover, it confirms that the psycho-emotional state is fundamentally a function of personalized acute threat exposure, specifically having relatives or colleagues in the Armed Forces (ρ=0.403), which rapidly translates into chronic internal depletion (from SL to EE, ρ=0.586), serving as the primary antecedent of functional impairment (from EE to FI, ρ=0.737). This pattern aligns with the stress-spillover and demand-resource models, in which personal life demands overwhelm professional coping resources. However, the findings also highlight the presence of protective factors, as demonstrated by the statistically significant negative correlation between age and NAR (ρ=-0.286, p<.01). This suggests that professional maturity acts as a buffer against cynicism. The obtained empirical data provide a solid basis for subsequent discussions on theoretical implications and the development of targeted crisis intervention strategies.

Discussion

Really, the main goal of our study was to empirically evaluate the psychosocial condition and professional burnout of Ukrainian academic staff during the full-scale war, with particular attention to the correlation between defined contextual stressors and the measured outcomes. So, the results obtained shown that, despite demonstrating substantial resilience in their professional identity, the academic staff is experiencing pronounced emotional strain. This suggests a critical dichotomy in the manifestation of burnout under prolonged crisis conditions, and it is a phenomenon that necessitates a contextually grounded theoretical interpretation.[21]

"A KEY FINDING OF OUR STUDY IS THE MARKED DIVERGENCE BETWEEN HIGH EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION (EE) AND THE SUSTAINED LOW MEAN LEVEL OF NEGATIVE AFFECTIVE REACTIONS (NAR)."

The descriptive findings, namely, the high prevalence of emotional exhaustion (EE) (79.8% in the moderate-to-high range) and elevated self-reported perceived stress level (ρ=0.586,p < .001), are consistent with established literature on trauma-exposed professionals in high-demand, low-resource environments. This is strongly supported by recent evidence showing significantly increased burnout among Ukrainian educators under prolonged conflict conditions.[22]

Similarly, studies of social field and IT professionals exposed to military stressors or crisis-driven workloads report elevated levels of emotional exhaustion and perceived stress levels in comparable environments.[23] Critically, this pattern is consistent with broader psychosocial models of burnout among aid workers and crisis professionals,[24] which emphasize the primary role of workplace stressors and emotional coping strategies. This perspective is further supported by the fundamental principles of the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory,[25] which posits that stress stems directly from the actual or anticipated loss of valued resources.

Furthermore, the conducted correlational analysis established a clear etiological mechanism for the observed distress, showing that the most potent external drivers of both perceived stress (ρ=0.403, p < .001) and emotional exhaustion (ρ=0.317, p= .002) were rooted in structural disruption but in the immediate personal connection to the war effort, namely having relatives or colleagues in the Armed Forces (RAF). This finding aligns with existing models that describe the potential impact of conflict-related stressors on professional well-being.[26] These models theorize that the primary impact on functional capacity follows an indirect pathway through chronic, war-related daily stressors, such as worry over loved ones (like relatives or colleagues in the Armed Forces).

For the educational sector, this means that the core threat to teaching quality originates not primarily from institutional challenges (e.g., damaged infrastructure, UD), but from the unmitigated, individual emotional toll of the war. The negative correlation between institutional damage (UD) and emotional strain that we observe confirms this, indicating that traumatic stress from the personal sphere prevails over the organizational demands of the university. Similar observations regarding the predominance of psychosocial stressors over organizational challenges have been documented in studies of other critical sectors.[27]

A key finding of our study is the marked divergence between high emotional exhaustion (EE) and the sustained low mean level of negative affective reactions (NAR). This result suggests a possible deviation from the traditionally assumed linear progression of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) model,[28] (which posits that high EE inevitably precedes depersonalization (cynicism). This fact is best interpreted through the lens of collective professional identity and purpose. Namely, in the context of the war, the sustained low level of NAR (M = 0.94) suggests that the academic community maintains a state of active moral engagement. The sustained professional empathy and connection, despite overwhelming fatigue, functions as a powerful collective coping strategy rooted in a sense of civic obligation to the educational mission.[29]

This perceived purpose acts as a potent, non-material job resource within the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, actively mitigating the development of cynicism even as emotional reserves are depleted. Moreover, this framework, which links job resources to well-being and engagement, is robustly supported by systematic literature reviews[30] and research demonstrating the protective role of resilience against burnout among univer-

sity faculty[31]. The established link between the JD-R framework and teacher resilience[32] also confirms that this adaptive capacity serves as a crucial buffer against detachment.

