



Personal determinants of psycho-emotional states in children of combatants: A theoretical analysis

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◆ **Abstract.** The purpose of the study was a theoretical analysis of the influence of personal characteristics on the psycho-emotional states of children from families of combatants. The methodology was based on analysis of academic sources addressing psycho-emotional states of children in crisis conditions, personal determinants of these states, family influence, and mechanisms of adaptation and maladaptation, which enabled identification of the main approaches to the problem through theoretical analysis, comparison of interpretations of key personal factors, and, through systematisation, generalisation, and interpretation, determination of relationships between personal characteristics, family context, and psycho-emotional states of children. The results of the analysis indicated that psycho-emotional states of children in wartime conditions are formed under the influence of a combination of stress-related and traumatic factors that have both acute and prolonged character. The analysis established that anxiety, fear, distress, emotional exhaustion, and post-traumatic manifestations constitute an interconnected system of responses, the intensity of which increases with the accumulation of stress experience. The analysis demonstrated that personal determinants, including anxiety, resilience, self-esteem, and emotional regulation, play a significant role in determining variability of children's responses. Family context, including family structure, emotional state of parents, quality of interaction, and conditions of separation, acts as a key mediator of the impact of war on the child. Generalisation of the results confirmed that psycho-emotional states of children of combatants are formed through the interaction of personal determinants, family context, and prolonged exposure to war, which determines variability from adaptive responses to persistent maladaptive manifestations. The obtained data may be used by psychologists, psychotherapists, social workers, professionals in the education system, and specialists in the field of mental health during the development of psychological support programmes, psychological assessment, and prevention of maladaptive states in children from families of combatants

◆ **Keywords:** anxiety; resilience; self-esteem; emotional regulation; adaptation; war; distress

◆ Introduction

The experience of war that a child undergoes indirectly through parental participation in combat affects not only current emotional responses but also the experience of fear, anxiety, and tension, uncertainty, and emotional vulnerability. The development of such states is determined by prolonged separation from parents, transformation of

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family interaction, increased psycho-emotional burden, and a constant anticipation of danger. In this context, clarification of the role of a child's personal characteristics that determine the features of psycho-emotional adaptation is necessary. Insufficient clarity of these patterns complicates the timely identification of children at risk and may lead to the consolidation of maladaptive states, disturbances in interpersonal interaction, and further complications in mental development.

Psycho-emotional states of children in wartime acquire a complex character and encompass affective, behavioural, and adaptive levels of response to prolonged stress. In the study by V. Voronova *et al.* (2025), researchers analysed the psycho-emotional state of adolescents in wartime through indicators of anxiety, emotional tension, and maladaptive manifestations. Researchers reported that the experience of war-related threat was accompanied by increased internal tension, reduced emotional stability, and difficulties in everyday functioning, which indicates disruption of psycho-emotional adaptation and increased risk of maladaptive responses. The features of psycho-emotional states of children in wartime were examined by O. Koliada & N. Onishchenko (2024), who focused on fear, anxiety, emotional lability, and behavioural changes. Researchers noted that the dominance of negative emotional experiences is associated with impaired self-regulation mechanisms, increased sensitivity to stressors, and reduced capacity for constructive emotional responding. Changes in children's mental health during war were analysed by E. McElroy *et al.* (2024) using a large sample of parental assessments. The assessment demonstrated an increase in anxiety and depressive manifestations, which confirms the cumulative character of stress exposure and the dependence of psycho-emotional disturbances on the intensity of trauma. Indicators of mental well-being in adolescents exposed to war were evaluated by R. Goto *et al.* (2024) through analysis of emotional state, symptoms of psychological distress, and overall level of psychological adaptation. Researchers reported the spread of anxiety and post-traumatic manifestations combined with emotional exhaustion, which highlights deterioration of internal well-being, weakening of adaptive resources, and risk of transformation of situational reactions into more persistent maladaptive states.

Personal characteristics of children in wartime determine the variability of psycho-emotional responses and influence the balance between adaptive and maladaptive forms of stress experience. I. Babik *et al.* (2025) examined psychological and pedagogical foundations of developing emotional resilience in children. Researchers established that the development of emotional stability, self-control skills, and the ability to process experiences constructively reduces the intensity of destructive reactions and increases the adaptive potential of the child. O. Prokofieva *et al.* (2025) analysed the possibilities of preventing stress and anxiety in children under martial law conditions. The results indicated that the effectiveness of psychological support depends on the development

of emotional regulation mechanisms, the ability to maintain internal control, and the transition to more structured forms of responding to stressors. The development of resilience among Ukrainian learners under wartime conditions was described in the study by V. Syniuk *et al.* (2025). Researchers observed that resilience functions as an internal resource that supports psychological balance, mitigates the impact of traumatic experiences, and creates a basis for restoring emotional stability.

The influence of parental participation in combat on children's psychological state manifests through changes in family interaction, experiences of separation, and increased emotional tension in everyday life. The psychological features of the perception of war by children in the primary school age group, according to the researcher Y.V. Tsiuryk (2025), are influenced by the type of family to which the child belongs – military or civilian. Researchers reported that the family context directly determines the content of a child's representations of war, the intensity of anxiety-related experiences, and the type of emotional responses, while the experience of living in a military family intensifies the personalisation of threat. Psychological features of emotional responses of children of military personnel during periods of separation from parents were described by Kh.D. Poliakova (2025). The findings indicated that prolonged absence of one parent complicates emotional self-regulation, increases internal instability, and worsens the course of adaptation. Psychotherapeutic support for families of military personnel during wartime was examined by V. Demydiuk & E. Balashov (2023) in relation to psychological difficulties arising within the family system. Researchers noted that emotional exhaustion, tension, and traumatic experiences of adults reduce the child's adaptive capacities and increase the risk of maladaptive states.

