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Students' Coping Strategies in Response to Academic Stress: A Study of Psychological Mechanisms and Their Effects on Adaptation

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Abstract: Psychological difficulties are becoming increasingly acute across Ukrainian society, particularly in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, which has created profound challenges for higher education. Modern academic programmes often demand high productivity, placing heavy pressure on students and contributing to fatigue, stress, and psychological strain. Additional stressors include social expectations, uncertainty over career prospects, and the daily struggle to balance studies, employment, and personal life. In such conditions, effective stress management becomes crucial for maintaining academic performance, personal well-being, and overall resilience. This study investigates the typology and effectiveness of stress management strategies among higher education students. It applies both theoretical analysis and empirical research, combining questionnaires and surveys with mathematical and statistical approaches, including descriptive, comparative, and correlation analyses. The research involved 80 psychology students, aged between 17 and 23 years, comprising 40% males and 60% females, across the full range of first to fourth year. Empirical results indicate that students tend to prefer passive coping mechanisms, including avoidance and distraction. While these may provide short-term relief from psychological discomfort, they fail to resolve underlying causes and, in the long run, intensify anxiety, as confirmed by correlation analysis. Social support was found to strengthen emotional well-being but did not significantly reduce stress or anxiety, suggesting its limited effectiveness as an independent coping tool. The findings highlight the importance of cultivating active stress management strategies, including self-organisation, problem analysis, and decision-making skills, which enable students to address difficulties constructively. This research is distinctive in being conducted during a full-scale military invasion, when the educational environment underwent profound change, shifting between classroom and online formats, while students simultaneously faced unprecedented psycho-emotional strain arising from continuous threats to their safety, health, and family stability.

Keywords: stress, stress-coping strategies, youth, stress resistance, adaptation, resources.

Introduction

In today's world, characterised by multiple global crises, the themes of mental resilience and adaptation to stress have become increasingly important. The military situation in the country has

introduced additional challenges for young people, requiring them to manage not only material and social difficulties but also significant psychological problems. Fear of uncertainty, anxiety about the future for themselves and their families, and the threat of losing their familiar way of life compel young people to seek effective methods of psychological adaptation under conditions of chronic stress. This makes the preservation of mental health and the development of resilience to stress critically significant.

Young people are now expected to develop strategies that enable them to manage stress, adapt to new realities, and maintain psychological balance. All students encounter a variety of challenges at different stages of their education, and each individual perceives and responds to stress in a distinct way. Academic stress, for example, is an adaptive psychological process that arises within educational environments when students face challenges and interpret them as stressful (Deng et al., 2022). This phenomenon is widespread in many countries and is manifested through physical and psychological reactions to academic stressors that exceed an individual's coping capacity (Adams and Blair, 2019).

Academic pressure frequently produces stress, anxiety, and tension among students owing to obligations such as examinations, assignments, and a heavy workload (Fathima et al., 2020). Throughout their studies, students encounter transitional phases such as adapting to a new institution (Pascoe et al., 2020), moving away from home, and interacting with peers from diverse backgrounds. While some students regard these transitions as rewarding, others approach them with apprehension and difficulty (Ye et al., 2018).

Concerns about academic stress are increasingly relevant, as many high school and university students report elevated levels of stress linked to academic demands (Marconcin et al., 2022). When stress escalates to severe levels, it can adversely affect mental health, leading to psychological disorders such as depression (Gobena, 2024). Since students represent the future and are vital to the growth and prosperity of society, their academic performance is crucial, and struggles with depression can seriously impede their success (Abbas, Kumari, and Al-Rahmi, 2024). Stress and anxiety are common emotional states that affect all individuals, and students are no exception (Jiménez-Mijangos et al., 2023).

Coping refers to an individual's continuous behavioural and cognitive efforts to overcome internal or external demands that are perceived as stressful or beyond their capabilities. In a traditional sense, coping may be regarded as behaviour that demonstrates an individual's determination to face life's challenges. It is behaviour directed towards adaptation to circumstances and reflects an established ability to use particular methods to manage stress. However, not all coping skills are equally effective. Individuals sometimes resort to strategies that provide immediate relief but may create more significant problems in the future (Moritz et al., 2016).

By adopting proactive measures, individuals are able to reduce the impact of stressors on their personality development. This ability is associated with factors such as self-perception, empathy, environmental conditions, and locus of control (Stanisławski, 2019). At present, three principal approaches are used to conceptualise coping. The first defines coping as part of ego dynamics and

regards it as a psychological defence mechanism intended to reduce stress. The second interprets coping in relation to personality traits, suggesting it represents a relatively stable tendency to respond to stressors in specific ways. Yet, the duration and stability of these responses are rarely supported by empirical evidence, which has limited the acceptance of this interpretation among researchers. The third approach views coping as a dynamic process, shaped not only by situational influences but also by the individual's stage of internal conflict with the external world.

Researchers classify coping strategies by examining the stressful situations faced, as well as the individual's personality traits, cognitive responses, and behaviours in those contexts. This classification provides a structured basis for understanding how different strategies function in relation to both immediate stress reduction and long-term adaptation.

Research Objective

To determine the coping strategies employed by higher education students to manage academic stress, and to examine the effects of these strategies on their overall adaptation during a state of martial law.

