



## EDITORIAL

### When War is Not just a War. It's a War with Ourselves and our Mental Health

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The war in Ukraine affected a lot of people around the world. Refugees that lost their families and houses, people located in neighboring countries that made a huge effort to help refugees, countries that were economically affected, people that took safety measures for them and their families – what all of these have in common? The answer is: a huge emotional impact. No matter the place or category, the war came with a lot of uncertainty that increased our fear regarding the future. Statistics from Health Cluster Ukraine show that in May 2022, approximately 15 million people were affected by war, being in need of humanitarian assistance and more than 12 million were in need of humanitarian health care (Schwartz et al., 2022). More specifically, 2.4 million people from Ukraine or Moldova crossed the Romanian border and continued their journey to other countries, with 100000 refugees that moved to Romania (UNICEF, 2022). As we can see, the numbers speak for themselves.

The war came after 2 years of COVID-19 pandemic that turned people's lives upside down. This represented a big challenge as, according to the last years studies, quarantine measures had strong negative psychological consequences such as loneliness, anxiety, depression, alcohol, or drug use (Kumar & Nayar, 2021). Both events were characterized by less predictability, stability, and safety (Kostruba & Fishchuk, 2022), with people's primary need being the searching process of coping strategies.

But resilience hides a big number of traumas and fears: fear of losing homes, fear for the future, fear related to health deterioration, fear of losing friends and family members, fear of death or lack of basic necessities (Bai et al., 2022). We speak about an environment that is unknown for refugees that will lead to long-term instability. Separation fear in refugees, for example, is usually quite persistent beyond

human resilience, stress-induced and it lasts long after escaping from the danger (Zepinic, 2021). More than that, people that lived their countries as a result of the war may face major threats after they arrive in the host countries such as discrimination, economic problems, language barriers, loss of family and community support, poor access to social, educational or health services, and uncertain asylum application procedures (Barbui et al., 2022). But these effects of traumatic events go deep down and affect people's wellbeing and quality of life for years after the war, with studies showing that these events are associated with posttraumatic stress symptoms, having a significant impact on social conditions (Matanov et al., 2013). In a meta-analysis regarding the prevalence of mental illness in refugees, Blackmore et al (2020) shows that the prevalence of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was 31.45%, while the prevalence of depression and anxiety was 31.5% and 11% respectively, with a percentage of 1.51% for psychosis. Moreover, some risk factors (for example, certain pre-existing psychiatric problems) may increase the risk of conflict-related mental health problems among vulnerable individuals (Bai et al, 2022). Females, elderly people, those who are unemployed, separated or divorced individuals have also a lower health-related quality of life (Grochtdreis, König, Riedel-Heller, & Dams, 2022). Studies show that high exposure to potentially traumatic experiences before or during flight was also associated with lower health-related quality of life (Sengoelge, Nissen, & Solverg, 2022).

Considering the traumatic events and the other additional stressors it is more than evident why people affected by war are at risk of developing mental health problems and worsen their wellbeing and quality of life (Beiser & Hou, 2017). Social support is one of the most researched concepts when speaking about traumas. According to studies, perceived

social support is one of the strongest predictors of overall adjustment after experiencing a trauma, making it a potentially significant protective factor for combating exposed veterans (Brewin et al., 2000). When people receive emotional support, feel valued or fitting in an environment they may report fewer PTSD, anxiety and depression symptoms and a more diverse and embedded social network, less disability and better quality of life (Proescher et al., 2020).

The last events affected not only the people in Ukraine, but also people living around. Families, investments, careers,

choices, hopes and dreams, all of these were changed in this fight. After years of fighting with different health or economic problems that forced people to take irrational decisions in uncertain times, the fight extended to a new one. It became a fight with us and our mental stability that forced us to deal with all these feelings and become more resilient. With all of these in mind, it is important to prioritize our wellbeing and quality of life. Today is not just another day. It is an opportunity to be more aware of our feelings and our mental health.

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