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## **PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES AND EDUCATIONAL CREATIVITY OF UKRAINIAN TEACHERS DURING WAR: FURTHER EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL OF MORITA THERAPY**

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This study explores the psychological condition of Ukrainian teachers under prolonged wartime conditions, focusing on mental health, coping strategies, and educational creativity. A nationwide survey conducted in October 2024 (n = 667) revealed that 57.3% of teachers scored above the clinical cut-off on the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10), indicating severe psychological distress. Despite this, teachers demonstrated resilience and employed creative strategies to support students, such as storytelling, humour, and emotional openness. “Jokes and life stories” emerged as the most frequently selected coping strategy. The study also compared preferences for internal (introspective, cognitive-emotional) therapies and external (bodily or expressive) therapies. While both were valued, internal approaches were slightly preferred. Notably, correlational analysis suggested that Morita Therapy’s pathological mechanisms—such as avoidance behaviours and self-preoccupation – may help explain Ukrainian teachers’ mental health difficulties, indicating cultural applicability. Over 90% of participants found Morita Therapy helpful. These findings underscore the importance of integrated, culturally sensitive psychological support that balances internal reflection with embodied, practical interventions for educators working in crisis environments.

**Keywords:** *Ukrainian teachers, war-related distress, mental health, crisis education, coping strategies, Morita Therapy, culturally sensitive interventions*

**Problem statement.** More than three years have passed since the Russian invasion began, and educational institutions in Ukraine continue to face severe disruptions. Even under the constant threat of shelling, educators have strived to maintain learning, resulting in significant psychological burdens on both students and teachers.

In early 2023, Professor Olha Nikolenko of Poltava V.G. Korolenko National Pedagogical University and her colleagues conducted a study on students' psychological conditions and the role of teachers in providing support during wartime. The study revealed that 68% of students identified “coping with fear” as their most pressing challenge (Nikolenko et al., 2023). Creative approaches such as art therapy were found to be effective, and practices like sharing daily routines and expressing empathy were highlighted as key forms of teacher support.

In January 2024, a nationwide survey targeting teachers was conducted in collaboration with Professor Nikolenko, Assistant Professor Nikolenko, and Associate Professor Zhao from Saitama University (Zhao, Nikolenko, Nikolenko, Zhdanova-Nedilko, 2024). The results indicated that 53.4% of Ukrainian teachers were experiencing severe psychological distress, exceeding the cutoff score of 25 on the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10), which suggests a potential risk of mental illness. At the same time, many teachers reported employing strategies to build trust with students and to accept fear as a natural emotion, rather than suppressing it. Practical approaches included encouraging students to focus on daily life and incorporating creative activities such as plays, field trips, and free writing to promote emotional stability.

Despite these creative efforts within schools, teachers themselves remain at high risk for mental health issues. Ukrainian teachers have long faced excessive workloads and psychological stress even before the war (Dziuba et al., 2021), and these burdens have intensified under wartime conditions. In response, the Ukrainian

government and international organizations have implemented various psychological support measures, including resilience training and coping strategies (Tolstoukhov & Lunov, 2023), stress management seminars, counselling, and group therapy (Chorna, 2024). Other interventions such as remote Psychological First Aid (Shragal & Pushkarskaya, 2025), positive psychology, self-development programs (Ignatovych, 2023), cognitive behavioral therapy, and mindfulness have also been introduced.

However, many of these supports tend to emphasize symptom reduction and positive thinking, while failing to sufficiently address the deeper emotional struggles faced by teachers. A study by Nadyukova and Frenzel (2025) involving 724 secondary school teachers found a high reliance on problem-focused coping and emotional suppression. The pressure to act as a “model teacher” was linked to the avoidance of expressing negative emotions, contributing to emotional labor, burnout, and depletion of psychological resources (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015; Zagefka, 2022).

