

ADDRESSING TEEN MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS AT INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY LEVELS

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Mental health of adolescents

- Adolescence is often associated with transitional challenges: social, emotional, physiological adjustments
- Reports indicate recent increase in anxiety, depression, suicide, eating disorders, substance abuse, self-harm and other forms of mental illness caused by COVID-19, social media use, increased academic pressure and workloads, looming economic, social, political and environmental crises
- In war zones, teens cope with physical and emotional trauma



What are the similarities/differences in teen experience in the U.S. and war-affected Ukraine?

How can information professionals support teens' well-being and resilience?

Resilience framework

Resilience is the capacity of an individual to access resources they need to sustain well-being, as well as the capacity of their communities and governments to provide them with what they need (Ungar, 2011).

The resilience framework offers a lens to examine structures that support teens' abilities to adapt to the difficult life challenges.

- Individual resources: social competence, problem-solving skills, optimism, etc.
- Family/friends' support: effective parenting, the presence of a caring adult, quality, not just quantity, of friends
- Community support: institutional structures (e.g., school, library, church, social workers)

Method

- Interviews with teens (12-18yo) in Ukrainian and U.S.
- Interviews with parents in Ukraine (15) and U.S. (14) *[reported here]*

Participants described

- a. recent incident when teens felt negative emotions and triggers of these emotions
- b. the coping strategies employed by the teens in dealing with stressful situations
- c. recommendations for desirable resources that could support the teens' internal and external resilience

The **similarities** in experiences of Ukrainian and U.S. teens



- **Stress** caused school-related demands, interpersonal relationships, negative news/media, disappointment in behaviors of adults, anxiety about unmet expectations
 - **Sadness** caused by difficulties fitting in, death of a pet, loneliness due to lack of friends
 - **Anger** related to arguments with parents and friends
 - Age-related **mood swings**
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The **differences** in experiences of Ukrainian and U.S. teens



- **Sadness** attributed to
 - the breaking of social connections due to the relocation of their families or friends (11 Ukr.)
 - bullying (2 U.S.)
- **Fear** for personal safety and the safety of loved ones (6 Ukr.)
- **Homesickness** and fear of missing out (FOMO) (9 Ukr)
- **Stress and disappointment** related to extracurricular activities (4 U.S.)

***Resources that support
teens' resilience at 3 levels***

Individual strategies



“He, fortunately, doesn’t take social media too seriously and has no trouble blocking people who are rude or annoy him.” US05

“it’s amazing how quickly they find distraction, during air sirens she calls her friends and they start making jokes about Putin, and start giggling” Ukr10

Parents from both countries mentioned teens **coping** by

- a. seeking distraction in the consumption of digital content
- b. engaging in creative activities
- c. spending time alone
- d. changing mindsets

U.S. parents mentioned teens seeking refuge in athletic activities

Ukrainian parents described teens’ information-seeking, and spending time outdoors as coping

Support from family, friends, community



U.S. and Ukrainian teens get support by talking to and spending time with **families and friends**

Helpful community resources included school and professional **therapists**

Ukrainian participants acknowledged the positive influence of **adult mentors** and the availability of **summer camps** as social places

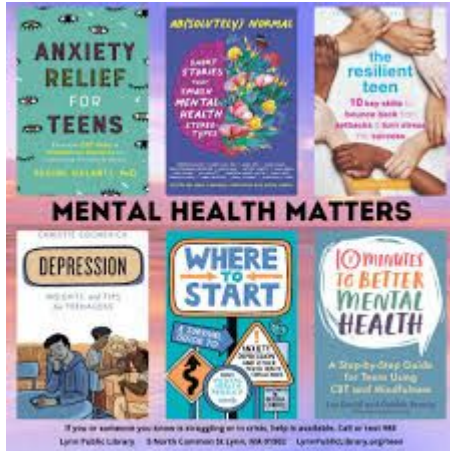
Three Ukrainian parents felt that their teens had **no support** from the community.

***What resources would help
to strengthen teens'
resilience?***

Educational resources and professional help

- Ukrainian and U.S. parents mentioned **educational resources** that could help teens develop skills to cope with life challenges
“Implement early education on emotions and on how to address them in a healthy and productive manner.” US03
- Both groups indicated the need for **more accessible, affordable, and trustworthy professional help**
“Counseling services are currently available to children who lived through extremely traumatic [war] experiences, but we all can use some help.” Ukr10
“Make counseling more accessible and affordable.” US03

Additional recommendations



Ukrainian parents wanted

- Technology features that encourage teens to take breaks from gadgets or limit the duration of use
- Access to free hardware to connect their teens to their friends
“Not everybody has smartphones” Ukr01
- Ability to connect to international peers

U.S. parents (8) mentioned informational posters about teens’ mental health that could be displayed in **public spaces**

Opportunities for libraries

Need for the safe communities and spaces (virtual and physical)

Ukrainian

Community events/**opportunities to socialize, dedicated non-commercial spaces for teens to spend time together and free after-school programs** (6)

“My child’s school has been online since pandemic. It would be great for her to have access to physical events, activities, spaces where she could properly socialize with her peers.” Ukr04

Libraries were not explicitly mentioned

Parents

Libraries and schools as safe/educational spaces (11)

“...outreach into schools to let teens know that there is space, programs for them, providing food/snacks, games, anything to bring teens into the library space. The goal isn’t just to fill the library, but to give teens a place to go so that they can be themselves.” US08

Access to safe and empowering **online spaces** (4)

“We need ways to keep children safe online without impinging on their sense of autonomy.” US06

U.S.

Conclusions

- Ukrainian and U.S. parents shared similar stories about their teens' emotional problems and coping strategies
- Fear, homesickness, instability in the lives of Ukrainian teens necessitate targeted support in mitigating trauma



Recommendations for libraries

1. Offer access to **therapists** (some Ukrainian libraries are doing it!)
2. Curated trustworthy **resources** on mental health
3. Dedicated **spaces** for informal social gatherings, to relax and recharge, do homework, socialize, or play games with friends
4. **Programming** focused on promoting well-being, emotional intelligence, developing problem solving, planning, coping, decision making and other skills

It is important to promote such opportunities:

Ukrainian participants were unaware of these resources even when they were offered by their local libraries!

Thank you! Questions?

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Author's publications



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