The analysis of functional outcomes in the present study suggests that emotional strain may lead to occupational decline. Specifically, we observed a robust positive strong correlation between EE and functional impairment (FI) (ρ=0.737***), suggesting that depletion of emotional resources may serve as a proximal antecedent of functional impairment. This pattern is consistent with the resource-depletion processes described in the Job Demands-Resources (JDR) model, whereby high job demands combined with limited emotional resources can undermine performance. Although no prior study has directly quantified this specific relationship among Ukrainian academic staff, previous research has documented substantial increases in burnout dimensions and associated functional challenges during the wartime context[33].

Furthermore, the statistically significant negative correlation between NAR and Age ρ=-0.286, p=.005) suggests that greater age may confer a protective effect against cynicism. While this correlation is based on our empirical data, general systematic reviews indicate that sociodemographic factors, including age, are important determinants of burnout prevalence.[34] This is consistent with the theoretical framework of resource accumulation,[35] whereby older, established faculty may possess more developed coping strategies, greater professional resilience, and a clearer sense of professional identity, potentially buffering them from questioning the value of their work relative to younger colleagues experiencing heightened career and existential uncertainty.[36]

"THESE RESULTS UNDERSCORE THE CRITICAL INFLUENCE OF INDIVIDUAL TRAUMA, HIGHLIGHTING THE NEED FOR TARGETED, RESOURCE-BASED SUPPORT FOR THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY."

Overall, these findings provide robust empirical evidence concerning the burnout dynamics among Ukrainian academic staff in the context of the ongoing war. All hypotheses concerning the leading role of personal stressors (H1), the direct link between emotional exhaustion and functional decline (H2) were confirmed. These results underscore the critical influence of individual trauma, highlighting the need for targeted, resource-based support for the academic community.

Conclusion

The empirical findings of this study offer a critical snapshot of the psychosocial condition of Ukrainian academic staff, highlighting the dichotomy between profound emotional strain and resilient professional identity during the full-scale war. The primary conclusion is that emotional exhaustion (EE) is highly prevalent (79.8%), driven predominantly by the personal trauma load (relatives/colleagues in the Armed Forces – RAF), which is consistent with the stress-spillover hypothesis and models of distress in conflict-affected populations.

Crucially, the negative affective reactions (NAR) dimension remains remarkably low, suggesting that a strong sense of moral engagement and civic obligation acts as a powerful non-material Job Resource within the academic community, mitigating the development of cynicism despite high EE. Furthermore, the analysis confirmed that the depletion of emotional resources (EE) translates directly into functional impairment (FI), while greater age offers a protective factor against cynicism.

This research offers a significant theoretical contribution by providing quantitative empirical support for the non-linear progression of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) model in high-stakes, purpose-driven environments. It demonstrates that collective identity and moral purpose can serve as crucial moderating variables, challenging the assumption of an automatic transition from exhaustion to professional detachment (cynicism).

Consequently, the practical implications of these findings are direct and vital for institutional policy. Given that the main stressor is the personal toll of the war (RAF), universities must shift focus from structural repairs to providing accessible, confidential, and sustained psycho-emotional support programs tailored to coping with non-work-related trauma. Simultaneously, institutional leadership should actively recognise, value, and promote the academic mission not merely as a job requirement, but as a crucial contribution to national resilience and post-war recovery; this reinforcement of moral purpose should be integrated into institutional communications as a resource (in line with the Job Demands-Resources model). Finally, intervention programs should be specifically targeted: while general support is needed for all staff experiencing EE, specialised training in coping mechanisms and professional identity confirmation may be particularly beneficial for younger faculty members (who have demonstrated higher vulnerability to NAR) to help them accrue professional resilience more quickly.

In conclusion, addressing the "exhaustion-impairment" link while fostering the "mission-empathy" buffer is essential for preserving the human capital of Ukrainian higher education during and after the conflict.

Limitations

The interpretation of this study's findings should be approached with an awareness of several methodological limitations arising from the unique circumstances of data collection. First, the non-probability, convenience sampling approach was dictated by the security risks inherent to research under martial law, which fundamentally restricts the generalizability of the results beyond the specific cohort of lecturers from the surveyed regions. Second, the reliance on self-reported data renders the results susceptible to biases inherent in survey research, such as social

desirability bias and recall bias, particularly when participants retrospectively evaluate their exposure to stress.

Due to the cross-sectional design of the study, which captured data at a single temporal point (May-July 2025), no causal inferences can be drawn. This design also limits the ability to assess the long-term dynamics of change in psycho-emotional states over the extended conflict period. Finally, the pervasive emotional context of active conflict during the data collection period must be acknowledged as a factor that may have influenced both the stability and patterns of participants' psycho-emotional short-term self-assessments.

In light of these reasons, future longitudinal studies, ideally employing probability sampling where circumstances permit, would be invaluable in verifying and extending the insights presented here. Such research could further explore the sustainability of professional resilience and the long-term impact of chronic wartime stress on the academic sector.

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