Despite the availability of studies on psycho-emotional states of children in wartime, the influence of individual psychological characteristics on the experience of stress, anxiety, and emotional maladaptation in children from families of military personnel remains insufficiently examined. The purpose of the study was to analyse the role of personal characteristics in shaping the psycho-emotional states of children whose parents participated in combat. The objectives of the study were to identify theoretical approaches to the analysis of psycho-emotional states of children in crisis conditions; to examine the role of anxiety, resilience, self-esteem, and emotional regulation in shaping psycho-emotional states; to generalise psychological mechanisms underlying the development of adaptive and maladaptive states in children from families of combat participants.

◆ Materials and Methods

The study was theoretical and was designed as an analytical synthesis of approaches to the analysis of children's psycho-emotional states in the context of wartime influence. The subject of the study comprised academic approaches to psycho-emotional states of children in crisis

conditions, personal characteristics as determinants of psycho-emotional responses, the influence of parental participation in combat on the psychological state of children, and mechanisms underlying the development of adaptive and maladaptive states. The analysis utilised materials from international organisations, including the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2025; n.d.) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2025), to clarify psychosocial consequences of war for children and families. Materials from the World Health Organization (WHO) (Ommeren *et al.*, 2015; WHO, 2025) and UNICEF recommendations (Hijazi & Snider, 2018) regarding the psychological support needs of children in crisis conditions were analysed. Guidelines of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC, 2007) were also incorporated to define international principles for organising psychosocial support for children in emergency and wartime settings. The theoretical synthesis was grounded in academic sources addressing psycho-emotional states of children in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war since 2022, including K. Dziwak *et al.* (2025), and M.V. Markova *et al.* (2025), as these sources most comprehensively reflected the specific features of wartime experiences of children from families of combat participants. Supplementary comparative material was drawn from selected studies based on armed conflicts in Syria (Perkins *et al.*, 2018; Veronese *et al.*, 2021; Awad & Almazroui, 2025) and Palestine (Gaza Strip) (Thabet *et al.*, 2016; El-Khodary *et al.*, 2020; Manzanero *et al.*, 2021), which enabled clarification of both general patterns of child war-related trauma and features determined by the Ukrainian socio-family context. The chronological scope of the source base covered the period from 2007 to 2025.

The analysis of personal determinants of psycho-emotional states of children from families of combat participants was conducted using general theoretical methods and research approaches aimed at analysing, comparing, systematising, and synthesising academic conceptions of the problem under investigation. Theoretical analysis identified the main approaches to examining psycho-emotional states of children in crisis conditions, including stress-based, trauma-focused, adaptive, and resilience-oriented approaches, and clarified their explanatory potential for interpreting children's psycho-emotional responses under wartime influence. The comparative method enabled comparison of interpretations of the roles of anxiety, resilience, self-esteem, and emotional regulation as factors of vulnerability or psychological protection, which allowed identification of common and divergent positions across domestic and international sources. Synthesis and systematisation organised academic concepts into key thematic domains, including psycho-emotional states of children in wartime, personal determinants of these states, the family context of parental participation in combat, and mechanisms underlying the development of adaptive and maladaptive responses. Generalisation and interpretation established relationships between children's personal characteristics, features of the family environment, and variability of

psycho-emotional states, and identified key mechanisms underlying their development under conditions of prolonged wartime stress. The study also applied a systems approach to examine psycho-emotional states as outcomes of interaction between individual and environmental factors, and a structural-functional approach to analyse the role of specific psychological mechanisms in supporting adaptation or contributing to maladaptation in children.

◆ Results and Discussion

Theoretical approaches to the analysis of psycho-emotional states of children

Theoretical analysis of academic sources enabled the identification of four main approaches to explaining psycho-emotional states of children in crisis and wartime conditions: stress-based, trauma-focused, adaptive, and resilience-oriented. Each of these focuses on a specific aspect of psycho-emotional responding, encompassing both immediate reactions to stressors and consequences of trauma, processes of adaptation, and resources for psychological recovery. This determines the relevance of their systematic comparison for a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying the development of psycho-emotional states of children in crisis conditions. Within the stress-based approach, psycho-emotional states of children are interpreted as a result of the interaction between the intensity of stressors, their subjective appraisal, and available coping resources. The analysis indicates that in wartime conditions anxiety, emotional tension, and distress develop not only under the influence of acute extreme events, but also as a result of the prolonged accumulation of everyday stressors, among which uncertainty, perceived threat, forced lifestyle changes, and loss of predictability in the daily environment play a central role (Sousa & Veronese, 2022; Schwarzer, 2024). Synthesised data also indicate that the intensity of psycho-emotional states depends on how a child interprets the threat and the extent to which coping strategies are employed to reduce internal tension (Lim *et al.*, 2022). However, as noted by L. Hazer & G. Gredebäck (2023), the idea of reducing the psycho-emotional states of children to those caused by stress alone does not account for the long-term effects of those wars on the children, or for the reasons that those psycho-emotional states become persistent over time within those individual children.

