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TEACHER RESILIENCE AND COPING DURING WARTIME IN TRANSCARPATHIA: PSYCHOLOGICAL RISKS, PROTECTIVE DYNAMICS, AND BURNOUT PREVENTION

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The ongoing Russian - Ukrainian war has profoundly altered the professional context of educators throughout the country. Although Transcarpathia remains geographically distant from active hostilities, schools operate under chronic uncertainty, shifting instructional formats, and heightened psychosocial demands. International and Ukrainian studies alike show that prolonged exposure to instability and high work demands increases educators' vulnerability to emotional exhaustion,

depersonalisation, and reduced professional efficacy [1; 5]. These pressures are intensified by the presence of pupils with trauma histories, distressed parents, and complex institutional expectations regarding both safety and learning outcomes.

Recent Ukrainian research documents substantial increases in stress and burnout symptoms among teachers working under martial law. Surveys of preschool and primary-school staff highlight elevated rates of anxiety, fatigue, somatic complaints, and feelings of resource depletion, especially where educators must simultaneously manage frequent air-raid alerts, disruption of routines, and the emotional needs of displaced children [1; 5]. Similar patterns have been described in other crisis contexts, where teachers report sleep disturbances, attentional problems, and erosion of professional motivation under sustained stress [1; 5].

In Transcarpathia, many schools serve classes that include internally displaced pupils, children separated from family members, or those exposed to disturbing war-related images and narratives. Educators often become the first line of emotional containment, holding pupils' fears and grief while coping with their own worries about mobilisation, economic insecurity, and family safety. Qualitative accounts indicate that lesson preparation increasingly involves anticipating potential triggers in class materials, and finding age-appropriate ways to acknowledge children's fears without reinforcing helplessness [5; 8]. Studies of wartime education describe how high teacher stress correlates with emotional dysregulation and behavioural difficulties among students, underlining that teacher well-being is a central pedagogical variable rather than a purely individual matter [5].

Within this context, teacher resilience can be conceptualised as the capacity to maintain functional emotional regulation, professional engagement, and a sense of meaning in work under prolonged strain. Multisystemic resilience frameworks emphasise that such capacity is not solely an individual trait but emerges from interactions between personal skills, social relationships, and institutional conditions [10]. Empirical work with Ukrainian educators highlights several key protective dynamics: supportive collegial relationships, opportunities for shared reflection, clarity of professional role, and a basic sense of autonomy in pedagogical decisions [2; 3].

Measurement studies show that emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation increase when educators perceive a mismatch between demands and resources, whereas perceived competence, relatedness, and autonomy function as buffers [3; 5]. In Transcarpathia, dense community ties, multigenerational households, and culturally embedded norms of mutual assistance can support teachers' coping. At the same time, these networks are affected by mobilisation, migration, and economic strain, so that educators often carry responsibilities for war-affected relatives in addition to their school work. Organisationally, schools must reconcile changing safety regulations and scheduling with the need to maintain coherent educational trajectories. Where leadership structures provide consistent information, acknowledge staff emotional load, and allow some flexibility in workload management, teachers report greater perceived control and less helplessness [1; 3].

Against this background, resilience-support is likely to be most effective when it addresses several levels simultaneously. At the individual level, research emphasises the role of self-regulation strategies such as cognitive reappraisal, clear interpersonal boundaries, and brief practices (breathing exercises, movement, short creative tasks) embedded into the school day [4; 6]. At the relational level, stable collegial networks, peer supervision, and constructive communication with parents help educators to contextualise stressors and avoid excessive self-blame. At the organisational level, predictable routines, transparent decision-making, and attention to the emotional climate function as structural resources that support teachers' sense of efficacy and belonging [3; 10].

Building on this evidence and on practical work with Transcarpathian schools, we have developed a preventive workshop series for teachers that combines psychoeducational, reflective, and arts-based methods. The workshops are organised as short cycles of 6-8 meetings, each lasting 90-120 minutes, and integrated into existing structures of in-service training. The aim is not to provide individual therapy, but to create a protected professional space in which teachers can understand their own stress reactions, experience supportive group processes, and experiment with simple tools that can be used both for self-care and in the classroom.