To address these challenges, alternative frameworks such as mindfulness—which encourages individuals to focus on the present moment without judgement—and Morita Therapy, a Japanese psychotherapeutic approach, have drawn attention. Morita Therapy advocates for the acceptance of anxiety and tension “as they are,” while encouraging action guided by life values. It is considered effective in alleviating excessive self-demands (Matsuura, 2015). In the survey by Zhao, Nikolenko, Nikolenko, and Zhdanova-Nedilko (2024), 95% of teachers responded that Morita Therapy could be helpful for their own mental health after being introduced to its principles.

From 2024 to 2025, a series of online group sessions based on Morita Therapy were implemented collaboratively by Associate Professor Zhao, Professor Nikolenko and Assistant Professor Nikolenko. Participants included 12 teachers from various regions in Ukraine and 60 teachers from Zaporizhzhia, a region heavily affected by the war. Professor Nikolenko played a central role in implementation and cultural coordination. Many teachers highly valued the principle of “not eliminating anxiety but taking action nonetheless,” suggesting the potential applicability of Morita-based attitudes to practical education. However, some limitations were also identified, including the difficulty of accepting overwhelming emotions and the tension between professional roles and personal identity.

Additionally, previous studies have not sufficiently examined which type of psychological support—internal training (reflective practices) or external training (skill-based techniques)—is perceived as more effective by teachers. Moreover, the relationship between teachers’ mental health and their hope for the end of the war remains underexplored.

To address these gaps, the present study aims to comprehensively examine Ukrainian teachers’ mental health conditions, associated factors, evaluations of psychological support, helpful strategies used in school settings, and the potential applicability of Morita Therapy as an alternative approach to psychological care.

**The purpose of the article.** The purpose of this article is to report the findings from the second nationwide survey of Ukrainian teachers conducted in October 2024. The study has four main objectives: 1) to examine the current mental health conditions of teachers, their evaluations of psychological support, and the practical strategies employed in school settings, and to compare these findings with those of the first survey conducted in January 2024 in order to assess changes over time; 2) to investigate whether the pathological mechanisms proposed in Morita Therapy—a Japanese psychotherapeutic approach, including avoidance behaviours, fixation on ideals, and excessive self-reflection—are applicable to understanding teachers’ mental health; 3) to analyse which form of psychological support, internal training or external training, is perceived as more effective; 4) to explore the relationship between teachers’ psychological well-being and their hope for the end of the war.

**Presentation of the main material.** This survey was approved for ethical review by the Poltava University of Education (Approval Number: 2024-1105-16). In October 2024 our team conducted the second teacher survey through Google Forms, from elementary, junior high, and high schools across Ukraine.

**Participants.** 667 teachers participated in this survey. The gender of participants was 23 male (3.4%), 638 female (93.7%) and 6 (0.9%) did not want to answer. 31 participants (4.6%) were in their 20s, 120 (17.6%) were in their 30s, 162 (23.8%) were in their 40s, 257 (37.8%) were in their 50s and 97 (14.3%) were in their 60s. The majority of participants had been teaching for more than 10 years (584 participants, 87.6%). Participants were from 21 regions in eastern, central and western Ukraine.

**Questionnaire and procedure.** The instruction of the survey was as below. “Please read the description and, if you agree, kindly participate. It will take approximately 15 minutes. While we strive to ensure your comfort, there may be questions that could be psychologically distressing. Therefore, you are not obligated to answer those questions, and you may choose to discontinue your participation at any point (simply by closing your browser). Personal identifying information will not be disclosed in any way to protect your privacy. Your responses will be securely managed and will be carefully disposed of after a certain period of time has elapsed. Having understood the above explanation, please select “Agree” if you are willing to participate. You may choose “disagree” to end the survey if you do not wish to participate”.