Within the approach to assessing the psycho-emotional states of children that focuses upon the traumas that those children have experienced, those psycho-emotional states are considered to be the result of the events that impact the children's sense of safety and their ability to act according to their developed expectations of their environment. As described by researchers who have investigated the effects of war on children, various symptoms of PTSD, depression, and anxiety develop as a result of these traumas (Thabet *et al.*, 2016; Perkins *et al.*, 2018). It was also established that repeated exposure to traumatic events, prolonged presence under threat, and absence of a safe environment intensified

psycho-emotional disturbances and contributed to their consolidation (Manzanero *et al.*, 2021). In families of combat participants, psycho-emotional difficulties of children may be associated not only with direct exposure to traumatic events, but also with living alongside a parent experiencing service-related post-traumatic disturbances. This provides grounds to consider vicarious traumatisation as a potential mechanism underlying child distress, as the psychological state of a significant adult and the everyday family context may mediate the child's experience of threat, tension, and emotional instability (Cramm *et al.*, 2022). However, P. Ferrara *et al.* (2025) emphasised that the trauma-focused approach, despite its strong explanatory value for severe forms of maladaptation, frames psycho-emotional states predominantly through a pathological lens and therefore requires extension with models that account for variability of responses and partial preservation of psychological functioning.

Within the adaptive approach, psycho-emotional states are interpreted as outcomes of the process of adjustment to altered living conditions rather than solely as direct consequences of stress or trauma. Children in wartime demonstrate different response trajectories, ranging from pronounced maladaptation to gradual stabilisation of psycho-emotional states, with this process determined by a combination of individual characteristics and environmental conditions (Hazer & Gredebäck, 2023; Recka *et al.*, 2025). Significant factors of adaptation also include family support, preservation of access to familiar social roles, availability of a structured daily environment, and a

sense of at least partial predictability of life circumstances (Selman & Dilworth-Bart, 2024). UNICEF's recommendations for psychosocial support for children in crisis situations stressed the importance of staged and context-sensitive support. This is because children's adaptation in these situations is not a straight line and can involve emotional disturbances coming back when new stressors are present (Hijazi & Snider, 2018).

The resilience-oriented approach looks at psycho-emotional states as protective resources that keep things stable or help people get back to a healthy mental state when things go wrong. The study found that resilience, good family relationships, and social support made it less likely for people to have maladaptive states, even when they had been through trauma. This is because these things help people deal with negative experiences and control their emotions (Veronese *et al.*, 2021; Slone & Peer, 2021). These resources do not remove stress or trauma, but they do help the child stay psychologically stable and get better faster after things that upset them (Elvevåg & DeLisi, 2022). However, H. Jafari *et al.* (2022) demonstrated that resilience cannot be considered a universal or stable protective mechanism, as its manifestations depend on life context, displacement experience, availability of support, and broader sociocultural conditions, and therefore it should be interpreted not as a fixed trait but as a dynamic process of interaction between the individual and the environment. For comparison of explanatory capacities of the stress-based, trauma-focused, adaptive, and resilience-oriented approaches, the results of the theoretical analysis are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparative analysis of theoretical approaches to explaining psycho-emotional states of children

Approach	Object of analysis	Key mechanism	Explanatory capacity	Limitations
Stress-based	Psycho-emotional responses to stressors	Cognitive appraisal of threat and coping strategies	Explains development of anxiety, distress, emotional tension	Limited consideration of depth of traumatic experiences
Trauma-focused	Consequences of experiencing extreme and traumatic events	Traumatic impact and disruption of sense of safety	Explains PTSD, depressive manifestations, emotional disorganisation	Limited consideration of adaptive forms of response
Adaptive	Process of adjustment to altered living conditions	Interaction of personal and environmental factors	Explains dynamics of psycho-emotional states and variability of responses	Less attention to deep mechanisms of traumatisation
Resilience-oriented	Protective resources of the child in crisis	Resilience, social support, family resources	Explains psychological stability, recovery, reduction of maladaptation	Dependent on life context

Note: PTSD – post-traumatic stress disorder

Source: compiled by the authors based on M. Slone & A. Peer (2021), I.C.Z. Lim *et al.* (2022), C. Sousa & G. Veronese (2022), B. Elvevåg & L.E. DeLisi (2022), L. Hazer & G. Gredebäck (2023), R. Schwarzer (2024), K. Recka *et al.* (2025)

Table 1 indicates that differences between theoretical approaches are primarily determined by different levels of interpretation of children's psycho-emotional states. The stress-based and trauma-focused approaches are oriented towards explaining the consequences of negative wartime influences, yet they differ in analytical depth: the stress-based approach describes mainly situational and cumulative reactions, including anxiety, tension, and distress, whereas the trauma-focused approach focuses on persistent and structured disturbances in mental functioning, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and emotional dysregulation. In contrast, the adaptive and resilience-oriented approaches shift the analytical focus from

negative manifestations to processes of adjustment and recovery resources, allowing for the explanation of variability in psycho-emotional responses of children under similar wartime conditions. The analysis of the stress-based model demonstrates insufficient consideration of the depth of traumatic experiences by children during the war. The trauma-focused model underrepresents the adaptive capacities that existed during that time period. The adaptive model does not always provide an explanation for the psychological disturbances for those children. Finally, while the resilience-oriented model considers some of the factors that may have provided those children with a means of coping with their traumatic experiences, it is limited in its

consideration of factors that can be applied universally to all children who experienced the war. Each of these models is likely to be utilised in conjunction with each other. Thus, the synthesis of these research studies leads to the conclusion that the best model for understanding the psychological and emotional responses of children during the war was an integrative model that considers each of the factors mentioned above.