Research Tasks:

1. To analyse contemporary scientific approaches to stress management.
2. To identify the coping strategies adopted by students in a country experiencing a full-scale military invasion.
3. To investigate the relationship between coping strategies for academic stress and the overall adaptation of higher education students.
4. To determine effective strategies for managing stress in higher education under conditions of martial law, which can enhance adaptation, and which may be developed through modern psychological, pedagogical, and social methods.

Research Problem

Scientists such as Selye (1936), who introduced the concept of stress, and Lazarus and Folkman (1984), who proposed a two-dimensional model of coping that included both problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies, laid the theoretical foundations for the study of coping behaviour. These early studies created the basis for subsequent research on mechanisms of stress management. Contemporary scholars, such as Scheier et al. (1986), have explored how individuals adapt to prolonged stress, particularly in crisis situations.

Despite extensive prior research, the current military situation in the country necessitates further investigation into how young people select and apply coping strategies under such conditions. War and uncertainty impose new demands on young people, modifying their behaviour and psychological adaptation mechanisms. When students experience stress, it is essential to examine how they adapt, which strategies they employ to cope with stress, and the consequences of these strategies for their mental well-being.

At the same time, the role of the social environment must be taken into account. Support from family, peers, and communities can significantly influence both the choice and the effectiveness of coping strategies. Therefore, the study of coping strategies among students is critical for formulating effective recommendations for mental health support in contexts of chronic stress.

Research Focus

The study examines students' coping strategies in response to academic stress and evaluates their impact on adaptation.

Research Aim and Questions

The study of coping strategies is characterised by a wide range of theoretical approaches that seek to explain their nature and content. These strategies are closely linked to psychological concepts such as coping resources, stress, adaptive mechanisms, defensive reactions, and behaviours aimed at overcoming difficulties. The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines the verb "cope" as "to deal successfully with a difficult situation," emphasising an individual's ability to respond effectively to challenges, while "strategy" is defined as "a way of doing something or a plan of action." Taken together, these definitions indicate that a coping strategy may be understood as a sequence of actions or a course of conduct directed towards successfully managing difficult life situations (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

Literature review / Theoretical Overview

The primary purpose of higher education is to prepare students for successful professional careers. However, studying at a higher education institution is a complex process that demands considerable cognitive and emotional effort, requires time, and is shaped by a variety of motivational factors that may significantly affect both mental and physical health (Iqra, 2024). Academic stress can result in a wide spectrum of outcomes, both positive and negative. Positive stress, referred to by psychologists as "eustress," is experienced when students feel motivated and enthusiastic about their studies. This form of stress can sustain their drive for academic achievement and may contribute to improved performance and higher grades. Although stress can enhance productivity up to a certain threshold, excessive levels can impair a student's ability to function effectively. Short-term stress may be beneficial, particularly during examination periods, as it can positively influence memory performance (Yaribeygi et al., 2017). Moderate levels of stress may also strengthen the immune system and improve the body's capacity to cope with injuries and illnesses, including infections and wounds (Iqra, 2024).

Eustress functions as a motivational factor that encourages students to take action and is essential for their overall academic satisfaction. However, when stress levels exceed a moderate threshold, it becomes a cause for concern. This typically occurs when academic demands intensify and students lack the necessary skills or resources to meet them. High levels of academic stress are associated with poor mental health, irrespective of gender, role, race, or academic performance (Barbayannis et al., 2022). Academic stress aggravates symptoms of depression and anxiety and

impairs academic performance (Pascoe et al., 2020). Depressive symptoms arising from academic and family stress have a marked impact on students' performance and overall quality of life (Deng et al., 2022).

Stress also affects physical health, primarily leading to fatigue and weakness (Abbas, Kumari, and Al-Rahmi, 2024). Students experiencing stress are more likely to consume unhealthy foods, such as ready meals and fast food (Choi, 2020). Excessive academic stress negatively influences both mental and physical health. It may result in headaches, gastrointestinal problems, loss of appetite, and persistent fatigue (Deng et al., 2022). Moreover, academic stress undermines learning performance and self-confidence (Yang et al., 2021). This can contribute to student dropout, a decline in the quality of graduates, and an increase in alcohol consumption, unauthorised absences, late assignment submissions, and reduced learning motivation (Gobena, 2024).

A strong correlation has been reported between academic stress and both mental and physical health (Travis et al., 2020). Active coping refers to efforts directed at eliminating or reducing the impact of a stressful situation. In contrast, passive coping relies on psychological defence mechanisms that seek to lessen the emotional burden of stress without addressing its source (Lazarus, 1993). Active strategies include problem-solving approaches, which involve a range of behavioural alternatives aimed at tackling the stressor. Passive coping, on the other hand, often involves avoidance as a primary strategy, although certain forms of avoidance have been shown in some studies to constitute active responses. Researchers emphasise that problem-solving can mitigate the negative effects of both acute life events and long-term stressors, and that problem-oriented coping is associated with lower levels of depression and emotional distress.

The term "coping" was first introduced into psychological literature in 1962 by cognitive psychologist L. Murphy. In his research on how children respond to age-related developmental crises, Murphy (1962) used the concept to describe their active efforts to resolve emerging problems. He later applied it more broadly to characterise an individual's attempts to address specific challenges. In the early stages of his work, Murphy (1962) underlined the relationship between coping, individual personality traits, and previous experiences of overcoming stress. He identified two fundamental components of coping mechanisms: the cognitive component, which governs the perception and analysis of stressful situations, and the behavioural component, which focuses on the actions undertaken to manage these conditions.