The questionnaire consisted of parts as below. Firstly, we examined teachers’ mental health. We used the psychological distress as one indicator. The Shortened version of Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10)

(Kessler et al., 2002) was used. This item was rated on a five-point scale anchored at *strongly disagree* and *strongly agree*. We also examined teachers' resilience as another mental health indicator. Resilience Scale (Hirano, 2014) was used. This item was rated on a five-point scale anchored at *strongly disagree* and *strongly agree*. Meanwhile, we also asked teachers to answer changes in both scales between the beginning of the war and now, as well as reasons for these changes. We also examined Morita Therapy Concept Scale (Shimizu, 2023; 15 items, 5-point Likert scale).

Secondly, we asked about the students' school life, contents of students' anxiety and fears, as well as what coping techniques teachers were using to decrease students' anxiety and fears.

Thirdly, we asked about useful psychological trainings teachers have learnt.

Finally, we introduced Morita Therapy and asked teachers' responses to it.

## **Results and discussion.**

### *1, Teachers' mental health.*

#### *1) Psychological distress.*

Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) was examined as an indicator of mental health. The cut-off points as suspected mental illness is 25, and 57.3% of all participants was above 25. This result suggest that the mental health of Ukrainian teachers is in a critical situation. There is an increase from the first survey (53.4%).

Compared to when the war started in February 2022, compared to when the war started, 10.4% of people said their mental state had 'improved', 42.7% said it was 'the same' and 46.9% said it had 'worsened'. While in the first survey 29.2% had improved their mental health, 42.3% were almost the same and 28.5% had deteriorated. The 2nd survey showed a quite worsened data than the 1st survey.

This result indicated that most teachers had not been able to recover from the shocking mental state they were in at the beginning of the war. Free text entry showed the reasons for this included 1) 'hopelessness' (24 participants) such as 'I don't see a way out of the situation', 2) 'unable to control emotions' (17 participants) such as 'I can't always control my emotions', 3) 'The constant trials of war' (7 participants) such as 'Missile attacks on our town have gotten worse' etc.

On the other hand, reasons for the improvements since the beginning of the war (multiple responses) included: 'I have learned to manage my emotions' (258 participants), 'I have a concrete understanding of the situation and know what to do' (204 participants), 'I have built my daily routines' (140 participants) etc.

#### *2) Resilience.*

Resilience was also examined. The total score was 79.58 (SD = 9.17), which was nearly the same as the result from January, 80.24 (SD = 8.84), suggesting that the resilience level of Ukrainian teachers was not low, especially compared to their psychological distress examined above.

#### *3) Morita Therapy's pathological mechanism*

The concept of Morita Therapy (i.e., its pathological mechanisms) was also examined.

We introduced Morita Therapy as below. "Here we would like to introduce Morita Therapy. It can be considered as one form of psychological support to help children and teachers in Ukraine cope with anxiety and enhance resilience. Morita Therapy is a form of psychotherapy that was initiated by Japanese psychiatrist Shoma Morita in 1919. While it was primarily targeted at treating neurasthenia at the time, it is now mainly used for neuroses such as anxiety disorders and obsessive-compulsive disorders. In recent years, it has been applied to PTSD, psychosomatic disorders, depression, and panic disorders. The basic principles of Morita Therapy are as follows: Anxiety and tension should not be considered as 'things that should not exist', but rather, the underlying 'desire to live better' should be appreciated. As anxiety and tension intensify the more one tries to eliminate them, they should be left as they naturally arise (as they are), and focus should be directed towards the actions one should take, building up constructive actions. Its effectiveness has been reported not only in Japan, but also in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy, as well as in war and conflict regions".

We asked participants if it is useful for anxiety coping and resilience (multiple choice), 269 said it was useful for coping with fear and anxiety, 323 said it was useful for actively thinking about action and solving problems, 49 said it was not useful because they could think positively without it, and 15 participants said that it was not useful because it was difficult to understand. Most participants were observed to be resonate and have interest in Morita therapy.

Taken together, these results indicated that while the distress level of Ukrainian teachers is in crisis, their resilience meets a certain level, which suggests that they have been forged tougher by the war. Meanwhile we can do more practice to enhance teachers' resilience, in order to reduce their psychological distress. The high score on "Morita neuroticism" may be due to cultural factors or a heightened sensitivity caused by the war.

