

Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy

Anticipatory Grief and Perseverative Worry: Psychological Impacts on Ukrainian Migrants From the 2022 Russian Invasion

Aigerim Alpysbekova, Carolina Scaramutti-Gladfelter, Mia M. Cisco, Duyen H. Vo, Maria Duque, Lawrence G. Watkins, Cory L. Cobb, Seo Woo Lee, Pablo Montero-Zamora, Seth J. Schwartz, and Inna Pokul

Online First Publication, August 21, 2025. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tra0002024>

CITATION

Alpysbekova, A., Scaramutti-Gladfelter, C., Cisco, M. M., Vo, D. H., Duque, M., Watkins, L. G., Cobb, C. L., Lee, S. W., Montero-Zamora, P., Schwartz, S. J., & Pokul, I. (2025). Anticipatory grief and perseverative worry: Psychological impacts on Ukrainian migrants from the 2022 Russian invasion. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*. Advance online publication. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tra0002024>

Anticipatory Grief and Perseverative Worry: Psychological Impacts on Ukrainian Migrants From the 2022 Russian Invasion

Aigerim Alpysbekova¹, Carolina Scaramutti-Gladfelter², Mia M. Cisco¹, Duyen H. Vo¹,
Maria Duque¹, Lawrence G. Watkins³, Cory L. Cobb³, Seo Woo Lee¹, Pablo Montero-Zamora¹,
Seth J. Schwartz¹, and Inna Pokul⁴

¹ Department of Kinesiology and Health Education, University of Texas at Austin

² Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, University of Miami

³ Department of Health Behavior, School of Public Health, Texas A&M University

⁴ College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Grand Canyon University

Objective: The present study was designed to examine the mental health challenges facing Ukrainian migrants exposed to the 2022 Russian invasion and who now reside in the United States, focusing on trauma, posttraumatic stress disorder, and emotional distress. Our study explored how anticipatory grief and perseverative worry intersect and contributed to migrants' emotional distress, which is further compounded by their ongoing emotional connection to Ukraine, where many relatives remain in danger. **Method:** Using a general inductive approach, we analyzed data from interviews with eight Ukrainian war migrants in the U.S. interviews were conducted in Ukrainian or Russian and analyzed using Dedoose Version 9.2.005. **Results:** The majority (five of eight) of participants discussed posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms and extreme emotional distress (six of eight) as a direct result of their exposure to war and violence, either firsthand or through loved ones. Participant statements suggested that emotional distress and strong emotional connection to Ukraine often co-occurred, with (a) 62.5% of individuals reporting both concerns for the safety of family members still in Ukraine, (b) material/emotional connections to Ukraine, and (c) 75% of participants indicating that their emotional distress was highly linked to trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder. **Conclusion:** Ukrainian migrants face a complex spectrum of trauma and emotional distress, influenced by their ongoing connection to a conflict zone and by constant worry for their families' safety.

Clinical Impact Statement

The present study focused on the phenomenal emotional distress and trauma experienced by Ukrainian migrants in the United States during and following the 2022 Russian invasion. Key findings illustrate the frequency of posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms, as well as the importance of anticipatory grief and perseverative worry among migrants who are concerned about loved ones in Ukraine. Our findings strongly suggest a need for future research to explore these underexamined psychological phenomena and develop targeted mental health interventions to support migrants coping with enduring fear and anxiety about their loved ones' safety.

Keywords: trauma, posttraumatic stress disorder, war, anticipatory grief, perseverative worry

Sylvia A. Marotta-Walters served as action editor.

Aigerim Alpysbekova  <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-0129-0968>

The present data are not presently available to people outside the research team. The study received approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Texas at Austin under Protocol Number STUDY00004306. This article represents an original contribution not previously published (except in the form of an abstract or preliminary report). None of the authors have conflicts of interest to report. No external funding was obtained for the present study.

Aigerim Alpysbekova played a lead role in conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, methodology, supervision, writing—original draft, and writing—review and editing. Carolina Scaramutti-Gladfelter played an equal role in conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, and writing—

original draft. Mia M. Cisco played an equal role in conceptualization and methodology. Duyen H. Vo played an equal role in conceptualization and formal analysis. Maria Duque played a supporting role in writing—review and editing. Lawrence G. Watkins played a supporting role in writing—review and editing. Cory L. Cobb played a supporting role in writing—review and editing. Seo Woo Lee played a supporting role in writing—review and editing. Pablo Montero-Zamora played a supporting role in writing—review and editing. Seth J. Schwartz played a lead role in supervision and an equal role in writing—review and editing. Inna Pokul played a lead role in translation and conducting interviews in Ukrainian.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Aigerim Alpysbekova, Department of Kinesiology and Health Education, University of Texas at Austin, Belmont Hall, 2109 San Jacinto Boulevard, Austin, TX 78712, United States. Email: aigelya@utexas.edu

The Russian–Ukrainian conflict, escalating from Crimea’s annexation in 2014 to the full-scale invasion in 2022, has profoundly impacted Ukrainian society. This ongoing war has reshaped social, economic, and cultural landscapes for Ukrainians at home and abroad. The conflict has triggered a large-scale displacement, with around 10 million individuals either internally or externally displaced. Among these individuals, 3.8 million have sought refuge in other European countries (Rizzi et al., 2022). Between February 2022 and March 2024, more than 500,000 Ukrainian war migrants resettled in the United States (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2024). By March 2024, over 187,000 had been granted temporary refuge through the Uniting for Ukraine (U4U) program, which allows Ukrainian citizens and their families to reside in the United States for up to 2 years under parole. Another 350,000 Ukrainians have entered the country through various other migration pathways (Alpysbekova et al., 2024).

The conflict has had a profound impact on the mental health of Ukrainian migrants. A survey conducted by Alpysbekova et al. (2024) of 703 Ukrainian refugees living in the United States, and who arrived between 2014 and 2023, highlights a concerning mental health crisis. Among the 289 participants who reported elevated stress levels, 81% met clinical criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), 91% for depression, and 93% for anxiety. This mental health crisis affects a wide range of Ukrainian refugees, encompassing those who fled earlier conflicts such as the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, the ongoing hostilities in the Donbas region, and the most recent 2022 invasion. Recent studies have confirmed the widespread prevalence of PTSD and depression among Ukrainians affected by the conflict (Fel et al., 2022; Konstantinov et al., 2023).

The experiences of Ukrainian refugees resonate with those of other populations affected by invasion. For instance, Anbesaw et al. (2022) found that PTSD prevalence of among residents of Dessie, Ethiopia, who endured prolonged armed invasion, was 19.4%. Factors such as being female, having a history of mental illness, and witnessing serious injury to family or friends increased risk for PTSD. Moreover, when examining the mental health of Syrian refugees in Turkey, Kurt et al. (2022) estimated prevalence rates of 41.6% for PTSD, 41.1% for depression, and 39.6% for anxiety. These figures suggest similarities in trauma responses among diverse populations, outlining the worldwide scope of conflict–migration-related psychological trauma.