Ukrainian researchers Shebanova and Didenko (2018) conducted a theoretical analysis of coping behaviour and noted that different psychological schools and scientific approaches interpret the distinction between "coping strategies" and "defence mechanisms" in diverse ways. They emphasised that coping is a conscious and purposeful action, which distinguishes it from defence mechanisms that operate at an unconscious level. The key criterion for differentiating the two lies in the degree of awareness associated with the actions.

By contrast, coping strategies centred on emotions and avoidance are linked to more severe depression and a higher risk of subsequent difficulties. Individuals employing these strategies may attempt to reduce the intensity of their depressive symptoms and to lessen the likelihood of negative

outcomes (Heffer and Willoughby, 2017). Avoidance methods can include becoming excessively absorbed in the problem, or increasing the use of alcohol or drugs. In extreme cases, suicide may be considered a form of active avoidance. This approach represents one of the principal behavioural strategies that contribute to maladaptive patterns of behaviour. Resorting to avoidance often indicates a lack of personal coping resources and inadequate problem-solving skills.

Second, coping strategies may be classified by their effectiveness, or the extent to which they resolve a problem or achieve a goal in a stressful situation. According to Heim's (1947) approach, there are three types of coping strategies: productive (constructive), which help to manage the problem; relatively productive (relatively constructive), which assist in coping with stress in specific situations; and unproductive (non-constructive), which do not eliminate the stressful situation. Frydenberg and Lewis (2000) identified 18 coping strategies and grouped them into three styles.

The first style is productive coping, which is directed towards problem solving. This style incorporates four strategies: focusing on solving the problem, which involves systematically analysing the situation and considering its various aspects; persistent work; a conscientious approach to study and professional responsibilities, combined with high productivity; focusing on the positive, which includes maintaining optimism, reminding oneself that others may face more difficult circumstances, and preserving a positive mood; and active recreation, which involves engaging in physical education and sport.

The second, intermediate style of coping highlights the importance of seeking social support. This category encompasses several strategies. One involves the wish to share personal difficulties with others in order to receive acknowledgement and assistance. Another consists of engaging in open conversations with trusted friends about troubling issues. Individuals may also attempt to expand their social networks by making new friends to gain broader support. A further approach is characterised by a strong desire to belong to a group, often motivated by concern for others' opinions and the pursuit of recognition and acceptance. Peer-to-peer activities are also part of this style, as they involve organising collective efforts to address shared challenges. Seeking guidance from mental health professionals is another commonly used strategy. In addition, individuals may turn to spiritual support, deriving strength and comfort from religious or spiritual practices.

Although these methods can be beneficial in many situations, some coping behaviours are considered unproductive because they do not facilitate problem resolution. One example is persistent anxiety about the future, both in general and on a personal level. Another involves relying on unrealistic hope that problems will resolve on their own without any intervention. Feelings of despair leading to complete passivity and refusal to confront difficulties are also included in this category. Some individuals attempt to deny the existence of a problem entirely, avoiding the situation and behaving as if nothing is wrong. Emotional release behaviours such as crying, shouting, or using substances like alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs are sometimes adopted for temporary relief. Others resort to harsh self-criticism, placing undue blame on themselves. Withdrawal from social contact and concealing problems from others are also common manifestations of ineffective coping. Finally, distraction through reading, watching television, or engaging in entertainment is frequently

employed as a way of escaping rather than addressing difficulties. These behaviours can hinder both personal growth and the development of problem-solving skills (Amirkhan, 1990).

According to Lazarus (1993), the primary functions of coping strategies are to ensure and maintain human well-being, physical and mental health, and satisfaction in interpersonal relationships. Unlike psychological defence mechanisms, coping strategies are consciously selected, applied, and modified by individuals depending on circumstances. Psychological defence mechanisms, by contrast, are employed unconsciously and may become maladaptive if they become entrenched. Individuals who rely on defence mechanisms in problematic or stressful situations often perceive the world as a source of threat. They also tend to display low self-esteem and a pessimistic outlook.

Hobfoll (1989) argued that the loss of resources is a key component in the development of stress, while cognitive appraisal is of lesser significance. In his view, stress arises when an individual's resources are threatened with loss, have already been lost, or when attempts to acquire additional resources after exhausting their own fail. Hobfoll (1989) emphasised that although cognitive appraisal may provide one means of assessing the extent of resource loss, the actual amount of resources lost is objectively determined and observable.

Within the resource approach, coping strategies are considered resources that enable individuals to adapt to their environment and overcome practical challenges. These strategies may also serve an important regulatory function by preventing the onset of mental illness, deviant behaviour, and personality disorders (Stephenson and DeLongis, 2020). However, this protective effect occurs only when individuals under stress employ constructive coping strategies and sustain an optimistic outlook, positive self-esteem, realistic life perspectives, and clear motivation (Melnychuk, 2021).

Coping strategies contribute to psychological health by enabling interaction with situations through adaptation to their demands, weakening or softening them, or avoiding or habituating them, which ultimately leads to the reduction of situational stress (Karamushka and Snigur, 2020).