### *2, Students' school life, Contents of students' anxiety and fears and teachers' coping strategies in educational settings*

#### *1) Students' school life.*

Missiles and raid sirens interrupt students' normal days, they have to go to shelters(81.3%). This means concentration is impaired, students are always under tension.

*2) Contents of students' anxiety and fears.*

Contents of anxiety and fears (multiple choice) of students on a daily basis: Uncertainty in everything (366 participants), fear for the safety of family and friends (299 participants), fear for their own safety (285 participants), and fear of losing their homes (141 participants). Compared to the previous results, the response "uncertainty in everything" stood out.

*3) Coping techniques being taught to students and successful cases.*

Techniques teachers taught their students to cope with anxiety and fear (single choice) included: Tell them it is fine to be afraid (28.0%), hold common creative projects (26.8%), talk about their daily lives (24.9%), talk about their anxieties and fears (14.3%), tell them not to be afraid (6.0%). Good experiences are also introduced in free answers, such as "in the evening, teachers read fairy-tales to students to emotionally prepare for calm sleep".

Most teachers use methods that recognize fear as a natural emotion and discuss it openly with students. encourage students to look at everyday life, Creative activities are also used. On the other hand, fewer teachers teach students to 'not to be afraid' than last time. It seems that the teachers have come to better recognize the importance of "coexisting with anxiety."

Examples of successful cases (multiple choice) included share emotions, jokes and life stories (251 participants), joint events for small groups of students (watching movies, discussing books, going to the theatres) (168 participants), contests of creative works (56 participants). "Jokes and life stories" was derived from the "Other" responses in the previous survey and was included as a response option for the first time in this survey. It turned out to be the most frequently selected option, representing a significant finding of this study. In the context of extreme stress, such as during wartime, sharing humor and life stories is not merely a form of casual conversation—it plays a crucial role in fostering psychological resilience and building social support networks. First, the use of humor is widely recognized as an effective strategy for coping with stress. Martin (2007) explains that humor serves both an emotional regulation function by alleviating negative emotions, and a social function by enhancing interpersonal relationships. Sharing laughter within a group creates a sense of belonging, which can counter feelings of isolation and helplessness, particularly vital in war-affected environments (Fredrickson, 2001). In such circumstances, laughter becomes a tool for survival, helping individuals sustain hope and emotional connection. Meanwhile, sharing life stories supports individuals in restoring a sense of self-continuity and meaning making in the face of trauma. According to McAdams (2001), narrating one's life as a coherent story deepens self-understanding and allows people to discover meaning and value even in adversity. In educational settings, when teachers share personal stories with students, it helps build psychological closeness and mutual trust (Noddings, 1992). This narrative engagement can be seen as a concrete practice of care in education.

*4) Difficulties in supporting students.*

Cases of teaching difficulties (multiple choice) were 'students who had suffered great losses (family, friends, home, etc.) in the war' (308 participants), 'students' panic attacks' (254 participants), and 'students with a passive attitude to life' (96 participants). Loss of family, friends, or home can lead to grief, trauma, and emotional withdrawal. According to Bowlby (1980), such loss disrupts attachment and affects a child's emotional and learning capacity. Panic attacks suggest extreme anxiety. When students are overwhelmed, they cannot stay within the "window of tolerance" for learning (Siegel, 1999). A passive or hopeless attitude may reflect learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975). These students may lack motivation and feel there is no point in studying, especially when their basic needs are unmet.

Overall, these findings show that teachers are facing serious emotional challenges in the classroom and need more support. Trauma-informed approaches and psychological resources are essential for both students' recovery and effective education.

*3, Useful psychological training for teachers.*

The responses to the question "What content have you found useful in the psychological trainings?" reveal a relatively balanced interest between external treatment training (48.3%) and internal treatment (51.7%). This suggests that teachers see value in both practical intervention strategies and internal psychological coping methods when supporting themselves and their students during the war.

