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WHO IS SUFFERING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN UKRAINE? A SNAPSHOT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DURING WAR AND A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

Research has shown that the risk for violent victimisation, including various forms of abuse and sexual violence, is high among individuals forced to leave their homes due to wars, humanitarian emergencies, and violent conflicts. Unfortunately, little is known about such critical issue as domestic violence within the home, as most research on humanitarian crises covers violence outside the home. Given that the home remains one of the most dangerous places for vulnerable individuals during wartime, it is crucial to address who is most vulnerable to becoming a victim of domestic violence in current war-torn societies such as Ukraine. Further, it is imperative to understand the characteristics of domestic violence at the “intersection” of war and a global pandemic. We use primary, self-reported survey data from an international research project entitled “A Cross-National Study of the Global Pandemic, Deviance and Health” to provide a snapshot of domestic violence in the current Ukrainian society and analyse the characteristics of self-reported domestic violence, both psychological and physical, which has been taking place during the Russian invasion of Ukraine and a global pandemic. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions: What are the levels of domestic violence (both physical and psychological abuse) when it happens at the time of “intersection” between war and a pandemic? Who is the most likely to become a victim of domestic violence in this unique situation? Results from logistic regression models reveal that, compared to single individuals in Ukraine, people who cohabit with their partners are at a higher risk of psychological abuse, while being married emerges as a “protective” factor against physical abuse. Additionally, having a higher SES significantly reduces the risk of psychological abuse from an intimate partner. Notably, in contrast with prior research, our results show that men's odds of experiencing physical abuse are higher. Explanations for these unique findings and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: domestic violence, war, Russian invasion, global pandemic, Ukraine.

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ХТО В УКРАЇНІ ПОТЕРПАЄ ВІД ГЕНДЕРНОГО НАСИЛЬСТВА? ДОМАШНЄ НАСИЛЬСТВО ПІД ЧАС ВІЙНИ ТА ГЛОБАЛЬНОЇ ПАНДЕМІЇ

За даними дослідження, ризик насильницької віктимізації, зокрема, різних форм жорстокого поводження та сексуального насильства, є високим серед осіб, які змушені залишити свої домівки внаслідок війни, надзвичайних гуманітарних ситуацій і конфліктів. На жаль, мало відомо про таку критичну проблему, як домашнє насильство, оскільки більшість досліджень під час глобальних криз фокусуються на насильстві поза домом. З огляду на те, що дім залишається одним з найнебезпечніших місць для вразливих осіб під час війни, в такий час дуже важливо звернути увагу на людей, які є найбільш вразливими до того, щоб стати жертвою домашнього насильства в суспільствах, охоплених війною, наприклад, в Україні. Крім того, необхідно визначити характеристики домашнього насильства, яке відбувається на “перетині” війни та глобальної пандемії. Ми використовуємо первинні дані опитування з міжнародного дослідницького проекту “Міжнародне дослідження глобальної пандемії, девіантної поведінки та здоров’я” для того, щоб краще зрозуміти домашнє насильство в сучасному українському суспільстві та проаналізувати характеристики домашнього насильства (психологічного та фізичного), яке відбувалося під час російського вторгнення в Україну та глобальної пандемії. Зокрема, у цьому дослідженні розглядаються такі питання: яким є рівень домашнього насильства (фізичного та психологічного) під час “перетину” війни та пандемії, а також хто найімовірніше стає жертвою домашнього насильства в цій ситуації. За результатами моделей логістичної регресії, порівняно з неодруженими особами в Україні, люди, які проживають разом зі своїми партнерами, піддаються більшому ризику психологічного насильства, водночас шлюб є формою “захисного” фактора проти фізичного насильства. Крім того, вищий соціально-економічний статус значно знижує ризик психологічного насильства з боку інтимного партнера. На відміну від попередніх досліджень, наші результати показують, що шанси зазнати фізичного насильства є вищими для чоловіків, ніж для жінок. Внесено пропозиції щодо майбутніх досліджень.

Ключові слова: домашнє насильство, війна, російське вторгнення, глобальна пандемія, Україна.

Interpersonal violence, mainly domestic and/or gender-based violence, has quickly become a public health priority, especially for individuals who have experienced humanitarian emergencies, including violent conflicts and war [1–4]. While violence impacts

boys, girls, men, and women differently, it nonetheless has lasting and pervasive consequences not only for one's health, including psychopathology but also for the long-term equity and economic growth of a society [5–9].