In the context of Ukraine's current development, the process of youth formation is increasingly influenced by crises in the political, social, and economic spheres (Predko, 2022). Rapid and significant changes in society necessitate closer examination of the psychological aspects of youth behaviour in challenging life circumstances. This highlights the importance of identifying effective psychological support methods that can help young men and women strengthen resilience to stress and acquire skills for overcoming difficulties, thereby facilitating their successful adaptation to contemporary challenges. However, the period of study is often accompanied by considerable mental and physical strain, particularly during semester examinations and tests. Such stress, combined with inadequate resource management, may result in emotional burnout among students. This condition impairs their ability to function effectively and communicate with others, potentially leading to internal and interpersonal conflicts, largely due to insufficient psychological literacy. Consequently, students may experience personal imbalance, anxiety, frustration, learning difficulties, relationship problems, and reduced academic or work performance.

Several factors influence the choice of coping strategies. Personality traits play a central role. For instance, depending on levels of anxiety, extroversion or introversion, and emotional stability, individuals in similar situations may adopt different coping approaches (Tkachyshyna, 2022). Extroverts are more inclined to seek social support, while those with high anxiety are more likely to avoid confronting problems or making decisions.

The social environment also has a significant impact on coping effectiveness. Supportive contexts and trusting relationships with family and friends encourage students to seek assistance when facing difficulties, enabling more effective adaptation to the challenges of student life. Conversely, young people who experience loneliness and social isolation are more likely to resort to ineffective coping strategies, such as avoidance and passivity.

Third, the intensity and duration of stress factors must be taken into account in today's world. For example, short-term stress during examination periods can motivate students and encourage the use of proactive coping strategies, such as planning and problem solving. In contrast, prolonged chronic stress or high-intensity stressors, including threats to life and health, serious interpersonal conflicts, and major socio-economic difficulties, often result in less adaptive and passive coping strategies, such as avoidance.

Fourth, cultural and religious traditions exert a strong influence on the choice of coping strategies among young people. In some cultures, behaviours directed towards problem solving and the pursuit of new goals are highly valued (Finstad et al., 2021). In others, patience, acceptance, and self-control are prioritised. For instance, young people in Western countries frequently rely on problem-focused strategies, whereas individuals in many Asian cultures tend to emphasise harmony in relationships and emotional regulation. However, in the search for immediate relief, some young people resort to maladaptive avoidance strategies, including the use of alcohol and drugs. Such behaviours ultimately undermine both mental and physical health and aggravate existing problems.

Research Methodology

General Background

A study was conducted at MAUP in Kyiv using the online platform Google Forms to investigate the relationship between students' choice of coping strategies in response to academic stress and their capacity for adaptation. Data were collected through a questionnaire specifically designed to assess students' stress experiences and adaptive abilities. In addition, five diagnostic techniques were employed to provide a comprehensive evaluation of coping strategies in stressful situations, allowing for a detailed analysis of the study's objectives. These techniques yielded valuable insights into coping strategies, psychological adaptation, anxiety levels, and the resources used by young people in stressful contexts. They also identified the overall level of psychological stress in the sample, enabling reliable conclusions to be formulated. The study employed a cross-sectional and quantitative design.

Participants / Sample

A study was conducted with 80 students from the Faculty of Psychology at MAUP in Kyiv, Ukraine. The sample size was determined through power analysis. With 80 responses, the study achieved a 95% confidence interval, representing the population of bachelor's degree students (447 psychology majors enrolled in the first-level bachelor's degree programme) with a margin of error of $\pm 10.0\%$. Voluntary participation and the willingness to complete all questionnaires and surveys were the criteria for inclusion in the sample.

Most students entered the academy immediately after secondary school, at ages 16–18. At the time of the study, participants were between 17 and 23 years old: 25% were in their first year, 30% in their second year, 15% in their third year, and 30% in their fourth year. The sample comprised 32 young men (40%) and 48 young women (60%), a gender distribution consistent with national statistics for psychology students in Ukraine. At the time of data collection, 75% of the students lived in a country affected by war for the preceding four years, while 25% resided abroad and studied remotely. Notably, 70% of participants combined their studies with employment.

Instrument and Procedures

The author's questionnaire was used to assess socio-demographic indicators. The choice of coping strategies was evaluated using the Coping Behaviour in Stressful Situations (CISS) methodology (S. Norman, D. Endler, D. James, and M. Parker; adapted by T. Kryukova). Students' stress levels were measured with the PSM-25 methodology. Stress resistance was assessed using the Connor-Davidson Stress Resistance Scale (CD-RISC). To identify the most common and effective coping strategies in specific contexts, the BASIC-Ph methodology was applied.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and a two-way ANOVA were employed to analyse the data. Correlation analysis was carried out using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software, with Pearson's correlation coefficients calculated to assess the linear relationships between the investigated variables. Pearson's method was selected because of its effectiveness when variables display a normal distribution, which was confirmed for each dataset prior to the analysis. In cases where the variables showed significant deviation from a normal distribution, Spearman's correlation coefficient was applied. This approach enabled the analysis of correlations between both normally and abnormally distributed variables, providing a comprehensive set of tools for statistical data analysis.