Anticipatory Grief, Perseverative Worry, and Attachment to the Homeland

Consider the psychological burden of being forced to flee one’s homeland due to invasion, only to find oneself in a foreign country while loved ones remain in the conflict zone. How does one manage the persistent anxiety that accompanies such a situation? This scenario presents significant emotional and psychological obstacles that are far from temporary. Fulton and Gottesman (1980) proposed *anticipatory grief* as a complex phenomenon that occurs before an actual loss, such as facing the impending death of a loved one or undergoing a significant life change. Anticipatory grief has been explored extensively in palliative care settings, where caregivers, as noted by Bilić et al. (2022), often experience “living with an illness” by maintaining optimism and a shared sense of destiny with their terminally ill loved ones. However, current literature does not

adequately address the unique form of anticipatory grief experienced by refugees who are abroad and constantly worried about the safety of loved ones in conflict zones. For these migrants, anticipatory grief is not just about awaiting loss; it involves a continuous cognitive and emotional process of projecting themselves into a future filled with potential tragedy—a daily reality that significantly impacts their mental health. This experience warrants more attention in refugee and migration studies.

This ongoing state of distress can prevent refugees from fully integrating into their new environments, as their minds remain anchored in the conflict zone. Ekblad et al. (2024) highlighted that the separation from family and the daily uncertainty of not knowing whether loved ones are safe exacerbates the emotional distress, complicating the integration process for refugees. The relentless uncertainty of whether loved ones will survive each day creates a cyclical grieving process: Mourning for a loss that has not yet occurred but that feels imminent. This ongoing state of distress can prevent refugees from fully integrating into their new environments, as their minds and hearts remain anchored in the conflict zone. The psychological strain of living in this suspended state, caught between the past they fled and the future they dread, can lead to chronic conditions such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD (Bryant et al., 2023; Ekblad et al., 2024).

Moreover, the cultural displacement experienced by war refugees adds another layer of emotional complexity (Alpysbekova et al., 2025). As they struggle to adjust to a foreign culture while dealing with the guilt of having fled, individuals may experience a strong sense of survivor’s guilt for having sought safety while loved ones are still in danger. This guilt is a key feature of the psychological distress associated with transnational bereavement, as individuals are often unable to reconcile their own survival with the ongoing suffering of others (Nesteruk, 2018). This guilt adds to their anticipated pain, making it much more difficult to develop a feeling of normality in their new lives. They are confronted with the dilemma of constructing a future while being tormented by the present vulnerabilities.

This experience is compounded by the psychological phenomenon of perseverative worry, which involves repetitive, uncontrollable thoughts about possible negative outcomes. The combination of anticipatory grief and perseverative worry leads to a continuous sense of fear and emotional distress, rooted not only in physical separation from loved ones but also in the psychological toll of constant vigilance. Additionally, social media, despite serving as a vital tool for maintaining connections and obtaining news, can exacerbate this anxiety. Refugees often rely on social media platforms to stay informed about the situation back home, but this constant exposure to distressing information can intensify their stress and worry (Elarashi et al., 2023). Every update, image, or headline can trigger fresh waves of fear and a sense of powerlessness.

This persistent distress reflects a complex emotional experience of mourning both the loss of loved ones and one’s familiar way of life, all while striving to adapt to a new environment. Attachment theory, developed by Bowlby (1969), provides a framework for analyzing Ukrainian refugees’ emotional discomfort, particularly in the context of deep emotional relationships with family members and with their native country. According to attachment theory, humans create strong emotional bonds with loved ones and the perceived or actual loss of these attachments can cause severe feelings of worry, grief, and despair (Van Eecke, 2005). For

Ukrainian refugees, forced separation from family members due to war breaks down attachment relationships, resulting in a psychological response comparable to anticipatory grief.

Furthermore, attachment to one's homeland plays a significant role in emotional distress (Juang et al., 2018). Many Ukrainian refugees feel a deep connection to their country, its cultural heritage, and its physical landscape. Displacement from their homeland, especially under such violent and traumatic circumstances, further amplifies their psychological distress. Strong attachment to both family and homeland results in what is referred to as ambiguous loss—a psychological state where a person feels torn between mourning the loss of something familiar and holding on to the hope that it might be restored (Boss & Yeats, 2014). This emotional tension manifests in persistent anxiety, as refugees struggle to reconcile their desire to rebuild their lives in the United States with their longing to return to a peaceful Ukraine. As Boss and Yeats (2014) explained, refugees are physically absent from their homeland but remain psychologically present, a concept she refers to as “leaving without good-bye.” This phenomenon is particularly relevant to the psychological experience of Ukrainian refugees, many of whom remain deeply engaged with news and social media about their homeland, the war, and its impact on loved ones, thereby exposing them to secondary trauma. Although the participants in our study did not explicitly mention survivor's guilt, this psychological tension could contribute to feelings of guilt and emotional distress, as refugees are confronted with the sense that they have survived while loved ones remain at risk.

As per Shevlin et al.'s (2018) trauma of displacement, combined with the emotional attachment to both homeland and family, can lead to prolonged mental health struggles, especially PTSD, depression, and anxiety, among Ukrainian refugees. Separation from their homeland due to forced migration, while maintaining a strong attachment to that homeland, can lead to significant emotional challenges as migrants attempt to establish a new sense of “home” in resettlement locations (George & Wargo Aikins, 2023; Shu et al., 2023). Literature, however, remains limited in providing specific terminology to describe this form of suffering. What do we call the pain of being separated from loved ones while enduring the daily fear of receiving devastating news about their safety? This phenomenon raises fundamental questions about how we conceptualize and address the mental health challenges faced by migrants who live in constant anticipation of tragic news about their loved ones.

The Present Study

The present study was conducted to improve our understanding of the complex trauma experienced by Ukrainian war refugees by exploring the interaction of their ongoing emotional issues and past experiences, focusing on how anticipatory grief, perseverative worry, and attachment to their homeland affect their mental health. People often form deep emotional connections with the places where they live. This phenomenon, known as a *sense of place*, refers to the emotional bond individuals develop with specific geographic settings. Sense of place encompasses both tangible and intangible benefits such as security, familiarity, shelter, work opportunities, and social interaction (Tenzer & Schofield, 2023). Sense of place is shaped through experiences, memories, and interactions within a particular environment. Additionally, *place identity*—a component

of self-identity—relates to how individuals define themselves in relation to their physical surroundings (Karaçor & Akçam, 2023).

Sense of place and place identity are particularly significant for Ukrainian migrants. Before the invasion, many Ukrainians enjoyed a modern and stable lifestyle, characterized by access to quality services, stable employment, and high levels of education. The loss of this comfortable and well-established life likely intensifies their sense of loss and emotional distress. This type of loss—both material and psychological—is particularly devastating because it is abrupt and unanticipated, leaving little room for mental preparation. The dissonance between their prior lives and current realities can make it difficult to process the trauma, as the emotional and cognitive leap from peace to conflict is particularly jarring.

To better understand these unique experiences and the resulting psychological impacts, we aimed to address the following research questions:

1. In what ways does persistent anxiety about family members remaining in conflict zones affect the mental health of Ukrainian refugees?
2. Does this anxiety represent anticipatory grief and perseverative worry?
3. How does attachment to their homeland contribute to mental health problems experienced by Ukrainian refugees, and how does attachment interact with the stress of migration and separation?