External treatment training typically includes behavioral techniques, classroom management strategies, and crisis-response tools. Its popularity reflects the need for concrete, action-oriented methods in highly unstable environments. In crisis situations, structured external interventions can restore a sense of order and provide immediate support (Hobfoll et al., 2007). On the other hand, the slightly higher preference for internal treatment points to the recognition of emotional processing, self-awareness, and stress regulation as vital components of long-term psychological resilience. Internal approaches often include mindfulness, self-

compassion, or Morita therapy—methods that may help teachers manage their own emotional responses and model psychological flexibility for students (Neff, 2003; Hayes et al., 1999).

Overall, the nearly even split indicates that effective psychological training in conflict settings must integrate both external and internal strategies. Teachers are not only first responders but also emotional anchors for students. Thus, programs that balance classroom techniques with personal coping skills are likely to be the most impactful.

4, *The correlations of teachers' mental health (K10 and Resilience), Morita Therapy's pathological mechanism, hope for the end of the war, preference to internal or external training*

Table 1

Correlations of the main variables				
	Resilience	Morita Therapy's pathological mechanism	Hope for the end of the war	Preference on internal aspects of psychological training
K10	-.32 **	.42 **	.24 **	0.01
Resilience	1	-.34 **	.22 **	-0.03
Morita Therapy's pathological mechanism		1	-0.07	0.08
Hope for the end of the war			1	-0.03

\*\*  $p < .01$

Correlational analysis (see Table 1) showed that better mental health (lower K10 scores) was significantly associated with higher resilience, lower scores on Morita Therapy's pathological mechanism, and stronger hope for the end of the war. No significant correlations were found between mental health and preference for internal vs. external psychological training, suggesting that both types of interventions may be beneficial.

**Conclusions.** Four major objectives were addressed in this study. First, we examined the current mental health conditions of Ukrainian teachers and compared them with the results of the January 2024 survey. Findings revealed that 57.3% of teachers scored above the clinical cut-off on the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10), indicating a severe mental health crisis. Compared to the first survey, a larger percentage of teachers reported a worsening of their mental state. Free-text responses highlighted persistent feelings of hopelessness, emotional dysregulation, and distress caused by constant threats such as missile attacks. These results confirm that most teachers have not recovered from the initial psychological impact of the war. However, the data also showed that many teachers have developed adaptive coping strategies, such as building routines, managing emotions, and maintaining a realistic understanding of the situation. Among the notable findings, "jokes and life stories" emerged as the most frequently selected coping strategy. This option, highlights the psychological importance of humour and storytelling in fostering emotional resilience and social connection under extreme stress.

Second, the theoretical applicability of Morita Therapy's pathological mechanisms—such as avoidance behaviours, fixation on ideals, and excessive self-reflection—was examined. Correlational analysis revealed a moderate association between Morita Therapy's pathological constructs and teachers' psychological distress, suggesting that these mechanisms may help explain the mental health challenges faced by Ukrainian educators. Most participants reported that Morita Therapy was helpful in coping with anxiety and promoting constructive action.

Third, we compared the perceived effectiveness of internal and external psychological training. Result suggests that teachers value both concrete, action-oriented strategies and reflective, emotion-focused techniques. Programs that integrate these complementary approaches are likely to offer the most robust psychological support in conflict zones.

Fourth, we examined whether hope for the end of the war is associated with teachers' mental health. Correlational analysis showed that teachers with better mental health were more resilient, less Morita-neurotic, and more hopeful about the future. Hope appears to serve as a protective psychological factor in enduring adversity. Interestingly, no significant relationship was found between mental health and preference for internal or external training, indicating that both forms of support may be broadly beneficial regardless of individual mental health status.

In conclusion, while Ukrainian teachers continue to face extreme psychological strain, they also demonstrate remarkable resilience and pedagogical creativity. Their ability to maintain educational continuity under wartime conditions, coupled with a willingness to engage in psychological self-care and student support, is both admirable and instructive.