Results

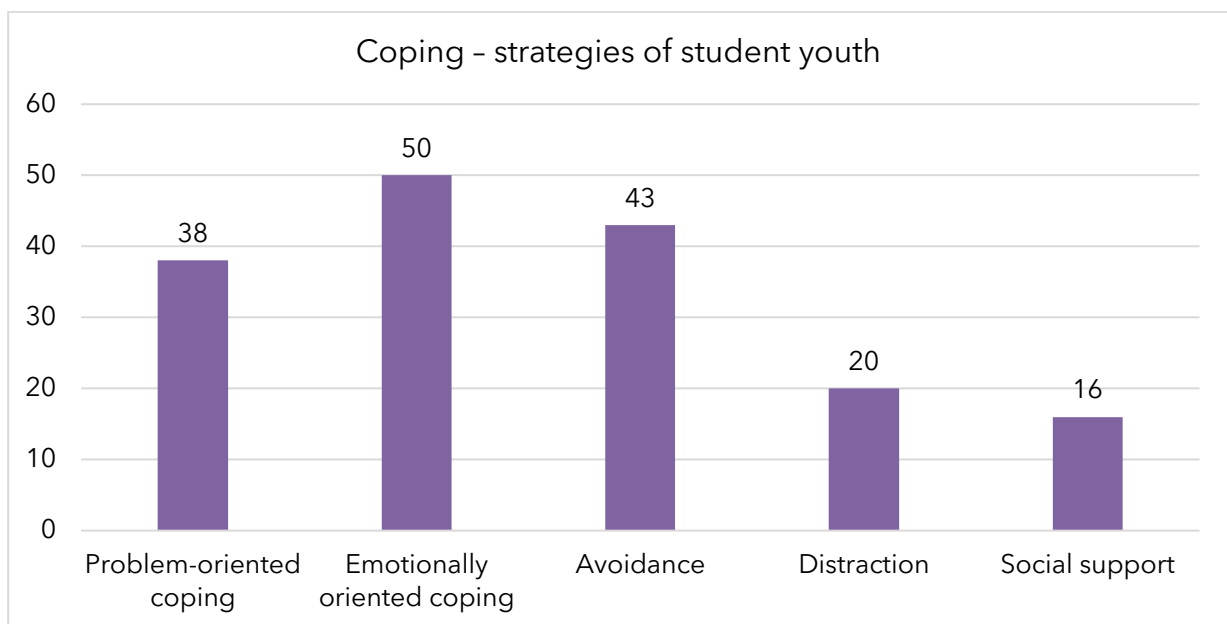
The average value for the problem-oriented coping strategy was $M = 38.12$, $SD = 8.87$, with values ranging from 31 to 72, indicating significant variability in the extent to which this strategy was used by respondents. In contrast, the average for the emotion-oriented coping strategy was $M = 50.06$, $SD = 11.63$, which was lower than that for problem-oriented coping but demonstrated greater variability. The avoidance coping strategy had an average value of $M = 43.69$, $SD = 8.40$, suggesting

relatively widespread use of this approach among young people. The average for the distraction strategy was $M = 21.20$, $SD = 4.66$, which represented a comparatively low indicator. The mean value for the social support-seeking strategy was $M = 14.42$, $SD = 3.76$, the lowest of all strategies examined.

The results of descriptive statistics (Fig. 1) indicate that young people more frequently employ emotion-focused strategies to cope with stress, suggesting that many of them rely on emotional regulation rather than active problem-solving.

Figure 1

The use of coping strategies among young students



The study assessed anxiety levels using the Situational and Personal Anxiety Scale. The mean anxiety level was $M = 30.42$, $SD = 10.82$, with values ranging from 5 to 57, indicating considerable variability in anxiety levels among respondents (see Table 1). In this study, the average anxiety level of 30.31 corresponded to a moderate level of anxiety. It is also important to note that the standard deviation of 10.80 further emphasised the diversity within the group.

Table 1

Level of anxiety among study participants

	N	Min	Max	M	S.D
Anxiety indicator	80	5	57	30,42	10,823

When analysing stress intensity using the PSM-25 scale, the mean score was $M = 160.68$, $SD = 43.16$. The values ranged from 68 to 278, highlighting considerable variation among respondents.

This distribution indicates that while some participants experienced very low levels of stress, others reported significantly higher levels (see Table 2). The minimum score of 68 reflects relatively low stress in part of the sample, whereas the maximum score of 278 demonstrates that a subgroup of respondents experienced very high stress levels.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics of stress levels among students

	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	S.D
Stress level	80	68	278	160,68	43,155

To evaluate stress resistance, the Connor-Davidson Stress Resistance Scale (CD-RISC) was applied, yielding an average score of $M = 25.43$, $SD = 6.57$ (see Table 3). The scores ranged from 7 to 38, indicating substantial variability in stress resistance among the respondents. The mean score of 25.43 suggests that, overall, participants demonstrated a moderate ability to cope with stress, although noticeable differences were evident within the group. The minimum score of 7 reflects a low level of stress resistance in some individuals, whereas the maximum score of 38 indicates that certain respondents displayed a high level of stress resistance.