Method

Participants

The current qualitative study was conducted in the United States, including eight adult Ukrainians, seven who arrived after the 2022 Russian invasion (the eighth participant arrived in 2017). Four participants were women and four were men. Participants came from various regions of Ukraine, including Kyiv (two participants), Irpin, Bila Tserkva, Cherkasy, Nizhyn, Lviv, and Zaporizhzhia. Five participants lived in Texas, with the remainder in Illinois, Virginia, and Massachusetts. Three participants—two men and one woman—reported being married; two women were divorced; and one man arrived with his unmarried partner. Additionally, five participants (three women and two men) were parents. One male participant indicated having close family still in Ukraine and one female participant reported arriving in the United States alone. All participants reported having immediate and extended family members still in Ukraine. Six recounted either direct or indirect exposure to war and violence, with one noting living through events such as having to replace all the windows in their residence due to “missile strikes” (see Table 1).

Data Collection/Procedure

We acknowledge that our study's sample size of eight participants may appear small; however, we draw on established qualitative research methodologies to justify this sample size. Guest et al. (2006) suggested that data saturation—when no new themes emerge—can often be reached with smaller sample sizes in qualitative research, particularly when the study population shares homogeneous experiences. In our case, all participants are Ukrainian migrants

Table 1
Participant Demographics and Interview Details

ID	Gender	Year of arrival to the United States	Relationship status	Proximity to frontlines	Parental status	Family in Ukraine or the United States	Duration of interview
1	Male	2017	Family in Ukraine	Located in a relatively safer region (far from active frontlines)	No children	Left mother in Ukraine	29:28
2	Female	2022	Single	Near active military engagement (in proximity to conflict zones)	No children	Single, lives in the United States by herself	35:00
3	Male	2022	Married	Near active conflict zone (bordered by frontline areas)	3 children (3, 11, 11 years old)	Lives with wife and children in the United States	38:27
4	Male	2023	Married	Living in an area affected by ongoing conflict (close to military operations)	3 children (2, 4, 6 years old)	Lives with wife and children in the United States	01:23:36
5	Female	2022	Divorced	Near active frontlines (frequent military activity)	1 child (16 years old)	Lives with the daughter in the United States	40:06
6	Female	2023	Married	Located in a region with intermittent military engagement (bordering conflict zones)	1 child (11 years old)	Lives with the husband and a son in the United States	50:27
7	Female	2022	Divorced	Near active frontlines (frequent military activity)	1 child (18 years old)	Lives with the son in the United States	36:46
8	Male	2022	Partnered	Directly affected by military occupation and fighting (close proximity to frontlines)	No family	Lives with the girlfriend in the United States	38:55

who arrived in the United States after the 2022 Russian invasion, which allowed us to focus on a very specific group with shared, focused experiences. Moreover, Mason (2010) argued that qualitative sample sizes are determined by the goals of the study rather than by conventional rules. Given the depth and specificity of our research objectives—understanding the mental health experiences of this cohort—the small sample size was sufficient to capture the most relevant themes, especially as we reached a point of data saturation during interviews.

Furthermore, the purposive sampling method was employed to ensure that the participants had direct and relevant experience with the postinvasion context, which has been shown to be associated with heightened levels of depression, anxiety, and PTSD symptoms (Alpysbekova et al., 2024). In future research, expanding the sample size could provide additional perspectives; however, for the scope of this qualitative study, we believe the current sample size is appropriate and sufficient to meet our research objectives.

The present sample was initially drawn from a quantitative survey of Ukrainian refugees in the United States who arrived between 2014 and 2023, with data collected from June to August 2023. Additional participants were contacted through the first author's network and through community organizations as well as social platforms such as Facebook, Telegram, and Instagram. Participants eligible for the present study had to meet the following criteria: (a) Ukrainian ethnicity, (b) born in Ukraine, (c) 18 years of age or older, and (d) residing in the United States.

Researchers followed up with participants from the quantitative survey, as well as with additional eligible individuals, and invited them to be interviewed. Interested participants were invited to participate in the research and were emailed consent forms in Ukrainian, English, and Russian. Participants signed and returned the consent forms online, which were then stored in a cloud server accessible only to the study team.

Regarding participant demographics, we did not specifically collect information on participants' exact ages. However, our inclusion criteria stipulated that all participants be older than 18 years. Although we did not directly ask for their ages, we can confirm that all participants were adults, aged 18 and older. In terms of participants' children, we collected information on their ages and confirmed that all children were residing with their parents in the United States. The ages of the children ranged from 3 to 18 years, including children aged 3, 4, 6, 11, 11, 16, and 18 years old. None of the participants' children were left behind in Ukraine; all were living with their parents in the United States at the time of the interviews. Regarding participants' spouses, all married participants were accompanied by their spouses when they came to the United States. None of the participants had left their spouses behind in Ukraine.

In-depth, semistructured interviews were conducted with eight participants, with interview durations ranging from approximately 29 to 83 min (average 45–50 min; see Table 1 and Appendix). Interviews were conducted in participants' preferred languages (Ukrainian or Russian). All interviews were conducted via video chat. The interview guide was designed to explore participants' experiences with forced migration, attachment to their homeland and family, and psychological distress related to the ongoing conflict. Open-ended questions encouraged participants to share personal narratives and probing questions were used where necessary.

Interviews were facilitated by the first author (a fluent Russian speaker) and a skilled interpreter fluent in Ukrainian, Russian, and

English. The interpreter, a native Ukrainian speaker, who also speaks Russian and English, conducted the interviews in Ukrainian. She ensured the accurate translation of the interviews, translating from Ukrainian to English, and from Russian (one interview) to English. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and translated by the interpreter for subsequent analysis. To ensure accuracy, the interpreter examined the translations and compared them with the original transcripts. Identifying information was changed to maintain participant confidentiality. Participants received \$20 as compensation for their time. All interviews took place in Spring 2024. It should be noted that although the interpreter conducted interviews in Ukrainian for the majority of participants, one participant requested that their interview be conducted in Russian, which was facilitated by the first author (a fluent Russian speaker). Notably, participants did not express psychological discomfort with the Russian language, despite its association with the invading country.

To enhance the transparency and rigor of our qualitative study, we adhered to the guidelines of the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (Tong et al., 2007). The study received approval from the first author's Institutional Review Board under the protocol STUDY00004306. Participants were informed that any confidential information would be deleted upon completion of the research project.

Data Analysis

The research team, consisting of four authors of the present article, reviewed the transcripts using a general inductive approach. This approach allows researchers to identify key themes and patterns from the raw data without relying on predefined theories (Thomas, 2006). The team first independently reviewed the transcripts to identify broad categories related to the research questions, guided by criteria such as thematic relevance, recurrence of concepts, and connection to the study's core objectives—then developed a final codebook containing two primary themes and five subthemes. To ensure consistency, we selected two transcripts to be coded separately by all four coders as a validation step. The coding process for the second transcript yielded the same 85% agreement. The remaining transcripts were then coded independently, with six virtual meetings over the course of 7 weeks to review and discuss codes. These meetings helped refine the application of codes and ensured consistency throughout the analytic process.

