



Daily War-Related Stress, Caregiver Mental Health, and Parenting Behaviors

among Ukrainian Caregivers

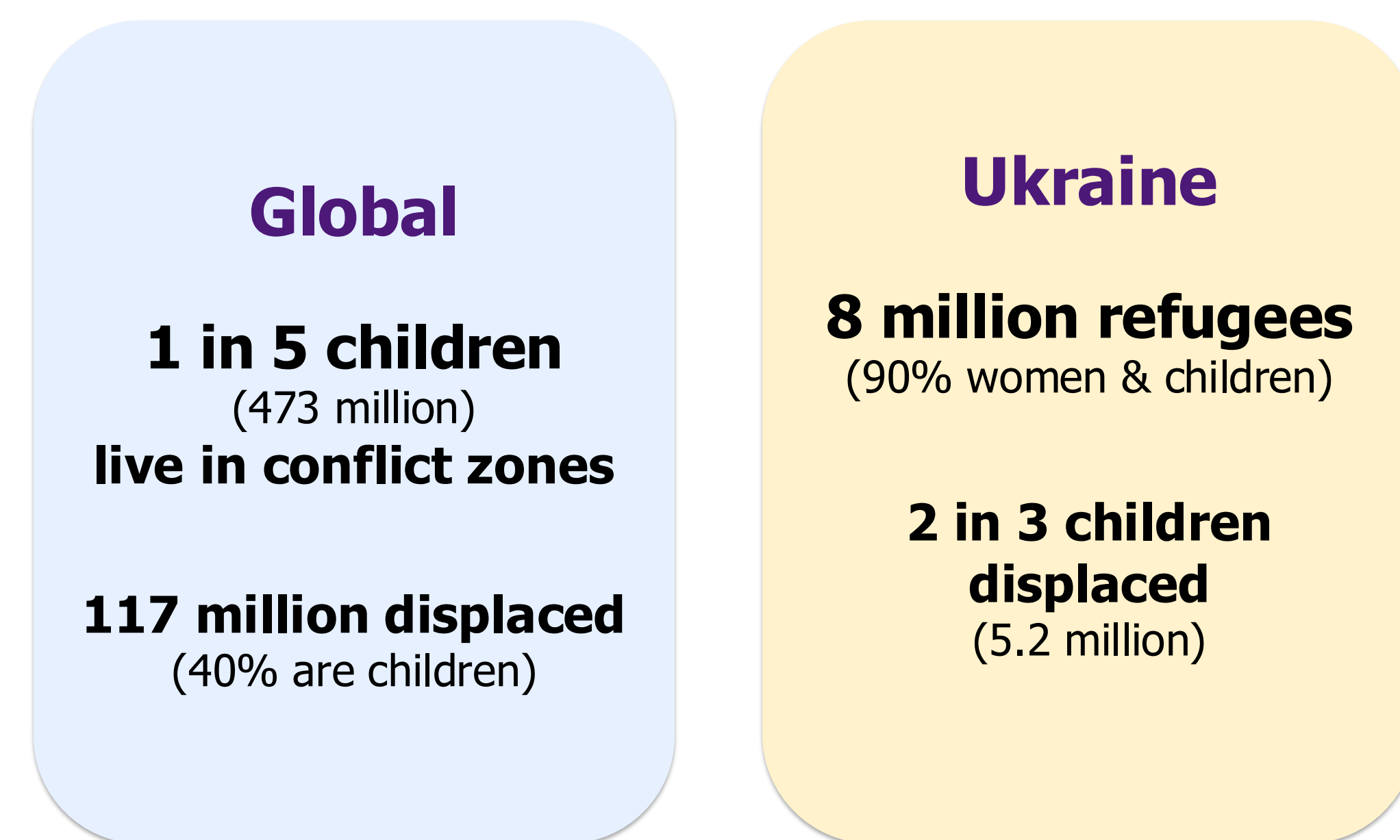
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Background

- Exposure to war-related stressors is associated with higher rates of caregiver anxiety, depression, and PTSD (Amsalem et al., 2025).
- Certain populations, including women, children and ethnic minorities, appear to be especially vulnerable to the effects of war (Werntz et al., 2018).
- Caregiver psychological distress is linked to harsher, less supportive parenting, affecting child emotional and behavioral outcomes (Bennett et al., 2026).
- Daily stress demonstrates a spillover effect, whereby caregiver stress and mental health are associated with parent-child interaction (Xu & Zheng, 2023).
- Prior research has examined the relationship between war-related stress and mental health, mental health and parenting, and daily stress and parenting separately.
- Few studies have integrated all three domains especially among conflict-affected Ukrainian families.