Due to the nature and prevalence of violence in humanitarian settings, international agencies have renewed their commitment to finding ways to reduce violence and their long-term consequences [10]. However, much of this research has been relegated to addressing high-profile forms of violence, including rape, sexual abuse by armed groups, and violence experienced by those internally displaced during the war [4; 11; 12]. While these types of violence are serious, research has often shown that the most dangerous place for women during humanitarian settings is within their households [13–15]. Unfortunately, due to households being so private, the violence experienced within the home during humanitarian unrest is often underexplored [16–18].

With this limitation in mind, this study seeks to fill the gaps in our knowledge about domestic violence during humanitarian conflicts, with a special focus on Ukraine. Since 2014, Russian threats have escalated into armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea, ultimately resulting in the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. This ongoing war by Russia expanded in 2022 following the Kremlin's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. This has resulted in a record number of civilian casualties in Ukraine and many more individuals seeking refuge in Europe or experiencing internal displacement in Ukraine [19; 20]. Accordingly, research has focused predominantly on those who have fled their homes, with only a small amount of research comparing the experiences of those who remained at home to those who left the country.

We also expand this research on humanitarian-based domestic violence by considering how the COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated the consequences of this violence. Research shows that COVID-19 has increased domestic violence in the household, with research documenting that this is a trend experienced globally [21–23]. Unfortunately, the work analysing domestic violence during the vulnerable times of cumulative crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and war-related humanitarian crises, is still relatively limited. Further, this work has not been reanalysed since Russia's newest unprovoked air, land, and sea invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Using primary, self-reported survey data from an international survey entitled *A Cross-National Study of the Global Pandemic, Deviance and Health*, conducted between November 2021 and September 2022, we analyse the incidence of self-reported domestic violence during the Ukraine-Russian war. We argue that certain groups are more vulnerable than others to becoming domestic violence victims. This vulnerability may be particularly critical to assess in countries like Ukraine, which recently experienced cumulative disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic and war. To provide a better image of who is more likely to be a victim, we consider how the demographics of individuals residing in Ukraine, including gender, age, socioeconomic status, and marital status, are associated with the risk of physical and psychological abuse.

Domestic and gender-based violence during wartime. Gender-based and interpersonal or domestic violence is a tool routinely utilised to intimidate and control individuals during war [24]. Gender-based violence is broadly defined as “any act that is perpetrated against a

person's will and based on gender norms and unequal power relationships" [25]. It can include various forms of interpersonal violence, including physical, psychological, economic, or even sexual acts of violence [26; 27]. Indeed, estimates suggest that anywhere from 3 to 52 percent of women can experience some form of violence during times of conflict [4; 28]. In addition, 35 percent of women who have experienced physical or sexual violence often experience this violence at the hands of their partners or some other perpetrator, resulting in lasting mental, physical and reproductive health consequences [17; 29; 30].

Work that considers the relationship between complex humanitarian crises and violence often stresses how gender-based and/or domestic violence are attributed to economic strains, family and community structures changes, and the normalisation of violence within the home [31]. For example, stress-related conflict can trigger the emotions of those who previously experienced violence, often resulting in more violence [32; 33]. Economic conditions can also aggravate vulnerabilities to violence [10; 28]. Stress due to job loss and financial insecurity has been classified as a major motive for male perpetration of violence [10; 28]. Further, research has found that more than half of all married women experience some form of violence during emergencies, including sexual, physical, and emotional violence. Other factors, such as age, can also impact one's experience with violence [34; 35].

However, most of what we know about the connections between humanitarian crises and domestic violence focus on individuals who are forced to leave their homes or on certain types of violence, such as rape and sexual abuse by armed individuals [11; 12]. We also know that the home remains one of the most dangerous places for women during wartime [13–15]. Unfortunately, due to the intimate nature of violence within the home, violence experienced in the home during humanitarian crises is not well developed [16–18].