Researchers subsequently entered the final codes into Dedoose Version 9.2.005 to check code co-occurrence, presence, and application. *Code co-occurrence* refers to the simultaneous appearance of related themes, suggesting the interconnectedness of participants' experiences (Sharp, 2021). For example, "emotional distress" and "emotional and materialist connection to homeland" were often coded together, suggesting that those with stronger connections to Ukraine may also experience heightened feelings of emotional distress (Sharp, 2021). *Code presence* refers to how often a particular code appears across the data. Simply put, code presence reflects whether or not a code appeared within a specific interview. *Code application* refers to how codes are used to categorize sections of the data (Arthur, 2021). For example, the theme "positive experience in the United States" was referenced 27 times across participants, suggesting a high degree of relevance to the Ukrainian refugee experience.

Codebook and Themes

The codebook we developed provided a framework for organizing and analyzing the qualitative data from interviews with Ukrainian migrants. The codebook identified two main themes—"Emotional Connection to Homeland" and "Mental Health and Psychological Distress" with subthemes under each. These categories were derived systematically through an iterative process of reviewing transcripts, identifying patterns, and creating definitions for each theme and subtheme. All authors were debriefed at the end of the coding process.

Results

Overall, the *emotional or materialistic connection (to homeland)* and the *emotional distress* are the two most frequently appearing codes in Dedoose. Each of these themes appeared 31 times across the eight transcripts. Saturation was reached after eight interviews.

Theme 1: Emotional Connection to Homeland

Subtheme 1a: Emotional or Materialistic Connection

This code represents the participants' feelings of attachment, nostalgia, and symbolic or physical ties (e.g., property) to Ukraine, influencing their sense of identity and emotional well-being. All participants expressed an emotional or materialistic connection to their homeland. Raters identified 31 excerpts reflecting this subtheme. In the interviews, all participants were asked to rate their emotional connection to their homeland from 0 to 10, with 0 indicating the weakest connection and 10 indicating the strongest connection. Remarkably, all but one of the participants rated their connection as either nine or 10, reflecting an overwhelmingly strong bond. In addition, participants often expressed their feelings of regret and sadness about having to leave the country and their beloved people.

My self-identification goes with Ukraine.

It's a pity that we can't go back and help.

We went to Kharkov because after one of the missile strikes, almost all the glass on one side in our apartment was broken - the kitchen and living room

We have nothing left in the occupied place. The house was already gone.

Subtheme 1b: Worrying About Parents' or Relatives Safety

This code captures participants' concerns and anxieties about the well-being of their family members who remained in Ukraine, reflecting emotional and psychological connections to their homeland. Five of the eight participants expressed concerns and worries about the safety and well-being of their family, friends, or relatives back home. Raters applied a total of 13 excerpts reflecting this subtheme. When expressing these concerns and worrying, participants often communicated anxiety about the safety of their family back home. This subtheme also reflects their emotional connection to their homeland. We believe that this theme captures anticipatory grief and perseverative worry because participants were talking about the dangers that their loved ones faced while still in Ukraine.

Well, the worst thing that could happen is if someone died, one of my relatives. Only this.

Yes, I'm saying. ... I'm following the news, I'm worried about everything there will be, I wish it was fine for everyone.

My relatives love me, that's why my safety was more important to them, and now, of course, they miss me very much. Just like I miss them

I would like my relatives to be here

I am sad just for my relatives and of course, this is the sadness of all my life.

Our relatives stayed in Ukraine, I was worried about them, but there were many issues that needed to be resolved

I worry about my relatives who stayed. The connection is strong and constant — we watch the news all the time. My mother is in Zaporozhye, near the front line. They used to bomb at night, but now it happens all day.

Theme 2: Mental Health and Psychological Distress

Subtheme 2a: Emotional Distress

This code refers to the emotional struggles participants experienced, such as anxiety, sadness, or feelings of helplessness, often stemming from displacement, loss, or exposure to traumatic events. This subtheme appeared in 31 excerpts across all participants.

The hardest part was making the decision. I spent days thinking about it — I was afraid. There was so much information, and it was scary either way. Staying felt dangerous, but so did leaving.

Emotional condition was not stable. I cannot say that I had a cool head and clear mind.

It was very difficult.

I feel like I'll always be in danger. I'm afraid of what we went through, and afraid I won't be able to escape — like those who died trying to flee under shelling. That fear keeps me from going back.

Subtheme 2b: Trauma or PTSD

This code focuses on participants evidencing symptoms of PTSD or trauma, stemming from experiences of war, displacement, and violence. Raters applied a total of 11 excerpts that indicate this subtheme across five of the participants.

There were places where people died ... so no intentions to go back there, no. Only because of psychological discomfort.

Our building was hit directly by artillery, and everything in the house was looted. Nearby buildings were also badly damaged. We realized that if we hadn't left, we probably wouldn't be here now.

Subtheme 2c: Being Exposed to War or Violence and Directly or Indirectly

This code addresses participants' direct or indirect experiences with invasion-related violence in Ukraine, which may include personal experiences or those of loved ones, shaping participants' psychological trauma. Raters applied a total of 17 excerpts indicating this subtheme across six of the eight participants.

Russian troops were stationed near the city, and I was terrified they could enter at any moment. Villages nearby were already occupied. At first, people fled to those villages thinking they'd be safer — but it was terrifying there, not safer at all.

Overlap Among Subthemes (Co-Occurrence Codes)

The subthemes under the two main themes are closely connected with each other. Common connections among subthemes were observed, with four predominant patterns emerging from overlapping excerpts.

First, *worrying about parents' or relatives' safety in Ukraine* often co-occurs with *emotional and materialistic connection to homeland* (five occurrences), where these two subthemes were linked, representing five out of the eight participants. This overlap indicates that concerns about family safety in Ukraine are often linked to emotional or materialistic ties to the homeland.

I'm still trying to understand everything myself. I have many friends and relatives still there, and I worry about them. The connection is strong and constant.

The connection with the city there is either Kharkov or Zaporozhye, just basically because relatives and friends who remained there seem to be pulling towards themselves. But there is nothing other

We watch the news all the time. I have a mother, she stays in Zaporozhye and this is very close to the front line and they are bombing the city every day now. And if before it was nightly attacks only there, now they do it all day long. They used a new tactic—when they were hit with missiles. ... they started hitting there with rockets again.

Second, *emotional distress* often co-occurs with *emotional and materialistic connection to homeland*. Raters identified six occurrences of this co-occurrence, representing six out of the eight participants. This co-occurrence indicates that emotional distress is associated with Ukrainians' emotional or materialistic connections to the homeland. These emotional ties may cause distress and further impact their well-being.

And yes, it was strong. ... I really didn't want to leave it at all, it was very hard.

I feel deep sorrow for my country, my city, our people. So many are dying — civilians, young men. Just talking about it gives me goosebumps. It's heartbreaking what's happening to us.