**Prospects for further research.** Future research should aim to strengthen this dual foundation—supporting both Ukrainian teachers' professional practice and personal coping—through integrated and culturally attuned approaches. Building on this study, we plan to further develop anxiety coping strategies based on Morita Therapy that are specifically adapted to the needs and cultural context of Ukrainian teachers. Amid increasing difficulties in providing psychological support under prolonged conflict, we remain committed to offering sustained and reliable assistance to both Ukrainian teachers and students.

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### **ПСИХОЛОГІЧНІ ВИКЛИКИ ТА ОСВІТНЯ КРЕАТИВНІСТЬ УКРАЇНСЬКИХ УЧИТЕЛІВ ПІД ЧАС ВІЙНИ: ПОДАЛЬШЕ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ ПОТЕНЦІАЛУ МОРІТА ТЕРАПІЇ**

Стаття присвячена психологічному стану українських вчителів в умовах тривалої війни, з особливим акцентом на їхньому психічному здоров'ї, стратегіях подолання стресу та освітній креативності. Загальнонаціональне опитування, проведене в жовтні 2024 року (n = 667), показало, що 57,3% вчителів набрали більше клінічного порогового значення за шкалою психологічного дистресу Кесслера (K10), що вказує на серйозний психологічний дистрес. Незважаючи на це, вчителі продемонстрували стійкість і застосовували творчі стратегії для підтримки учнів, зокрема розповіді, гумор та емоційна відкритість. «Жарти та історії із життя» виявилися найчастіше обраною стратегією подолання труднощів. У нашому дослідженні ми також порівняли переваги внутрішніх (інтроспективних, когнітивно-емоційних) терапій та зовнішніх (фізичних або експресивних) терапій. Хоча обидві були оцінені високо, внутрішні підходи були дещо кращими. Кореляційний аналіз показав, що патологічні механізми Моріта терапії, такі як уникнення поведінки та самозаглиблення, можуть допомогти пояснити проблеми з психічним здоров'ям українських вчителів, що вказує на культурну застосовність. Понад 90% учасників загальнонаціонального опитування визнали Моріта терапію корисною. Ці висновки підкреслюють важливість інтегрованої, культурно чутливої психологічної підтримки, яка врівноважує внутрішню рефлексію з втіленими, практичними втручаннями для освітян, які працюють у кризових умовах.

**Ключові слова:** українські вчителі, стресові стани, пов'язані з війною, психічне здоров'я, кризова освіта, стратегії подолання труднощів, Моріта терапія, культурно чутлива психологічна підтримка

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### **МЕТОДИЧНЕ ЗАБЕЗПЕЧЕННЯ ОСВІТНЬОГО КОМПОНЕНТУ «ФІЗКУЛЬТУРНО-СПОРТИВНІ СПОРУДИ»: ТЕОРЕТИЧНІ ОСНОВИ ТА ПРАКТИЧНА РЕАЛІЗАЦІЯ**

У статті розкрито теоретичні засади та практичні аспекти методичного забезпечення освітнього компоненту «Фізкультурно-спортивні споруди», який є складовою частиною освітньо-професійних програм з підготовки майбутніх фахівців у галузі фізичної культури і спорту. Акцентовано увагу на актуальності освітнього компоненту у контексті сучасних викликів у сфері вищої освіти, зокрема модернізації спортивної інфраструктури, гармонізації державних стандартів з міжнародними освітніми вимогами та впровадження інноваційних підходів до підготовки педагогічних кадрів. Детально проаналізовано структуру, зміст, дидактичну побудову та засоби реалізації освітнього компоненту, визначено мету дисципліни, сформульовано очікувані результати навчання, окреслено спектр тем, які охоплюють як історичний розвиток спортивних споруд, так і їх сучасну класифікацію, конструктивні особливості, вимоги до безпеки, утримання та експлуатації. Підкреслено важливість застосування сучасних методів навчання, зокрема проблемного,