Table 3

Descriptive statistics of stress resistance assessment among students

	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	S.D
Stress resistance	80	7	38	25,43	6,569

The BASIC PH methodology identifies six key resources that young people can use to cope with stress: faith and values, emotions, communication, imagination, cognition, and physical activity. Mean values, standard deviations, and minimum and maximum scores were calculated for each resource. The scale measuring reliance on faith and values ($M = 17.95$, $SD = 4.57$) indicates an average level of dependence on spirituality as a coping mechanism among young people. The emotion expression scale ($M = 18.78$, $SD = 5.48$) shows that young people slightly prefer to use emotional resources to manage stress. The communication scale ($M = 16.43$, $SD = 6.25$) reflects a moderate reliance on communication as a coping strategy. The imagination scale ($M = 17.32$, $SD = 5.81$) demonstrates the use of imagination as a coping resource, for example by creating positive scenarios or avoiding stressful thoughts. This resource is applied at a level similar to faith and values, indicating an individualised approach to stress reduction. Ukrainian higher education students in this study primarily relied on cognitive resources ($M = 21.28$, $SD = 6.10$). By contrast, physical activity was used very little to cope with academic stress, as reflected by the lowest indicators ($M = 13.83$, $SD = 4.73$).

The results of the correlation analysis revealed several statistically significant relationships. First, problem-oriented strategies for overcoming difficulties were not significantly associated with anxiety levels among students ($r = -0.122$, $p = 0.335$). Emotionally oriented coping strategies, however, showed a significant positive correlation with both anxiety levels ($r = 0.526$, $p < 0.001$) and stress resistance ($r = 0.639$, $p < 0.001$). By contrast, avoidance and distraction strategies demonstrated a strong positive correlation with increased anxiety ($r = 0.816$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that students with higher anxiety levels were more likely to adopt distraction strategies.

Social support exhibited only a weak correlation with anxiety ($r = 0.204$, $p = 0.039$) and stress ($r = 0.165$, $p = 0.042$), suggesting that reliance on social support alone is insufficient for reducing anxiety and stress in this student population. Finally, a significant positive correlation was observed between stress and anxiety levels ($r = 0.767$, $p < 0.001$), confirming their close interrelationship.

To examine how anxiety and stress influence the frequency with which different coping strategies are employed, a two-factor analysis of variance was conducted. The analysis of main effects showed that students with greater stress tolerance more frequently adopted active coping strategies aimed at problem solving ($F(1,80) = 1059.25$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.02$), as well as active stress management and social support seeking ($F(2,80) = 537.23$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.24$), rather than avoidance. Furthermore, students with higher anxiety levels were more likely to seek social support ($F(1,80) = 262.96$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.019$) and to rely on avoidance strategies ($F(1,80) = 273.34$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.021$).

The study confirmed that stress is an integral component of the lives of modern youth. The primary sources of stress include education, social relationships, and employment, particularly when combined with academic obligations. Other factors, such as health issues, financial challenges, and military conflict, also affect the emotional well-being of young people, though to a lesser degree. Most respondents demonstrated a good ability to adapt to stressful circumstances; however, a subset of students required additional support to develop adaptive skills, which is of significance for psychological assistance practices.

Descriptive statistics revealed that problem-oriented coping strategies predominated among young people, reflecting a general tendency to address difficulties actively. This may suggest a sufficient level of stress resistance and an ability to overcome life challenges effectively. Emotion-oriented strategies, while less frequently used, showed considerable variability: some respondents relied on emotional expression to relieve tension, whereas others avoided such practices. Avoidance strategies were found to be less effective in the long term, as they provided only temporary relief without addressing the underlying causes of stress.

Distraction strategies are rarely used by respondents, which may suggest that this approach is not particularly effective in stressful situations. Indicators related to social support are also low, possibly reflecting limited engagement with social resources among young people or restricted access to them. The analysis shows that the young people who participated in the study generally experience moderate levels of anxiety, although there is significant variability between individuals. Fluctuations in anxiety levels, from very low to very high, highlight individual differences in the

perception of and responses to stress. On average, stress resistance among higher education students is moderate, yet there are marked differences within the group, with some respondents showing low levels of resistance and others demonstrating high levels. These differences influence individual choices of coping strategies. Young people frequently rely on faith and values, emotional expression, communication, and imagination as resources for coping with stressful situations, whereas physical activity is the least utilised strategy for stress management among students.

It is possible that today's youth, who are immersed in gadgets and social networks, are not sufficiently aware of the benefits of physical activity for alleviating stress. Correlation analysis indicates that passive coping strategies, such as avoidance, are more frequently employed by those with high anxiety levels. Furthermore, there is a direct correlation between social support and the use of coping resources such as communication and imagination, although social support does not appear to influence anxiety levels. These findings underscore the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach to coping, taking into account both the strengths and limitations of individual strategies. Therefore, students should be encouraged to develop skills in active coping, such as problem-solving, while also cultivating the effective use of social support to achieve sustainable adaptation to stressful situations.

Discussion

The study examined the stress management strategies employed by undergraduate students at the MAUP Faculty of Psychology in Kyiv (Ukraine) to cope with academic stress and evaluated how these strategies influence overall adaptation under conditions of martial law. Academic stress is a multifaceted issue arising from both academic and personal factors. Throughout their studies, students encounter numerous stressors, including strained relationships, heavy workloads, and increasing educational demands. These stressors can trigger a range of physical and psychological symptoms that may hinder students' personal, academic, and professional development. Addressing academic stress effectively requires coordinated efforts to provide students with adequate support and resources to ensure both academic achievement and emotional well-being.