Third, *exposure to war and violence* often co-occurs with *PTSD symptoms and trauma*. Raters identified five occurrences, representing five participants. This co-occurrence indicates that exposure to war and violence, either through social media or in-person, is associated with developing PTSD and trauma-related conditions.

On the last day in Kyiv, as we tried to leave, an airstrike hit nearby, and I thought we wouldn't make it. A man was killed just next to us, but we made it out safely. That moment reinforced for me that leaving was the right choice, though it was terrifying.

After reaching safety, I still had flashbacks—thinking a plane was a missile—until I realized we were in Poland. In New York, we instinctively took cover from the sound of planes. My dog is still terrified of airplanes, as we were taught to survive in constant fear.

Fourth, *PTSD and trauma* also often co-occurs with *emotional distress*. Raters identified six occurrences, representing six participants. This co-occurrence indicates the link between PTSD symptoms/trauma and emotional distress.

I feel like I'll always be in danger, haunted by what we saw. I'm afraid I won't be able to leave, like those who died trying to flee or under shelling. That fear keeps me from returning.

There were places where people died ... so no intentions to go back there, no. only because of psychological discomfort.

Even if the war ends, nothing will be the same. A divide is forming between those who left and those who stayed, with guilt, self-righteousness, and competition rising. Corruption and arbitrariness remain, leaving people feeling defenseless despite stable lives.

To answer our research questions, these subtheme connections indicate that (a) concerns, worrying, and anxiety about family, relatives, and friends back home might cause participants' emotional distress and (b) the emotional and material connection to the homeland, emotional distress, and PTSD symptoms/trauma are connected with each other. Noteworthy, although these co-occurrences may indicate the connection between our subthemes, our design does not allow us to evaluate causality.

Theme 3: Parental Drive to Protect Children in the Context of War and Migration

Subtheme 3a: The Urgent Need to Protect Children From War and Secure Their Future

Raters identified five occurrences, representing five participants. This theme emphasizes the strong parental drive to protect children, which was a key motivator for leaving Ukraine. Parents expressed a profound need to ensure the physical safety of their children and secure a better future for them, whether it was by shielding younger children from the dangers of war or preventing older children from being conscripted into the military. These parental instincts were a significant factor in their decision to migrate to the United States, seeking stability and opportunities for their children that were unavailable in their war-torn homeland.

I realized that I would not be able to stay at home with the child in Ukraine, I would have to go work to make a living, the child would stay at home alone. I wouldn't feel safe to do it.

In Ukraine, even 16-year-old boys aren't allowed to leave, and 18-year-olds are taken to war. At 18, they've barely started their life — just finished school. I can't imagine sending my child to war at that age. I wish we could stay here in the U.S. for a better future, away from the war.

Honestly, if it wasn't for my daughter, I would have stayed in Ukraine. If I was 100% sure of a better future for my daughter, that she didn't need my support, I'd go. I'd sign up to the front line.

I left Ukraine legally because I have three children. You can cross the border if you're a parent with three or more children, or if you're discharged from military registration. Others leaving with fewer children likely paid off the military office. We were very worried about how hard it would be for our children, especially the youngest.

Discussion

The present study was designed to address significant gaps in the existing literature regarding mental health issues faced by Ukrainian war migrants, specifically the psychological phenomena of anticipatory grief and perseverative worry. As the ongoing invasion in Ukraine continues to impact many people's lives, these migrants' distinctive emotional condition is characterized by a constant sense of loss and concern for the safety of their loved ones. Our results suggest a high prevalence of emotional distress, PTSD symptoms, anticipatory grief, and perseverative worry, which are exacerbated by migrants' strong emotional and material connections to their homeland, ongoing concerns about loved ones' safety, and direct or indirect experiences with conflict-related violence.

A key finding is that all participants indicated a strong emotional and material connection to their hometown and to Ukraine as a whole. This bond not only represents their sense of self but also acts as a psychological foundation, potentially exacerbating their emotional distress. Almost all participants ranked their emotional connection to Ukraine as a nine or 10, suggesting a strong bond that complicates their migration experience. This bond is consistent with attachment theory, where loss of an attachment figure (in this case the homeland) can be distressing. This finding is consistent with earlier research, which has linked strong emotional ties to the motherland to heightened emotional suffering among displaced people (Shu et al., 2023). However, our findings point to an important link between emotional ties to one's hometown and anticipatory grieving, a topic that has received little attention in the migration literature.

In terms of anticipatory grief, our findings echo Kosminsky and Neimeyer's (2016) work on grief, though traditional grief models do not fully capture the continuous, anticipatory nature of loss for migrants. Anticipatory grief involves grieving before the actual loss occurs, which is particularly relevant for crisis migrants who may grieve the potential loss of their homeland, culture, and way of life even before leaving (McCarroll & Yan, 2024). The literature on anticipatory grief among military families (Simon et al., 2020) provides parallels, though more research is needed to develop targeted interventions for migrant populations experiencing ongoing uncertainty about family members' safety. Moreover, the concept of anticipatory grief as part of the migratory experience is central to understanding the emotional burdens faced by refugees and migrants, as noted by Renner et al. (2024).

Participants linked anticipatory grief with anxiety about their relatives' safety, expressing concern for loved ones in war zones. Anticipatory grief—the fear of losing loved ones in conflict zones—is associated with emotional and material ties, with five of the eight participants expressing anxiety for their relatives' safety. This form of grief emerges from the fear of losing loved ones and the uncertainty surrounding their safety, creating a pervasive sense of anxiety that can disrupt daily functioning. Participants articulated feelings of despair and helplessness as they confronted the possibility of irreversible loss. For instance, in our study, many participants reported feelings of sorrow not just for what they have lost but for what they may still lose, highlighting a psychological burden that compounds their experiences of displacement. Although earlier research has investigated grieving within family care practices (Trucco et al., 2024), few have investigated anticipatory grief among war refugees. This distinction is critical because anticipatory

grieving is an ongoing emotional weight rather than a response to a specific loss. This distinction was emphasized by Nesteruk (2018), who identified the layered emotional complexities experienced by migrants who face both actual and anticipated losses.

Our findings also suggest that exposure to conflict-related violence, whether experienced directly or through social media, is strongly linked with PTSD symptoms and trauma-related conditions among Ukrainian migrants. Researchers have examined a link between exposure to conflict-related violence and the development of PTSD symptoms and other trauma-related conditions in a variety of contexts. For example, a study of Syrian and Iraqi refugee children (Hinchey et al., 2023) found that direct exposure to conflict and combat predicted higher anxiety symptoms over time. Similarly, research on Ukrainian citizens affected by the ongoing war (Kurapov et al., 2023) found increased levels of anxiety, sadness, stress, and trauma-related symptoms among individuals directly exposed to military activity, physical violence, or significant human suffering. In our study, trauma and PTSD symptoms were prevalent among five of the eight participants. This prevalence aligns with Miller and Rasmussen (2017), who argue that indirect exposure to war, such as seeing images or hearing stories of violence, can still lead to trauma and PTSD symptoms among migrant populations. However, our data provide additional details, as we found that PTSD symptoms and trauma frequently co-occurred with emotional distress (for six of eight participants), suggesting that trauma may exacerbate emotional struggles such as anxiety, sadness, and helplessness. This co-occurrence strengthens the argument that trauma and emotional distress are interconnected, likely requiring integrated therapeutic interventions.

