

Students in the line of fire: Student well-being in countries affected by armed conflict: The examples of Iran and Ukraine

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Background

Military conflicts affect students' mental health, social functioning, and coping behaviors. This study examined mental well-being among students living in countries directly affected by war (Ukraine, Iran) and neighboring countries (Poland, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia).

Methodology

Participants: N = 1,510 university students. Countries: Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania, Iran, Ukraine. Mean age: 21.84 years; 60% women. Online data collection: January 2025 – February 2026

Measures: Depression Anxiety Stress Scales – Long Form, R-UCLA Loneliness Scale, CAGE Questionnaire, Berlin Social Support Scales.

Analysis: Descriptive statistics, Between-country comparisons, Regression analysis

Results: Iranian students reported the highest depression, anxiety, stress, and loneliness scores. Lithuanian students reported the lowest psychological distress. Polish students showed higher distress levels than Ukrainian students. Romanian students reported the highest alcohol-related behavior scores. The strongest predictors of poorer mental well-being were: lack of intimate emotional bonds; lack of community belonging; worse financial situation; female gender; lower social support. Relationship status was not a significant predictor. The regression model explained 27% of variance in DASS-42 scores.

Conclusions

Mental well-being differed significantly across countries. Loneliness-related factors were stronger predictors of distress than relationship status alone. Social connectedness and financial stability appear crucial for protecting student mental health during geopolitical crises.

Keywords:

Iran; Ukraine; war; students; well-being