Psycho-emotional states of children under war-related exposure

The analysis demonstrates that the psycho-emotional states of children in wartime conditions possess a complex, multi-tiered structure, encompassing both primary emotional responses (fear, anxiety, tension) and enduring maladaptive states (distress, post-traumatic stress disorder, emotional exhaustion). These states are not isolated; they constitute interconnected symptom complexes that may mutually reinforce each other (Scharpf *et al.*, 2023). The analysis reveals that a fundamental attribute of children's psycho-emotional responses is their dynamic nature: initial situational reactions, following extended exposure to stressors, may evolve into persistent forms of disturbance, thereby complicating their prompt identification and intervention (Miller & Rasmussen, 2024).

The analysis of various studies conducted in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war indicates that the psycho-emotional states of children within this region have developed as a result of the stress and traumatic experiences that these children have endured. Researchers have reported that children within these regions experience symptoms of anxiety, depression, emotional lability, sleep disturbances, somatic symptoms, and a general feeling of threat (Markova *et al.*, 2025). Furthermore, the war within Ukraine has been noted to have contributed to the development of these negative emotional states within the population of Ukraine in particular (Savelyuk, 2024; Saveliuk & Zelenkova, 2024). Additionally, studies into the experiences of those who have been internally displaced as a result of the war indicate that these psycho-emotional states are the result of the experiences of these children of displacement (Dzivak *et al.*, 2025). Finally, a report of the United Nations Children's Fund (2025) regarding mental health and psychosocial work with those affected by the war in Ukraine states that children within these conditions generally experience high levels of anxiety and a need to restore a sense of safety and stability. Thus, as a result of these factors, it is clear that the psycho-emotional states of the children within Ukraine are the result of the interaction of these various stress and traumatic factors, and that their complexity is increasing as a result.

The analysis of international studies shows that the structure of children's psycho-emotional state in different regions of the world is similar, indicating the universality of some psycho-emotional states in children. Primary reactions include fear and anxiety, which reflect an immediate response to threat, yet under conditions of

prolonged persistence, they transform into distress and more complex mental disturbances (Koutoulaki, 2025). Studies conducted in the Gaza Strip show that a high frequency of traumatic events is directly associated with the development of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety disorders, with these conditions co-occurring and forming complex symptom clusters (Thabet *et al.*, 2016; El-Khodary *et al.*, 2020). The analysis further reveals that psycho-emotional disturbances have a network structure, within which individual symptoms mutually reinforce one another, contributing to their stabilisation and increasing complexity (Scharpf *et al.*, 2023). In a systematic review, J. Moreno-Chaparro *et al.* (2022) emphasised that the intensity of these states varies depending on the duration of war, socio-economic conditions, and the level of support, which highlights the importance of contextual factors. These findings highlight that psycho-emotional states of children have a universal structure, yet their expression and course depend on the specific environment.

There is a different line of research that looks at the shift from temporary to long-term psycho-emotional states. This process is gradual and builds on itself: initial responses like fear, anxiety, and tension can turn into chronic distress, post-traumatic symptoms, and emotional exhaustion when they happen over and over again and last a long time. The main mechanisms underlying this transition include the accumulation of stress experience, depletion of adaptive resources, and the absence of a stabilising environment that could interrupt this process (Miller & Rasmussen, 2024). Emotional exhaustion functions not only as a consequence but also as a factor that further deepens psycho-emotional disturbances, since it reduces the capacity for effective coping (Markova *et al.*, 2025). At the same time, evidence shows that, in the presence of family and social support, this process may be partially reversible, which reflects the dynamic character of psycho-emotional states (Veronese *et al.*, 2021). Recommendations of the World Health Organization on mental health, trauma care, and rehabilitation in wartime conditions emphasise that timely identification of such states and early intervention are essential for preventing their chronicity and progression into clinical forms of mental disorders (WHO, 2025).

Psycho-emotional states of children in wartime conditions develop under the combined influence of two key mechanisms: chronic stress and traumatic experience. A.M. Thabet *et al.* (2016) and B. El-Khodary *et al.* (2020) confirmed the determining role of traumatic events in the development of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety manifestations, which underlines the significance of direct exposure to threat in deepening psycho-emotional disturbances. In contrast, the study conducted by M.V. Markova *et al.* (2025) focused on stress, emotional tension, and the way in which such elements can manifest physically within those who are enduring such tension. While these types of studies appear to be contradictory to those examining trauma, they are, in fact, examining different levels of the development of the children's

psycho-emotional states – those at the traumatic level vs. those at the stress-related level. Furthermore, these studies support the interpretations related to adaptation and resilience within the children, regardless of whether the children experienced positive or negative outcomes as a result of their exposure to those specific stressor or trauma-related factors.

Consequently, the psycho-emotional states of children in wartime contexts exhibit a complex structure that integrates situational responses and enduring disturbances. Their development is influenced by the interplay of chronic stress, traumatic experiences, and accessible support resources, with a gradual shift towards more enduring forms resulting from the accumulation of adverse influences. This confirms the necessity for early identification, thorough evaluation, and multi-tiered support for children to avert the emergence of maladaptive conditions.