Violence during the global pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic is both a criminal justice and public health concern, which has fundamentally altered how we handle crime and victimisation and how public health policies may fundamentally alter crime both during COVID-19 and during future pandemics. Research has often attributed COVID-19 to a decrease in certain types of crimes, including property crimes, robberies, and some forms of assault [23], but has increased other forms of crimes, such as an intimate partner or domestic violence [21; 36]. This is a trend that has been well-documented across the globe. For instance, a meta-analysis by Piquero and colleagues (2021) found a moderate to a substantial increase in domestic violence [21]. A study focusing on North America, Europe, Asia-Pacific, Africa, and other contexts, found that domestic violence increased for a certain time, regardless of the country context [37]. While past research clearly illustrates the need to address domestic violence during the pandemic, there is limited evidence on the vulnerability to domestic violence in the context of multiple crises, including war and COVID-19.

Present study: The context of Ukraine. Protests and the Revolution of Dignity in Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, resulted in a pro-Russian administration fleeing the country in early 2014. During political instability and unrest in the country, Russian threats have escalated into armed conflict between Russian-based forces and the Ukrainian military in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea, resulting in Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. As the war became a stalemate later that year, shelling and hostilities in the Donbas border frontlines continued.

For eight years, the Donbas war has resulted in more than 14,000 civilian deaths and forced a few million people to relocate from the Donbas region [38].

After the Kremlin's full-scale land, sea, and air invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the war in Ukraine escalated further. At the same time, the Kremlin refused to call the invasion a war and referred to it as a special military operation and the liberation of Donbas. Since the beginning of the full-scale armed attack, Russian forces have been trying to establish control over the Donbas region and broaden their invasion of the country. Between February and September 18th, 2022, there have been 14,532 confirmed civilian casualties in Ukraine, at least 6,6 million refugees have fled to Europe, and at least 7,7 million people have been displaced within Ukraine [20]. Since the start of Russia's unprovoked attack on Ukraine in early 2022, gender-based violence, including but not limited to sexual violence, has been reported [39]. Current anecdotal reports of this violence have been relegated to understanding violence among women and girls attempting to flee their homes [19; 40]. As an estimated 12,8 million people, or 17,5 percent of Ukraine's population, have been displaced (and this number continues to grow daily); thus, it is not a surprise that most of the violence is being reported at border crossing points, bomb shelters, or other transit points [19; 40].

Sadly, the war is not the only hardship that Ukraine has had to experience in recent years. At the beginning of 2020, the world declared the COVID-19 virus outbreak. The outbreak was recognised as a pandemic in March 2020 and resulted in widespread closures and shutdowns. As a result of the pandemic, regulating healthcare, hospitality, education, and other industries has become more challenging. Globally, the pandemic disrupted people's ordinary daily practices and routines, and Ukraine was no exception. When the Russian military attack began in 2022, many communities across Ukraine were already vulnerable to the pandemic's consequences. As Russia invaded Ukraine, another wave of COVID-19 caused by the omicron strain was at its peak, and the war drastically worsened the situation. Many people have not had access to medical attention, and hospitalisation is limited due to the destroyed or overcrowded hospitals [41].

The impacts that humanitarian crises have on violence, particularly domestic violence, have been well documented in Ukraine. Past reports have indicated that internally displaced women may receive the bulk of the violence in this country context. Analyses of domestic violence in Ukraine in 2014, following Russia's invasion and annexation of Crimea, found that violence rates were as high as 22,4 percent, with at least 5,3 percent of this occurring in the home versus being among those who are internally displaced [40]. However, there are several areas of research that need to be further explored. First, the overall impact COVID-19 has had on domestic violence trends has been explored using anecdotal data or data from non-government organisations (NGOs). While meaningful, this work is still relatively limited. However, this work finds that there was a twofold increase in domestic violence in 2020 compared to the previous year¹ [42; 43]. Further, surveys collected by NGOs found that domestic violence became more frequent and violent, particularly during

¹ Level of domestic violence increases in Ukraine due to COVID-19 pandemic. (2020). *Kyiv Post*. URL: <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/level-of-domestic-violence-increases-in-ukraine-due-to-covid-19-pandemic.html>

lockdowns [42]. Accordingly, the relatively limited research on this subject is surprising, given that the relationship between COVID-19 and domestic violence is well-researched in other countries' contexts. Studying domestic violence in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ukraine, a country currently experiencing war, can provide us with some unique insights into domestic violence trends. Second, while the number of domestic violence remains low (5,3 percent) based on previous studies, we know very little about those experiencing the violence as the research overwhelmingly focuses on the experiences of internally displaced individuals. However, because the household is considered private, violence is often underexplored, especially during times of war [16–18]. Further, our empirical knowledge of gender-based violence in Ukraine is still relatively relegated to experiences that happened at the onset of the invasion of Crimea and the years following but have not been updated to understand the impact of Russia's full invasion of Ukraine on violence.