The findings of the study contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexity and multidimensional character of stress experienced by students during their academic journey. The research analysed the factors and sources of academic stress among higher education students in Ukraine, as well as methods for assessing stress levels. It also considered the potential negative effects of academic stress on students' mental and physical health. The results indicate that, in many cases, students are reluctant to actively resolve their problems and frequently rely on passive coping strategies. This preference for avoidance may partly reflect the psychological characteristics of young people.

Problem-focused coping strategies are employed less frequently than emotion-focused strategies, and the high variability in their use suggests that some individuals rely on them actively, whereas others rarely apply them. Similar findings were reported in a study by Ukrainian researchers who examined the psychological characteristics of young people living under martial law (Halian et al., 2024). In the long term, avoidance strategies are less effective, as they provide only temporary

relief from stress without addressing its underlying causes. Ball and Gunaydin (2022) observed that avoidance is a central and transdiagnostic mechanism contributing to a range of anxiety disorders, including OCD and PTSD.

Furthermore, respondents rarely reported using distraction as a coping method, while seeking social support received the lowest average scores. This indicates that individuals may not be making full use of available social resources, either because they do not seek help from others or because their access to social support is limited.

The average level of anxiety was found to be moderate, which may be regarded as a level that enables individuals in higher education to focus on addressing everyday challenges of student life while avoiding a pathological state that could endanger mental health. Very low levels of anxiety may indicate effective stress management skills, whereas high anxiety levels may reflect a lack of such skills and ineffective adaptive responses among students in higher education institutions. This finding suggests that anxiety levels among young people are highly diverse and depend on individual coping strategies and levels of stress resistance.

Anxiety may be classified as signalling, confusing, paranoid, or depressive. Signalling anxiety reflects an internal imbalance, which can be restored by adapting and assimilating information and transforming it into knowledge. When anxiety becomes maladaptive, a confused state arises, characterised by difficulty in distinguishing between material that needs to be learned and adapted and knowledge that is already established. The paranoid form is manifested as a sense of threat or destruction associated with new information. The depressive form is characterised by feelings of loss and uncertainty when confronted with the unknown (Lima Silva and Marques de Oliveira, 2024).

The relatively high standard deviation recorded in the study reflects the diversity of the group, the personal characteristics of the respondents, and the varied objective circumstances in which young people currently find themselves in Ukraine.

Most students who participated in the study reported average stress levels. According to a survey conducted among Ukrainian students, titled *Psycho-emotional State of Teachers and Students: A Survey Among the University Community "How Are You?"*, 2024, supported by the Ministry of Education and Science, approximately one in ten students (11.9%) experienced significant stress, while more than two-thirds (67.1%) reported moderate stress. The average score indicates a tendency towards rising stress levels, suggesting that many students in Ukrainian higher education institutions frequently face stressful situations (Coordination Center for Mental Health of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2024). The lowest scores reflect a subset of respondents with relatively low stress, likely due to the use of effective stress management strategies, such as problem-oriented approaches that enable them to cope more productively. In contrast, the highest scores identify a group of respondents with very high stress levels, which may indicate insufficient stress resilience, reliance on passive coping strategies such as avoidance, or limited social support.

The average level of stress resilience among most participants suggests that young people generally demonstrate a moderate capacity to cope with stress. Similar results were reported by

Kushnir and Yaremiichuk (2021) in their study of student stress resilience. Low stress resilience may signify a heightened likelihood of experiencing stress and difficulties in managing challenging situations. Respondents with low resilience tend to rely on passive strategies, including avoidance and distraction, and may not actively seek social support. Conversely, high stress resilience among some respondents indicates an ability to manage stressful situations more effectively, often as a result of adaptive coping strategies or robust social support. Overall, the findings suggest that stress resilience among young people varies considerably and is shaped by individual characteristics and coping strategies.

Young people tend to rely slightly more on emotional resources to cope with stress. This may involve expressing emotions, seeking emotional support from others, or engaging in internal emotional processing. Communication is also used at a moderate level as a coping resource, with students often turning to others for support and the exchange of ideas. In addition, imagination is employed to create positive scenarios or to distract from stressful thoughts. This resource is used at a level comparable to faith and values, indicating a personalised approach to stress reduction.

It is noteworthy that students in higher educational institutions in Ukraine frequently rely on cognitive resources. They actively plan their lives, set goals, analyse situations, and make decisions, which enables them to manage stress more effectively. However, it is concerning that these students rarely use physical activity as a resource for overcoming stress. This may be explained by a lack of time, since many combine study with employment, as well as insufficient awareness of the benefits of physical activity for mental and emotional well-being.

The study also revealed a prevalence of passive coping strategies, such as distraction and avoidance. Ukrainian students often resort to avoidance behaviours, distracting themselves instead of addressing their difficulties. Although these strategies may provide short-term relief, correlation analysis indicates that they ultimately increase stress and anxiety over time. Avoidance does not resolve the problem but merely delays the consequences.

Furthermore, the limited impact of problem-oriented strategies in reducing anxiety suggests that young people do not generally attempt to resolve problematic situations that require additional effort, particularly the mobilisation of internal resources and the assumption of responsibility for their actions. The study showed that students more frequently rely on cognitive and emotional strategies to regulate their emotional state rather than directly addressing the actual sources of stress. This underscores the need to develop programmes that promote constructive and effective coping strategies among young people.