Another significant finding is the emergence of perseverative worry as a key psychological phenomenon among Ukrainian migrants. Worry about the safety of loved ones back home in Ukraine was reported by five of the eight participants and it often intersected with emotional distress. This finding aligns with the literature on perseverative cognition (Brosschot et al., 2006), which refers to continuous activation of stress responses due to ongoing, uncontrollable concerns. Research indicates that perseverative cognition, manifested as worry and rumination, can exert significant impacts on individuals' stress levels, health behaviors, and overall well-being (Kramer et al., 2022; McCarrick et al., 2022). Although worry is a common response to stress, its chronic presence in the form of perseverative worry can exacerbate psychological distress, which in this context is closely tied to the ongoing uncertainty regarding loved ones in war zones.

Furthermore, the migration decisions of parents in this study were strongly influenced by their concerns for their children's safety and well-being. This finding aligns with existing literature that highlights the significant role of parental instincts in migration decisions, particularly in conflict situations. As Miller and Rasmussen (2017) shown, the desire to protect children from violence and instability is a primary motivator for families fleeing war zones. For parents of young children, the immediate dangers of living in a war zone—such as violence, lack of security, and instability—created an urgent need to seek refuge elsewhere. Similarly, parents with older sons expressed fear of conscription and the threat of their children being sent to the front lines intensified their urgency to leave Ukraine. This is consistent with research by Opie et al. (2024), who observed similar patterns among families displaced by conflict.

In both cases, the common denominator was the parental drive to ensure a better future for their children, away from the horrors of war. This aligns with the findings of Bürgin et al. (2022), who argue that the desire to secure a safe and stable future for children is one of the most powerful motivators for families affected by conflict. Thus, the emotional and psychological toll of war, combined with the hope for a better future, played a crucial role in the decision-making process of Ukrainian parents in this study.

Although our findings are consistent with much of the trauma and migration literature, there is a need for work examining the intersection of anticipatory grief and perseverative worry among migrant populations. Additionally, existing models of PTSD do not fully capture the aspects of anticipatory distress linked to loved ones in war zones, suggesting this issue as an area ripe for further exploration. Some literature, such as Herroudi et al. (2023), focuses heavily on postmigration experiences but underemphasizes the role of emotional ties to the homeland, an area our study highlights as crucial to understanding the full scope of migrant distress. As emphasized by Boss and Yeats (2014), this emotional tension between past and future—between holding onto the homeland and the uncertainty of whether loved ones will survive—creates a complex form of ambiguous loss that exacerbates mental health challenges for migrants.

Recommendations for Mental Health Interventions

Given the complex spectrum of mental health challenges observed in this study, several recommendations can be advanced for future interventions. One key finding from our research involves the profound emotional connection to the homeland and the anticipatory grief linked to the safety of loved ones in war zones. Therefore, interventions should prioritize addressing homeland attachment, as this psychological bond significantly amplifies worry and distress. Creating therapeutic spaces where Ukrainian migrants can process their emotional ties to Ukraine, while managing the anxiety associated with potential losses, will be essential.

Trauma-informed care should serve as a cornerstone of any therapeutic approach with Ukrainian migrants. As Katsounari and Jacobowitz (2011) and van der Kolk (2014) argued, trauma is not just a past event but an ongoing experience for many, particularly those who maintain strong emotional ties to war zones. For individuals expressing heightened emotional and material connections to their homeland, incorporating trauma-informed techniques that address ongoing fears for loved ones' safety may help mitigate anticipatory grief.

Additionally, cognitive behavioral therapy techniques, including trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy, can be particularly effective in addressing perseverative worry, anticipatory grief, and emotional distress. Cognitive behavioral therapy models for anxiety, such as those discussed by Newman et al. (2011), provide evidence-based approaches for managing intrusive thoughts and emotional dysregulation. Given our findings, interventions should focus on identifying and restructuring the specific thoughts related to homeland attachment and potential loss, helping migrants manage the continuous cycle of worry about their loved ones. Incorporating mindfulness practices, as suggested by Williams et al. (2014), could help migrants develop healthier emotional responses to ongoing stressors.

Finally, community-based support networks can play a crucial role in reducing isolation and fostering resilience. As Hobfoll's (2011) work on the conservation of resources model suggests, social and emotional resources are critical in mitigating the effects of trauma. Support groups for Ukrainian migrants may help them process their experiences in a collective, culturally relevant context, potentially reducing the burden of individual distress.

Limitations

The present findings should be interpreted in light of several considerations. *First*, the small sample size of eight participants, though consistent with qualitative research norms, may limit the generalizability of the findings. Further studies with larger, more diverse samples could enrich the findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological phenomena under investigation. *Second*, participants were primarily drawn from a personal network and from community organizations, which may introduce selection bias. *Third*, the interviews were conducted in Ukrainian, Russian, or English, depending on participant preference, with transcripts then translated into English for analysis. Although this approach allows participants to express themselves authentically, language differences could potentially compromise interpretation of concepts that may not be fully captured in translation. *Finally*, as the data collection was limited to Ukrainian migrants in the United States, the study may not fully represent the experiences of Ukrainian migrants in other countries or within Ukraine itself. Future research should aim to address these limitations by expanding sample sizes, including participants from more diverse geographic regions and backgrounds, and considering comparative studies across different countries hosting Ukrainian refugees.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present findings suggest complex relationships among emotional attachment to the country, concern for loved ones' safety, trauma, and mental health among Ukrainian migrants. Anticipatory grief and persistent worry emerged as significant psychological phenomena in this population, suggesting a need for additional investigation and tailored mental health interventions.

The findings have practical implications for mental health professionals and policymakers. Trauma-informed care should address both the visible and hidden scars of displacement, focusing not just on PTSD and anxiety, but also on emotional ties to the home country. Culturally competent services are crucial, as Ukrainian migrants may face challenges that require tailored therapies. Community-based support groups or family-inclusive interventions may be more effective in addressing their needs. Given the ongoing nature of their trauma, long-term mental health strategies are essential, focusing on coping with grief, uncertainty, and emotional regulation.

Future research should focus on several longitudinal studies to track the long-term psychological impact of anticipatory grief and persistent worry, exploring resilience and coping mechanisms among migrants, identifying strategies for managing prolonged stress, and comparing the psychological effects of different waves of migration (post-2014 vs. post-2022) to identify distinct patterns and needs.

This study's novelty lies in examining the specific emotional processes of Ukrainian migrants, particularly how emotional attachment and war-related stress complicate traditional mental health care. We hope that this work will prove helpful in informing future research and support efforts.