Personal determinants of psycho-emotional states of children in war

Aside from the previously mentioned determinants of psycho-emotional states of children in conditions of war, other significant determinants include characteristics such as anxiety, resilience, self-esteem, and emotional regulation. These characteristics help to determine the way that the children respond to the conditions of war – either appropriately and with control, or in the development of maladaptive psychological states. Yet, some of the constructs that were discussed in the literature were more thoroughly examined than others; anxiety, resilience, and emotional regulation were explored in more depth than the determinant of self-esteem (Urbański *et al.*, 2024; Lotzin *et al.*, 2025; Keleynikov *et al.*, 2025). Thus, each of these personal determinants can be analysed as components of a system of those personal, vulnerable characteristics and the protective characteristics within the children. In the studies examined, anxiety predominantly manifests as a component of psycho-emotional vulnerability that heightens the probability of progression from situational tension to enduring symptoms of distress, depression, and post-traumatic manifestations. In a study examining Ukrainian children displaced to Poland following the onset of full-scale war, researchers correlated anxiety and depressive symptoms directly with coping strategies and resilience. This finding supports the interpretation of anxiety not merely as an emotional state but also as an indicator of diminished adaptive capacity (Urbański *et al.*, 2024). Studies on children from the Gaza Strip show a similar pattern, where trauma from the war is linked to post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety as different ways of showing psychological maladaptation (Thabet *et al.*, 2016). So, anxiety has two roles: it is a direct response to a threat, and it shows that someone is less able to deal with stressful situations mentally. In this respect, the conclusions of B. El-Khodary *et al.* (2020) align with the position of A. Koutoulaki (2025), who interprets anxiety not as an isolated symptom but as an element of a broader

complex of mental health disturbances in children during war, which indicates its central role in the structure of psycho-emotional vulnerability.

Resilience is interpreted as a psychological resource that mitigates the destructive impact of cumulative traumatisation. During the Russian-Ukrainian war, researchers explicitly address the buffering effect of resilient coping in relation to symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, which supports considering resilience as a factor that does not eliminate stress but modifies its psycho-emotional consequences (Lotzin *et al.*, 2025). Resilience was also examined in relation to anxiety, depression, and coping strategies, which confirms its role as a factor that mediates the impact of adverse experience on mental state (Urbański *et al.*, 2024). A similar interpretation appears in a study on societal and community resilience among the populations of Ukraine and Poland, in which resilience is conceptualised as a multi-level resource relevant at both individual and social levels (Kimhi *et al.*, 2023a). This supports the view that resilience in children cannot be reduced to an individual trait but develops through the interaction of supportive relationships, experiences of control, and a safe environment, functioning as a mechanism that mediates the relationship between accumulated trauma and the severity of post-traumatic symptoms.

Self-esteem is represented less directly in the analysed sources, yet its significance as a personal determinant of psycho-emotional states is evident through related constructs such as self-perception, self-efficacy, and psychological well-being. Positive self-perception is associated with greater internal stability and a stronger capacity to maintain functioning under stress (Sarżyńska-Mazurek *et al.*, 2024). This supports interpreting self-esteem as a factor that mediates experiences of helplessness, loss of control, and emotional destabilisation. Nevertheless, the influence of self-esteem on psycho-emotional states varies across developmental stages. In early childhood, its content is more strongly determined by emotional support from significant adults, a sense of acceptance, and the stability of the immediate social environment, whereas in adolescence, the role of self-awareness, self-reflection, social comparison, and sensitivity to one's social position increases (Krauss *et al.*, 2020; Katsantonis *et al.*, 2023). Under conditions of war, this produces age-related differences in the experience of anxiety, uncertainty, loss of control, and emotional instability. Evidence also indicates that individual psychological resources are associated with variability in the experience of war-related exposure (Guo, 2025). In this context, M.L. Temple *et al.* (2024) examined the relationship between resilience, stress, and well-being, which aligns more broadly with the interpretation of positive self-perception as an internal resource supporting psychological functioning in wartime conditions. Self-esteem may therefore be considered an internal resource of subjective stability: its reduction increases sensitivity to stress, whereas its relative preservation supports the integrity of self-concept during war.

Emotional regulation emerges as one of the most sensitive mechanisms through which war-related experience affects the psycho-emotional state of a child. Disruptions in emotional regulation within the family system increase the risk of maladaptation in children, since they complicate the processing of fear, tension, and uncertainty (Kelynikov *et al.*, 2025). Emotional regulation has also been examined as a factor of mental health in refugee children, which supports interpreting it as a mechanism that either constrains or intensifies negative emotional states (Çelik & Özkan, 2025). A similar pattern was identified in the context of traumatic experience, based on which emotional competence is associated with the effectiveness of coping with trauma-related consequences (Zhylin *et al.*, 2024). Emotional regulation constitutes not only a discrete skill but also a central link between war-related stress and the psycho-emotional state of a child, since it determines whether the experience of threat is integrated into experience or consolidated in the form of destructive reactions. In this respect, J.E. Opie *et al.* (2024) emphasised that emotional and behavioural outcomes of children in military families depend on broader family functioning, which aligns with the interpretation of emotional regulation as a process closely associated not only with individual but also with family resources.