The initial sessions focus on psychoeducation and mapping the current load. Drawing on Ukrainian and international findings on stress and burnout, core concepts such as emotional exhaustion, secondary trauma, and moral distress are presented in a concise, accessible form [3; 5]. Participants are invited to depict their present state using simple visual metaphors (colours, shapes, or symbolic images representing tension, pressure, or fragmentation). This image-based self-reflection, consistent with complex arts-based approaches, often helps educators to recognise bodily and emotional signals that have been ignored in everyday functioning.

Subsequent sessions place stronger emphasis on resources and protective factors. In one frequently used task, teachers draw or paint a "personal safe place" or "inner resource landscape" using forms, colours, and symbols that evoke calm, support, and agency. Group dialogue then focuses on the concrete conditions that help participants to access such inner spaces in real school situations: short pauses between lessons, supportive conversations with colleagues, or small rituals at the beginning or end of the day. This work aligns with findings that perceived social support and a sense of professional competence function as robust buffers against burnout [1; 10], while the arts-based format allows these protective elements to be experienced, not only discussed.

The collective dimension of resilience is addressed through group-based artistic tasks. For example, participants may create a shared mandala or image symbolising the teaching staff as a community. Each teacher contributes a segment reflecting their role, strengths, and current needs. The emerging image provides a starting point for exploring boundaries, distribution of responsibilities, and mutual support. Such tasks often bring implicit expectations and tensions to the surface, but also highlight existing competences and solidarity within the staff, echoing organisational findings on the

importance of collegial cohesion and a coherent professional identity under crisis conditions [3; 8].

Elements of reflective practice and collegial consultation are integrated throughout the workshop cycle. Short case vignettes drawn from teachers' own experiences with war-affected pupils are processed in small groups, combining narrative reconstruction with simple image work (for example, a visual "before–during–after" of a difficult interaction). This process helps participants to step back from habitual interpretations, recognise their own emotional reactions, and consider alternative responses. Available evidence suggests that such shared reflection can reduce feelings of isolation and guilt, which are frequent among teachers who struggle with complex pupil behaviour and perceive themselves as ineffective [2; 5].

The programme has been designed so that its components can be gradually integrated into the everyday practice of Transcarpathian schools. The structure, duration and material requirements of the sessions are aligned with the realistic workload of teachers, allowing them to experiment with reflective, self-regulation and arts-based exercises without substantial additional time or resource demands. The different elements – such as brief grounding practices, short check-in rounds at the beginning of staff meetings, or simple collective image-making tasks – are intended to be sufficiently flexible to function both within a structured workshop cycle and as stand-alone tools that schools can adapt to their own context. On the basis of Ukrainian and international literature, it is reasonable to assume that such process-oriented, school-embedded interventions may, over time, contribute to lowering burnout risk and improving staffroom climate; however, these effects require systematic empirical evaluation before firm conclusions can be drawn.

From a research perspective, mixed-methods designs that combine standardised measures of burnout, psychological well-being, and resilience with qualitative interviews and focus groups would allow for a more differentiated understanding of which components work best for which groups of educators under which organisational conditions. Longitudinal studies are particularly important in wartime, as stressors and resources change over time and delayed effects are likely [3; 5].

Educators in Transcarpathia are carrying out demanding emotional labour under conditions of long-term crisis. The available Ukrainian and international evidence indicates that their resilience is strengthened when they have access to supportive professional communities, clear and meaningful role definitions, and practical tools for self-regulation and mutual support. Conceptualising resilience as a multilevel phenomenon – linking individual competencies, collegial relations, and institutional culture – helps in designing interventions that match the complexity of educators' lived reality rather than placing responsibility solely on individual teachers. A comprehensive school-based programme that integrates reflective practice, psychoeducation, expressive methodologies, and structured collegial consultation can contribute to reducing psychological overload and supporting the continuity of education for children in the region.

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