Social support was found to increase the use of resources such as communication and imagination, yet it did not significantly influence anxiety or stress levels. Therefore, although social support is a valuable resource, it is insufficient for comprehensive stress management without the use of active coping strategies. Its effectiveness is likely shaped by the quality, frequency, and relevance of support in relation to the stressful situation, as well as by individual personality traits.

The findings indicate the necessity of further research aimed at developing and implementing programmes that foster coping strategies among young people. Such programmes should integrate active strategies with effective approaches to the use of social support.

Proposals for improving the educational process and leisure activities included several key measures: reducing the number of exams and tests during the examination period; decreasing the overall workload for students; providing access to textbooks and essential learning materials; encouraging skill development outside class through activities such as brain rings, quests, and competitions; broadening the curriculum with subjects of interest to students; minimising the amount of independent work assigned; organising leisure activities with teachers and curators, such as visits to museums, exhibitions, theatres, and excursions; and postponing the start of the first class by 30 minutes.

One of the most significant wishes expressed by students is that every teacher should attend class in a positive mood, accompanied by a smile. Support from adults, including curators, teachers, and psychologists, has a substantial impact on students' social and psychological adaptation. These adults should foster an environment that not only facilitates adjustment to new learning conditions but also enables students to realise their full potential. Stress resilience can be developed in the same way as other skills, through systematic learning of how to manage behaviour and thoughts effectively. In psychology, the term *acquired stress resistance* refers to the capacity to confront challenges through rational thinking and careful planning. It is essential not only to build resilience in response to difficulties but also to develop the ability to prevent such difficulties from arising. Creating conditions that promote healthy growth and development makes a considerable contribution to this goal.

Methods for strengthening stress resilience include enhancing self-esteem, maintaining a balanced daily routine that incorporates both rest and physical activity, attending classes regularly, integrating into new social environments, and practising relaxation techniques. A key governmental priority is to sustain the interest of active youth in social transformation by involving them in meaningful projects that provide the skills, knowledge, and opportunities required for self-fulfilment.

Limitations of the Study

The study was conducted under martial law, a context that contributes to heightened anxiety and significantly affects both learning conditions and an individual's ability to adapt. Another limitation is that 25% of the participants were residing abroad at the time of the survey and completed it online, which may have influenced the results. As the study included only full-time students, it was not possible to assess the coping strategies used by part-time students. In addition, the sample was restricted to individuals under the age of 23, although higher education may also be pursued by older students whose different life experiences could influence their coping strategies. Furthermore, many people today obtain a second or even a third degree, and their approaches to coping may differ. However, only students pursuing their first degree were included in this study.

Conclusions and Implications

The scientific understanding of the psychological characteristics and classification of coping strategies has been deepened and generalised. The age-related features of the development of coping strategies among students in the context of a full-scale military invasion have also been analysed.

The analysis demonstrated that coping strategies play a pivotal role in psychological adaptation, enabling flexible responses to challenges and helping to maintain internal balance. Stress, particularly under conditions of academic and social pressure, remains a constant feature of student life. The choice of coping strategies determines how effectively young people can counter its negative consequences. Coping represents the principal form of stress management and involves active efforts by individuals to address situations that threaten their psychological or physical well-being.

In examining the coping strategies employed by higher education students during a full-scale military invasion, the study found that passive coping methods, such as distraction and avoidance, were predominant. Nevertheless, students are also able to employ problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies, which support adaptation to changing academic and social environments. Although social support strengthens the use of resources such as communication and creativity, it does not significantly influence levels of anxiety or stress. Thus, while social support is a valuable resource, it is insufficient on its own without the application of active coping strategies, which are essential for effective stress management.

Another aim of this study was to identify approaches to overcoming stress in higher education under martial law, with a view to enhancing adaptation through modern psychological, pedagogical, and social methods. The findings highlight the importance of strengthening active coping strategies among students. In particular, these strategies should cultivate self-organisation, encourage the analysis of complex situations, and promote effective decision-making. This can be achieved through educational programmes designed to foster stress management and the development of personal resilience.

The full-scale war in Ukraine has changed the educational landscape to such an extent that this impact on the learning sector must be taken into account when planning the educational process, both for recovery and for achieving quality education for future generations. The loss of the stable structure provided by educational institutions and safe spaces has affected all young people. This fact alone requires that mental health and psychosocial support in education be implemented as a priority, especially in the face of the ongoing vulnerability of communities, which is intensifying now and will continue in the post-war period. An integrated, multifaceted framework for mental health and psychosocial well-being support, along with the systematic provision and expansion of measures already initiated by public institutions, will create more resilient education systems following the crisis. In these turbulent times, educational institutions can establish a foundation of knowledge and resources, including the findings of this study, which students can utilise to enhance their own psychological and emotional well-being.

Suggestions for Future Research

Given the difficult socio-economic conditions and the context of martial law in Ukraine, the search for ways to enhance personal resources and improve adaptation to challenging living conditions, particularly for students who are expected to become the driving force behind the revival of the country, opens up new opportunities for both scientific research and practical application. In our view, a longitudinal study conducted over the next five to ten years would enable the determination of the long-term impact of academic stress on students' professional success and on the mental health of a generation that was compelled to pursue higher education under conditions of full-scale military invasion. Another promising direction, in our opinion, is the comparison of strategies for overcoming academic stress among students enrolled in different forms of study, namely full-time and part-time.

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Conflicts of Interest

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