The results of the theoretical analysis support considering anxiety, resilience, self-esteem, and emotional regulation as interconnected personal determinants of psycho-emotional states of children in wartime conditions. Anxiety increases vulnerability to maladaptation, resilience performs a buffering function, self-esteem supports or weakens internal stability, and emotional regulation determines the manner in which stress and traumatic experience are processed. Together, they form a psychological profile that determines the intensity, duration, and qualitative characteristics of psycho-emotional responding in children of combatants.

The impact of parental participation in hostilities on children

The analysis indicates that the impact of parental participation in hostilities on children's psycho-emotional state is mediated primarily by the family context, rather than by the mere fact of military service or combat experience of the adult. Key mechanisms of this influence include separation from parents, changes in the emotional state of adults, increased tension within the family, disruption of established patterns of family interaction, and a reduction in parental resources. The structure of the family also acquires significance, since the child's psycho-emotional responses differ depending on whether a complete family system is maintained or the child lives in a single-parent, guardianship, reconstituted, or distanced family, where one parent is absent for extended periods due to military service. Parental war experience acquires psychological significance for the child when it alters the sense of safety, predictability, and emotional availability within the family. The impact of

parental participation in hostilities therefore requires consideration not as an isolated external factor but as a process of transformation of the family environment, within which children's psycho-emotional difficulties emerge or intensify (Eltanamy *et al.*, 2021; Wadsworth *et al.*, 2021).

Separation from parents constitutes a primary mechanism associated with mobilisation, active service, rotations, or forced family displacement. Analysis of the sources confirms that prolonged absence of one parent disrupts established attachment structures, reduces the sense of stability, and increases anticipation of danger (Wadsworth *et al.*, 2021; Zhylin *et al.*, 2024). Children experiencing such separation more frequently demonstrate anxiety, emotional instability, difficulties with self-soothing, and behavioural responses associated with uncertainty in the family situation (Kent *et al.*, 2021). In this context, J.E. Opie *et al.* (2024) indicated that the consequences of separation vary across children and depend on the duration of absence, the quality of communication with the absent parent, and the level of family support, which means that separation operates through broader conditions of family functioning. The psycho-emotional effect of parental separation is therefore determined not only by physical distance but also by the extent to which the family maintains psychological connectedness during periods of enforced absence.

The impact of parental combat experience on the child's psycho-emotional state depends on characteristics of the family environment, including family structure, configuration of caregiving relationships, stability of family roles, level of emotional support, and preservation of internal family resilience. In intact families, where emotional availability of adults, role consistency, and supportive interaction are maintained, war-related strain is more likely to be partially compensated by greater stability of daily functioning and preservation of the child's sense of safety. In single-parent families, under conditions of parental separation, prolonged absence, or transfer of caregiving functions to guardians or other significant adults, the child's psycho-emotional state is more vulnerable to destabilisation, since the risk of reduced support, emotional distance, and heightened experience of uncertainty increases (Diab *et al.*, 2015; Koliadenko *et al.*, 2024). This corresponds with the position of R. Gribble *et al.* (2020), who emphasise the importance of considering family context and the configuration of military families in analyses of psychosocial consequences of war experience. Thus, family structure functions as a modifying factor through which parental combat experience translates into specific psycho-emotional outcomes for the child.

Another mechanism is the emotional state of parents, especially the presence of post-traumatic, anxious, depressive, or exhaustion-related symptoms. Analysis demonstrates that post-traumatic stress disorder, complex PTSD in parents, and general emotional distress in adults create an adverse psycho-emotional climate within the family, which reduces the quality of support available to the child and complicates emotional processing of war-related

experiences (Karatzias *et al.*, 2023; Keleynikov *et al.*, 2025). Emotional instability in adults influences the child not only through direct observation of anxiety or exhaustion but also through changes in communication styles, responses to everyday challenges, and the overall emotional atmosphere within the family (Lev-ari *et al.*, 2024). Within a broader theoretical framework, K. Erlewein *et al.* (2024) noted that parental service and cumulative adverse experiences of children should be examined jointly, since psychological strain in adults increases children's vulnerability to their own stress exposure. Therefore, the emotional state of parents performs an active mediating function in the development of children's psycho-emotional states.

Another of the factors that contribute to the negative impact of the war on children is the tension that often exists within the families. Such tension is worsened by the impact of the war, fatigue, changes in roles within the family, and the depletion of the resources of the parents. The impact of the war on the children is felt not just in the way that the war directly impacts the children, but also due to the impact of the war upon the parenting practices and behaviours of the adults within those families (Eltanamy *et al.*, 2021; Mladenović *et al.*, 2021). Families who experience tension between its members, or whose parents begin to exhibit irritability or fatigue due to the continued impact of the war often experience poorer emotional and behavioural

functioning from their children (Chemerys *et al.*, 2025). C. Awad & K. Almazroui (2025) have explored the relationship between traumatic experience, mental health, and the development of resilience among adolescents in Syria and found that the relationship exists within the context of the family system. The tension that exists within the families often has a direct impact upon the mental health of their children, and is, therefore, one of the factors that contributes to the worsening mental health of those children.