To fill these gaps in the literature, this exploratory study focuses on the crucial yet understudied topic concerning vulnerability to different forms of domestic violence in contemporary Ukraine. Specifically, we analyse domestic violence in the household during the Ukraine-Russian war that escalated in 2022 and consider how the sociodemographic statuses of individuals residing in Ukraine, including gender, age, socioeconomic status, and marital status, are associated with the risk of physical and psychological abuse. **This study aims** to answer the following research questions focusing on Ukraine: What are the levels of domestic violence (both physical and psychological abuse) when it happens at the time of “intersection” between war and a pandemic? Who is the most likely to become a victim of domestic violence in this unique situation?

Data and Methods. Data used in this study are from the international survey “A Cross-National Study of the Global Pandemic, Deviance and Health”, which took place between November 2021 and September 2022. These data were collected anonymously online via google forms across six countries: Ukraine, Guatemala, the United States, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Pakistan. Prior to the dissemination of the survey, this study was approved by the US institutional review board. The questionnaire was shared by the research team via social media, group emails and messages, posters, and other means of advertising the survey. Respondents who were 18 or older and resided in one of the countries participated in the study.

The Ukrainian component of the study was also supported by SOCIOINFORM, a well-established research organisation located in Ukraine with a significant record of conducting survey data for researchers and various national and international organisations. Specifically, together with the primary research team, SOCIOIFORM has contributed to disseminating the survey among respondents residing in Ukraine. The survey questionnaire was written in English and then translated into Ukrainian by linguists fluent in both languages. It was also pre-tested among a sample of Ukrainian respondents and then revised based on those pretests before disseminating the survey. The questionnaire included items used and validated in prior research in Ukraine and other international contexts [44–46], as well as various novel measures that have not been comprehensively incorporated in the past. The final analytic sample consisted of 773 respondents.

Measures and analytic strategy. Dependent variables. We include two dependent variables representing different forms of domestic violence in this study. First is the experience of physical abuse. The question asked respondents how frequently they have experienced physical abuse from their intimate partner such as spouse/boyfriend/girlfriend (e.g., they pushed, slapped, shook, and/or used force in any other way) since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Responses were recoded to represent 1 = experienced abuse; 0 = never experienced abuse. Second, we included the experience of psychological abuse, which was measured by asking respondents about the experiences of psychological abuse from their intimate partner such as spouse/boyfriend/girlfriend (e.g., they screamed at them, called them names, and/or were very mean with their words). Responses were recoded to represent 1 = experienced abuse; 0 = never experienced abuse.

Predictor variables. We included various sociodemographic variables to assess the vulnerability to both physical and psychological abuse. First is gender, with 1 = female; 0 = male. Second is age, measured in years old. Further, SES is captured by the relative socioeconomic status of respondents compared to others. Specifically, they were asked how much financially better or worse off they consider themselves compared to others. Responses ranged from 1 = much worse off to 5 = much better off. Higher scores represent higher SES. Similar measures have been used and validated in prior survey studies [47]. Finally, we included the marital status of the respondent where 0 = single (reference category); 1 = married; 2 = living with a partner; 3 = divorced/widowed/separated [45].

Analytic strategy. We conduct a series of multiple logistic regression models to assess the proposed relationships of interest, which is appropriate given our binary outcomes. Variance inflation factors (VIFs) in all the models were less than 3, ruling out any multicollinearity issues [48].

Results. Descriptive statistics shown in Table 1 reveal that our sample includes about 55% female respondents, and the average participants' age is 43 years old. Most of the respondents are married (51%), followed by those that are single (23%), divorced, widowed, or separated (20%) and individuals living with their partners (5%). Additionally, most respondents indicated that they are generally on the same level as others regarding their socioeconomic status (SES mean = 2,912).