References

- Alpysbekova, A., Cisco, M. M., Ertanir, B., Vo, D. H., Scaramutti, C., Nehme, L., Montero-Zamora, P., Bautista, T., & Schwartz, S. J. (2025). Cultural-economic stress and mental health among Ukrainian immigrants residing in the U.S. post-Russian invasion. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 95(4), 365–380. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000796>
- Alpysbekova, A., Cisco, M. M., Vo, D. H., Ertanir, B., Sahbaz, S., Montero-Zamora, P., Bautista, T., Scaramutti, C., Bartoszak, M., Nehme, L., Duque, M., & Schwartz, S. J. (2024). The effect of the Russian invasion on mental, social, and behavioral health among Ukrainians living in the United States. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0001770>
- Anbesaw, T., Zenebe, Y., Asmamaw, A., Shegaw, M., & Birru, N. (2022). Post-traumatic stress disorder and associated factors among people who experienced traumatic events in Dessie town, Ethiopia, 2022: A community based study. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 13, Article 1026878. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2022.1026878>
- Arthur, M. M. L. (2021). *Qualitative data analysis with Dedoose: Developing findings*. Rhode Island College. <https://pressbooks.ric.edu/socialdataanalysis/chapter/qualitative-data-analysis-with-dedoose-developing-findings/>
- Bilić, J., Skokandić, L., & Puljak, L. (2022). Anticipatory grief and experience of providing at-home palliative care among informal caregivers of spouses in Croatia: A qualitative study. *BMC Palliative Care*, 21(1), Article 199. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12904-022-01093-1>
- Boss, P., & Yeats, J. R. (2014). Ambiguous loss: A complicated type of grief when loved one disappear. *Bereavement Care*, 33(2), 63–69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02682621.2014.933573>
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss volume one*. Basic Books.
- Brosschot, J. F., Gerin, W., & Thayer, J. F. (2006). The perseverative cognition hypothesis: A review of worry, prolonged stress-related physiological activation, and health. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 60(2), 113–124. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychores.2005.06.074>
- Bryant, R. A., Nickerson, A., Morina, N., & Liddell, B. (2023). Posttraumatic stress disorder in refugees. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 19(1), 413–436. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-080921-080359>
- Bürgin, D., Anagnostopoulos, D., Vitiello, B., Sukale, T., Schmid, M., Fegert, J. M., & the Board and Policy Division of ESCAP. (2022). Impact of war and forced displacement on children's mental health-multilevel, needs-oriented, and trauma-informed approaches. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 31(6), 845–853. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-022-01974-z>
- Ekblad, S., Gramatik, O., & Suprun, Y. (2024). Increasing perceived health and mental health literacy among separated refugee Ukrainian families with urgent needs occasioned by invasion-a group intervention study with participatory methodology in Sweden. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 12, Article 1356605. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1356605>
- Elareshi, M., Ziani, A., & Alsridi, H. (2023). The perceptions of Iraqi internally displaced persons of social media use during war and conflict. *Jurnal Komunikasi. Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 39(1), 21–36. <https://doi.org/10.17576/JKMJC-2023-3901-02>
- Fel, S., Jurek, K., & Lenart-Kłoś, K. (2022). Relationship between socio-demographic factors and posttraumatic stress disorder: A cross sectional study among civilian participants' hostilities in Ukraine. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(5), Article 2720. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19052720>

- Fulton, R., & Gottesman, D. J. (1980). Anticipatory grief: A psychosocial concept reconsidered. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 137(1), 45–54. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.137.1.45>
- George, C., & Wargo Aikins, J. (2023). Developing a secure base in family intervention: Using the adult attachment projective system to assess attachment in family relationships. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, Article 1291661. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1291661>
- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59–82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903>
- Herroudi, L., Knuppel, I., & Blavier, A. (2023). Post-migration journey: Asylum, trauma and resilience, different trajectories—A comparison of the mental health and post-migration living difficulties of documented and undocumented migrants in Belgium. *The International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 70(1), 201–208. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00207640231204212>
- Hinchey, L. M., Nashef, R., Bazzi, C., Gorski, K., & Javanbakht, A. (2023). The longitudinal impact of war exposure on psychopathology in Syrian and Iraqi refugee youth. *The International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 69(7), 1833–1836. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00207640231177829>
- Hobfoll, S. E. (2011). Conservation of resources theory: Its implication for stress, health, and resilience. In S. Folkman (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of stress, health, and coping* (pp. 127–147). Oxford University Press.
- Juang, L. P., Simpson, J. A., Lee, R. M., Rothman, A. J., Titzmann, P. F., Schachner, M. K., Korn, L., Heinemeier, D., & Betsch, C. (2018). Using attachment and relational perspectives to understand adaptation and resilience among immigrant and refugee youth. *American Psychologist*, 73(6), 797–811. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000286>
- Karaçor, E. K., & Akçam, E. (2023). Using structural equation modelling to examine the relationship between place identity, sense of community, and environmental attitude. *MethodsX*, 11, Article 102443. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mex.2023.102443>
- Katsounari, I., & Jacobowitz, J. (2011). A Comparative analysis of mmpi and rorschach findings assessing combat-related PTSD in Vietnam veterans—Analysis of mmpi and rorschach findings assessing PTSD. *Psychology*, 2(4), 335–341. <https://doi.org/10.4236/psych.2011.24053>
- Konstantinov, V., Reznik, A., & Isralowitz, R. (2023). Depression and quality of life among Ukrainian adults relocated to Russia. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 28(6), 493–503. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2023.2216986>
- Kosminsky, P., & Neimeyer, R. (Ed.). (2016). Techniques of grief therapy: Assessment and intervention. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying*, 75(3), 300–305. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0030222816663410>
- Kramer, A. C., Neubauer, A. B., Scott, S. B., Schmiedek, F., Sliwinski, M. J., & Smyth, J. M. (2022). Stressor anticipation and subsequent affective well-being: A link potentially explained by perseverative cognitions. *Emotion*, 22(8), 1787–1800. <https://doi.org/10.1037/emo0000954>
- Kurapov, A., Kalaitzaki, A., Keller, V., Danyliuk, I., & Kowatsch, T. (2023). The mental health impact of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war 6 months after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 14(14), Article 1134780. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1134780>
- Kurt, G., Ventevogel, P., Ekhtiari, M., Ilkkursun, Z., Erşahin, M., Akbiyik, N., & Acarturk, C. (2022). Estimated prevalence rates and risk factors for common mental health problems among Syrian and Afghan refugees in Türkiye. *BJPsych Open*, 8(5), Article e167. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjo.2022.573>
- Mason, M. (2010). Sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative interviews. *Forum qualitative Sozialforschung/forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 11(3), Article 8.
- McCarrick, D., Prestwich, A., & O'Connor, D. B. (2022). Perseverative cognition and health behaviours: Exploring the role of intentions and perceived behavioural control. *Psychology & Health*, 39(9), 1183–1199. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08870446.2022.2130921>
- McCarroll, C. J., & Yan, K. (2024). Mourning a death foretold: Memory and mental time travel in anticipatory grief. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-024-09956-z>
- Miller, K. E., & Rasmussen, A. (2017). The mental health of civilians displaced by armed conflict: An ecological model of refugee distress. *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences*, 26(2), 129–138. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S2045796016000172>
- Nesteruk, O. (2018). Immigrants coping with transnational deaths and bereavement: The influence of migratory loss and anticipatory grief. *Family Process*, 57(4), 1012–1028. <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12336>
- Newman, M. G., Castonguay, L. G., Borkovec, T. D., Fisher, A. J., Boswell, J. F., Szokodny, L. E., & Nordberg, S. S. (2011). A randomized controlled trial of cognitive-behavioral therapy for generalized anxiety disorder with integrated techniques from emotion-focused and interpersonal therapies. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 79(2), 171–181. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022489>
- Opie, J. E., Hameed, M., Vuong, A., Painter, F., Booth, A. T., Jiang, H., Dowling, R., Boh, J., McLean, N., & McIntosh, J. E. (2024). Children's Social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes in military families: A rapid review. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 33(6), 1949–1967. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-024-02856-5>
- Renner, A., Schmidt, V., & Kersting, A. (2024). Migratory grief: A systematic review. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 15, Article 1303847. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1303847>
- Rizzi, D., Ciuffo, G., Sandoli, G., Mangiagalli, M., de Angelis, P., Scavuzzo, G., Nych, M., Landoni, M., & Ionio, C. (2022). Running away from the war in Ukraine: The impact on mental health of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees in transit in Poland. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(24), Article 16439. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192416439>
- Scharp, K. M. (2021). Thematic co-occurrence analysis: Advancing a theory and qualitative method to illuminate ambivalent experiences. *Journal of Communication*, 71(4), 545–571. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqab015>
- Shevlin, M., Hyland, P., Vallières, F., Bisson, J., Makhshvili, N., Javakhishvili, J., Shpiker, M., & Roberts, B. (2018). A comparison of DSM-5 and ICD-11 PTSD prevalence, comorbidity and disability: An analysis of the Ukrainian Internally Displaced Person's Mental Health Survey. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 137(2), 138–147. <https://doi.org/10.1111/acps.12840>
- Shu, Z., Du, Y., & Li, X. (2023). Homeland, emotions, and identity: Constructing the place attachment of young overseas Chinese relatives in the returned Vietnam-Chinese community. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, Article 984756. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.984756>
- Simon, N. M., Hoepfner, S. S., Lubin, R. E., Robinaugh, D. J., Malgaroli, M., Norman, S. B., Aciermo, R., Goetter, E. M., Hellberg, S. N., Charney, M. E., Bui, E., Baker, A. W., Smith, E., Kim, H. M., & Rauch, S. A. M. (2020). Understanding the impact of complicated grief on combat related posttraumatic stress disorder, guilt, suicide, and functional impairment in a clinical trial of post-9/11 service members and veterans. *Depression and Anxiety*, 37(1), 63–72. <https://doi.org/10.1002/da.22911>
- Tenzen, M., & Schofield, J. (2023). People and places: Towards an understanding and categorisation of reasons for place attachment—Case studies from the north of England. *Landscape Research*, 49(3), 340–358. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01426397.2023.2289970>
- Thomas, D. R. (2006). A general inductive approach for analyzing qualitative evaluation data. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 27(2), 237–246. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214005283748>
- Tong, A., Sainsbury, P., & Craig, J. (2007). Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ): A 32-item checklist for interviews and focus groups. *International Journal for Quality in Health Care: Journal of the International Society for Quality in Health Care*, 19(6), 349–357. <https://doi.org/10.1093/intqhc/mzm042>