Another area of synthesis looks at the need for family-oriented support. This is because children's mental and emotional problems during wartime can't be fully understood without looking at the system of important relationships. When helping kids in emergencies and wars, you need to think about how stressed the parents are, how well the family interacts, how tired the adults are, and how well the family can give kids a sense of predictability (IOM, 2025; UNICEF, n.d.). The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2007) guidelines stress that children's mental health in times of crisis should be looked at in a multi-layered system of support, where the family can either be a main source of safety or a risk factor. Consequently, parental involvement in hostilities necessitates evaluation not solely via individual outcomes for the adult, but also through alterations in the functioning of the entire family system. Table 2 shows these mechanisms in a structured way.

Table 2. Family mechanisms of the impact of parental combat experience on children

Family factor	Psychological content	Main mechanism of influence on the child	Most typical consequences for the child
Separation from parents	Temporary or prolonged separation, lack of direct contact, uncertainty	Reduction in the sense of safety and stability	Anxiety, emotional instability, behavioural difficulties
Change in family structure	Intact, single-parent, guardianship, or altered family configuration; redistribution of caregiving functions	Modification of care stability, continuity of presence of a significant adult, organisation of daily family functioning	Experience of uncertainty, reduced sense of safety, emotional instability, difficulties in adaptation
PTSD and distress in parents	Emotional instability, overload, exhaustion	Reduced emotional availability of the adult	Distress, secondary anxiety, deterioration of well-being
Family tension	Conflict, role changes, instability of family interaction	Destabilisation of the child's everyday environment	Emotional maladaptation, behavioural disturbances
Depletion of parental resources	Parental burnout, reduced sensitivity, fatigue	Weakening of support and containment of the child's emotions	Increased reactivity, difficulties in self-regulation
Supportive family environment	Predictability, stability, emotional availability	Buffering of stress and mitigation of war-related impact	Partial stabilisation of the state, better adaptation

Source: compiled by the authors based on IASC (2007), M. Diab *et al.* (2015), Z. Hijazi & L. Snider (2018), S.M. Wadsworth *et al.* (2021), H. Eltanamy *et al.* (2021), J. Kent *et al.* (2021), N. Mladenović *et al.* (2021), S. Kimhi *et al.* (2023a), T. Karatzias *et al.* (2023), N.V. Koliadenko *et al.* (2024), C. Awad & K. Almazroui (2025), N. Chemerys *et al.* (2025)

Examination of Table 2 reveals that the influence of parental involvement in hostilities functions through various interconnected familial pathways. Separation diminishes the sense of safety and triggers primary anxiety; PTSD and emotional distress in parents diminish the quality of emotional support; familial tension converts war-related stress into the child's daily experience; and the depletion of parental resources compromises the ability to maintain stabilising interactions. A supportive family environment has the most potential to make up for these risks because it can lessen their overall impact. Parental combat experience does not inherently dictate the child's psycho-emotional state; rather, the critical factor is the

manner in which this experience alters familial relationships, the emotional climate, and the daily operations of the household. This substantiates the relevance of a family-oriented approach to psychological support for children in families of combatants.

Integration of approaches and mechanisms of development of psycho-emotional states

The analysis undertaken allows the generalisation that children's psycho-emotional states in wartime form through the simultaneous action of several interrelated mechanisms, namely accumulation of stress, cognitive interpretation of threat, characteristics of emotional regulation,

influence of the family environment, and the presence or absence of protective resources. This multifactorial character indicates that no single approach – stress-based, trauma-based, adaptive, or resilience-based – provides an exhaustive explanation of children's psycho-emotional responses when considered in isolation. The synthesis therefore rests on an integrative model, in which the war experience of the child or family is mediated by internal and external factors and results either in adaptive stabilisation or in maladaptive consolidation of negative states (Ommeren *et al.*, 2015; Oliinyk *et al.*, 2025).

Accumulation of stress combines the impact of acute war events with prolonged everyday stressors. The prolonged character of strain, rather than a single traumatic event, determines the transition from situational emotional responses to persistent distress, exhaustion, and disruption of adaptation (Sokhor *et al.*, 2024; Amsalem *et al.*, 2025). In this context, stress accumulation has a cumulative character: uncertainty, forced displacement, separation, changes in daily routines, lack of control, and repeated exposure to threat signals do not merely coexist but reinforce each other. War-related impact therefore produces not a linear but a cascading dynamic of psycho-emotional strain, where new stressors build upon already weakened adaptive resources of the child. Within a broader humanitarian framework, M.V. Ommeren *et al.* (2015) emphasised that mental health in emergency contexts requires consideration of the interaction between acute stress and chronic psychosocial burden, which corresponds with this interpretation.

Cognitive interpretation of threat determines how the child understands danger, loss, separation, and uncertainty. Comparison of the analysed approaches indicates that similar external circumstances may lead to different intensities of psycho-emotional states depending on whether the child perceives the situation as uncontrollable, temporary, personalised, or manageable in the presence of support (Kimhi *et al.*, 2023b). Cognitive interpretation explains why some children exhibit predominant fear and anticipation of catastrophic outcomes, whereas others demonstrate mobilisation of adaptive resources. In this domain, the mechanism of psycho-emotional state development is linked to internal representations of safety, control, and the future. The IASC (2007) guidelines on mental health and psychosocial support in emergencies stress that helping children in crisis should include not only lowering outside stressors but also making the environment more understandable, predictable, and meaningful, since these things make threats less dangerous. So, cognitive interpretation is a key link between outside factors and a person's mental and emotional state.