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of study variables, N = 773

	Mean or %	SD	Min	Max
Physical abuse	0,088	0,283	0	1
Psychological abuse	0,332	0,471	0	1
Female	0,554	0,497	0	1
Age	43,722	16,020	18	82
SES	2,916	0,602	1	5
Single (ref.)	0,233	0,423	0	1
Married	0,511	0,500	0	1
Living with a partner	0,052	0,222	0	1
Divorced/widowed/separated	0,204	0,404	0	1

Further, Table 2 includes figures representing logistic regression coefficients predicting physical abuse (Model 1) and psychological abuse (Model 2). First, we find that the odds of experiencing physical abuse are roughly 50 percent higher for males than females ($b = -0,685$; $p < 0,05$). Further, compared to single people, those who are married are at a lower risk of physical abuse by their partners ($b = -0,942$; $p < 0,05$). Specifically, the odds of physical abuse are about 61 percent lower among married individuals in contrast to their single counterparts. Next, findings reveal that SES is significantly and negatively associated with the risk of psychological abuse. For a one unit increase in SES, the predicted probability of psychological abuse decreases by roughly 24 percent. Finally, people who cohabit with their partners are at a higher risk of psychological abuse. On the other hand, age and being divorced, widowed, or separated are not significantly associated with physical or psychological abuse.

Table 2

Logistic regression predicting psychological and physical abuse among Ukrainian respondents, N = 773

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Physical abuse		Psychological abuse	
	Coefficient (SE)	OR	Coefficient (SE)	OR
Female	-0,685*	0,504	-0,138	0,871
	(0,270)		(0,160)	
Age	0,009	1,009	0,005	1,005
	(0,010)		(0,006)	
SES	-0,008	0,992	-0,275*	0,759
	(0,214)		(0,130)	
Married	-0,942*	0,390	0,026	1,027
	(0,372)		(0,229)	
Living with a partner	0,256	1,292	1,192**	3,295
	(0,507)		(0,365)	
Divorced/widowed/separated	-0,738	0,478	-0,189	0,827
	(0,467)		(0,291)	

* $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,01$; *** $p < 0,001$.

Discussion and conclusion. People can experience violence at any point in their lives, whether there is peace or instability in society. However, threats and victimisation tend to rise in crises [4; 36]. As a result of humanitarian emergencies, such as wars or pandemics, certain individuals may be at an increased risk of violent victimisation, including abuse and different forms of violence. The purpose of this study was to fill gaps in the literature regarding the vulnerability to domestic violence in the context of war and the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, we aimed to understand how individual sociodemographic

characteristics are associated with physical and psychological abuse in Ukraine, which currently suffers cumulative crises in the form of war and pandemic.

First, consistent with previous research on the relationship between domestic violence and economic strains [10; 28], we find that psychological abuse is more likely to occur among people with lower socioeconomic status. This trend can be potentially explained by the financial insecurities and stress related to lower income. Further, some individuals may experience victimisation due to financial dependence on their partners. In addition, we find that marital status is another important characteristic to consider to better understand domestic violence. Psychological abuse appears to be more prevalent among Ukrainian respondents who are cohabiting. In contrast, married couples report fewer incidents of physical abuse. This finding can be potentially attributed to higher levels of trust, emotional intimacy, and security among married couples compared to single individuals.

On the other hand, contrary to the previous literature on domestic violence, our results reveal that male respondents report significantly higher odds of physical abuse than females. Perhaps, in Ukraine, during such turbulent times as war and pandemic, the levels of comfortability to report domestic violence have increased among men, but women have become less comfortable and willing to share their experiences. Overall, future research is needed to explore the tendencies of male victimisation within households during wars and global health crises and better address the patterns of reporting domestic violence and mechanisms explaining these trends.

Whereas this research provides unique insights into domestic violence during crisis in Ukraine, several limitations must be noted. First, we use cross-sectional self-reported data, which can suffer from exaggerating issues, difficulty remembering certain aspects, or withholding information. Additionally, we use a convenience sample, and thus, our findings cannot be generalisable across Ukraine.

Despite these limitations, our study provides an important foundation for better understanding the patterns of such critical issues as domestic violence in Ukrainian society. As it reveals that individuals with certain demographics are more vulnerable than others to abuse, it is critical for future studies to address the mediating mechanisms explaining the “how” and “why”. Overall, culturally sensitive, and context-specific studies on domestic violence will allow the development of more nuanced policies and programs addressing these issues in Ukraine.

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