Trucco, A. P., Khondoker, M., Kishita, N., Backhouse, T., Copsey, H., & Mioshi, E. (2024). Factors affecting anticipatory grief of family carers supporting people living with Motor Neurone disease: The impact of disease symptomatology. *Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis & Frontotemporal Degeneration*, 25(7–8), 776–784. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21678421.2024.2359559>

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2024, December 6).

Ukraine refugee situation. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

van der Kolk, B. A. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Viking.

Van Eecke, Y. (2005). Immigration from an attachment perspective. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 33(5), 467–476. <https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.2005.33.5.467>

Williams, J. M., Crane, C., Barnhofer, T., Brennan, K., Duggan, D. S., Fennell, M. J., Hackmann, A., Krusche, A., Muse, K., Von Rohr, I. R., Shah, D., Crane, R. S., Eames, C., Jones, M., Radford, S., Silverton, S., Sun, Y., Weatherley-Jones, E., Whitaker, C. J., ... Russell, I. T. (2014). Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for preventing relapse in recurrent depression: A randomized dismantling trial. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 82(2), 275–286. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035036>

Appendix

Interview Questions

The Journey From Ukraine

1. On a scale of 1–10 (1 being very weak, 10 being very strong), how strong is your emotional connection to Ukraine? Emotional connection is defined as a feeling of alignment that goes beyond “liking.”
2. Can you briefly explain why and how you left your country?
 - a. Probing question: Was this a planned or sudden decision?
 - b. Probing question: Did you receive any assistance to leave the country?
3. What was the hardest part about leaving Ukraine?
 - a. Probing question: What were your last thoughts as you were leaving?
4. Reflecting on your decision to leave Ukraine, do you ever have moments of regret?
 - a. Probing question: How do you move forward after having those thoughts? What are things that make you feel better?
5. Do you intend to return to your home country?
 - a. Probing question: What circumstances would motivate you to do so?

Immigrating to the United States

1. Tell me about your journey migrating to the United States?
2. What challenges did you encounter when traveling from Ukraine to the United States?
 - a. Probing questions: Any Financial problems? Any Family problems?
3. Some individuals encounter challenges when entering the United States. How was it for you?
 - a. Probing questions: What was your biggest challenge?

4. What are your most pressing needs here in the United States?
 - a. Probing question: What are your expectations of the United States?
5. What ways have you tried to adapt and cope with your life changes?
 - a. Probing question: What routine or behaviors make you “feel at home”?
6. Who did you migrate with? (family, kids, friends, or alone)?
 - a. Probing question: Tell me about your migration with them? (Were they supportive? Did you have to be the one to provide strength and support for them?)
7. Who provided you with the most significant support during your journey?
 - a. Probing question: Who provided you support during your resettlement?

Transit and Detention Experiences (if Applicable)

1. If you went through other countries during your journey, could you describe that experience?
 - a. Probing question: If you went through detention or refugee centers, could you describe that experience?
2. Did you encounter any discrimination or difficulties during your transit?
 - a. Probing question: In detention centers?
3. What support/preparedness you wish you could have had that would help the transit and resettlement experience less hard?
4. Could you provide us a full summary of your experiences at the refugee facility, with an emphasis on the physical conditions?
 - a. Probing question: How did the authorities treat you during your stay?

(Appendix continues)

- b. Probing question: Did you have any issues with assistance?
 - c. Probing question: What was the level of privacy you had?
 - d. Probing question: How were the living conditions in terms of room space and the number of roommates?
 - e. Probing question: What was your accessibility to personal hygiene and clothes and other care?
5. How would you rate the emotional impact of your experience in a refuge/detention center during your journey on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 indicating a very weak impact and 10 indicating a very strong impact?
 6. What is your biggest hope for your future in the United States?

Received October 9, 2024

Revision received June 24, 2025

Accepted July 8, 2025 ■