Impact of War on Children & Families



Sources: Save the Children (2024); UNHCR (2024); UNICEF (2022); DHS (2023)

Objectives

- This study examines the associations between daily war-related stress, caregiver mental health, and parenting behaviors among Ukrainian caregivers.
- Specifically, this study aims to investigate whether daily war-related stress is associated with caregiver anxiety and depression symptoms, and whether these symptoms are associated with positive or negative parenting behaviors.

Methods

Participants

The final sample included 319 Ukrainian caregivers (M age = 42.19 years, SD = 7.44; range = 24–60).

| Demographic Category | n | % |
|------------------------|-----|-------|
| Sex | | |
| Male | 23 | 7.2% |
| Female | 296 | 92.8% |
| Education Level | | |
| Middle school | 9 | 2.8% |
| High school | 8 | 2.5% |
| Vocational school | 34 | 10.8% |
| Bachelor's degree | 72 | 22.8% |
| Master's degree | 176 | 55.7% |
| Doctoral degree | 17 | 5.4% |
| Marital Status | | |
| Single | 13 | 4.1% |
| Married | 256 | 80.8% |
| Domestic partnership | 4 | 1.3% |
| Divorced | 29 | 9.1% |
| Separated by war | 9 | 2.8% |
| Widowed | 6 | 1.9% |

Procedure

Secondary data from a larger study of Ukrainian caregivers examining war-related stress, mental health, and parenting among Ukrainian caregivers of children under 18. Recruitment took place via social media utilizing online survey on Qualtrics.

Measures

Demographic questionnaire and the following measures.

| Construct | Measure | Number of Items | Reliability (Cronbach alpha) |
|--|---|-----------------|------------------------------|
| War-related stress | Ukrainian Scale of Daily War Stressors | 26 | .93 |
| Mental Health (depression and anxiety) | Patient Health Questionnaire-8 (PHQ-8) | 8 | .91 |
| | Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7) | 7 | .94 |
| Parenting Practices | The Multidimensional Assessment of Parenting Scale (MAPS) | 34 | .89 |

Discussion

Findings

A key finding of this study is the differential association between caregiver mental health and parenting behaviors. While depressive and anxiety symptoms were associated with increased harsh parenting, they were not significantly related to positive parenting practices. This pattern suggests that caregiver psychological distress may be more strongly reflected in increases in negative parenting behaviors rather than reductions in positive behaviors such as warmth and support.

Implications

- Expand access to low-resource, scalable mental health interventions for caregivers in war-affected settings.
- Integrate mental health support into parenting programs.
- Focus on reducing harsh parenting behaviors, not only promoting positive parenting.

Limitations

- Cross-sectional design limits causal interpretation.
- Self-report measures may introduce response bias.
- Sample consisted primarily of female caregivers.

Future Direction

- Longitudinal research to examine temporal relationships.
- Inclusion of more diverse caregiver populations.
- Examination of protective factors (e.g., social support, resilience).

Results

Pearson correlation analyses were conducted to examine associations among daily war-related stress, depression, anxiety, and parenting practices.

| Variable | Depression | Daily stress | Anxiety | Pos. parenting | Neg. parenting |
|--------------------|------------|--------------|---------|----------------|----------------|
| Depression | 1 | | | | |
| Daily stress | .579** | 1 | | | |
| Anxiety | .822** | .600** | 1 | | |
| Positive parenting | -.003 | .125* | -.011 | 1 | |
| Negative parenting | -.342** | -.258** | -.394** | .393** | 1 |

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

- Daily war-related stress was positively correlated with depression ($r = .579, p < .001$) and anxiety ($r = .600, p < .001$).
- Depression ($r = -.003, p = .964$) and anxiety ($r = -.011, p = .840$) were not significantly associated with positive parenting behaviors.
- Depression ($r = -.342, p < .001$) and anxiety ($r = -.394, p < .001$) were significantly associated with negative parenting behaviors (reverse-coded: higher distress \rightarrow harsher parenting).

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