Emotional regulation governs the processing of events and the subsequent storage of emotional reactions. The synthesis shows that when emotional regulation is poor, war experiences more often turn into long-lasting forms of anxiety, emotional exhaustion, irritability, or behavioural disorganisation. On the other hand, when emotional regulation is good, threatening experiences can be integrated

without leading to chronic maladaptation (Keleynikov *et al.*, 2025; Khadzhyradieva *et al.*, 2025). This mechanism is especially important in childhood because emotional regulation happens not only on an individual level but also through interactions with adults and the family system. So, emotional regulation can't be seen as just an internal skill. It depends on whether the child gets emotional support, whether adults show stable response patterns, and whether there are safe ways for the child to interact with others. V. Vus *et al.* (2023) looked at the barriers and facilitators of mental health and psychosocial support interventions for children and found that psychological support works best when the environment can maintain regulatory mechanisms instead of just reducing symptoms.

Family influence acts as a principal intermediary between the wartime experiences of adults and the psychological and emotional states of children. Separation from parents, post-traumatic stress disorder in parents, emotional distress in adults, family conflict, parental burnout, and diminished emotional availability create a secondary risk environment for the child, wherein war-related stress intensifies and becomes ingrained in daily life (Eltanamy *et al.*, 2021; Chemerys *et al.*, 2025). Family structure also affects this effect. For example, in two-parent families with an emotionally available adult, the effects of war-related stress may be lessened. On the other hand, in single-parent, guardian, or changed family structures, the risk of anxiety, emotional instability, and feeling uncertain goes up (Koliadenko *et al.*, 2024). At the same time, a supportive family environment allows the family to act as a buffer, lowering the level of distress and stabilising the person's mental and emotional state. This line of thinking is backed up by UNICEF (n.d.) and IASC (2007). They say that psychosocial support for children in humanitarian settings should always include stress on parents or carers, family functioning, and safety in everyday life as main goals of intervention (Hijazi & Snider, 2018). In this case, the family isn't just a background variable; it's a structural mechanism that shapes how children feel and think.

The balance between risk and protective factors reflects the relationship between vulnerability and psychological protection factors. Analysis of the impact of war on the mental health of refugee populations indicates that factors such as the experience of anxiety, emotional regulation deficits, instability within the family environment, and the traumatic experiences that those refugee populations have endured represent a line of risk (Dufynets *et al.*, 2024). However, factors like the presence of psychological resilience, social support systems, positive self-perceptions, and the presence of positive relationship with others in the individual's life represent the line of psychological protection against the risks that emerge from the experience of war and its related traumas. For this reason, the psycho-emotional state of a child is appropriately understood as the result of a dynamic balance between stressor pressure and available coping resources. Psychosocial support requires a multi-level structure precisely because mechanisms of risk

and protection operate simultaneously at the individual, family, and social levels (Ommeren *et al.*, 2015).

Thus, the results of the theoretical synthesis support the view that an integrative model is the most productive for explaining the psycho-emotional states of children in war-time conditions, as it combines stress-based, trauma-based, adaptation-based, and resilience-based approaches. This model enables simultaneous consideration of stress accumulation, the specificity of threat interpretation, the role of emotional regulation, family mediation, and the balance between risk and protective factors. Such a synthesis provides a theoretical basis for explaining the variability of psycho-emotional states among children of combatants and for substantiating multi-level psychological support.

◆ Conclusions

The synthesis of theoretical approaches to the analysis of children's psycho-emotional states indicated that their treatment in the academic literature is primarily framed within four approaches: stress-based, trauma-based, adaptation-based, and resilience-based. Each of these reflects a distinct level of analysis of children's psycho-emotional responses, from the initial reaction to a threat to long-term consequences of traumatising and the potential for psychological recovery. The isolated application of a single approach narrows the interpretation of psycho-emotional states, whereas their integration provides a more comprehensive explanation of the mechanisms underlying children's responses in crisis and wartime conditions. The analysis of children's psycho-emotional states under conditions of war identified five of the most common forms of response: anxiety, fear, distress, post-traumatic stress disorder, and emotional exhaustion. These states form an interconnected system of symptoms, and their intensity increases under prolonged exposure to stressors, forced displacement, separation from close others, and disruption of everyday stability. Evidence emphasised that the transition from situational reactions to stable maladaptive forms is cumulative and occurs through the interaction of chronic stress and traumatic experience.

The synthesis of personal determinants of children's psycho-emotional states confirmed the decisive role of anxiety, resilience, self-esteem, and emotional regulation. Anxiety is a vulnerability factor, resilience a protective resource, self-esteem acts as a regulatory factor for the emotional self-feeling, and emotional regulation is a factor in

the processing of stressful and traumatic experiences. The interaction of these factors determines whether the war has an influence upon the child of combatant in either the development of controlled emotions or the development of stable maladaptive emotional states. The significance of self-esteem is present at each developmental stage of the child. The impact of the parent's participation in combat has an impact upon the child in terms of the emotional distress that develops in the adults in the family, the tension within the family, and the weakening of the parental resources that support the child. For the child, the factor that is most important is the changes to the feeling of safety within the family that results from the parent's participation in combat. The influence of combat upon these factors is mitigated in families that contain two parents and an emotionally available adult, and is stronger within families with only one parent, guardian, or within altered families. Families that are supportive of the child can mitigate the impact of the war upon the child, whereas families that are exposed to conflict, exhaustion, or emotional instability within the adults in the family will have a stronger impact of the war upon the child. The synthesis of these factors has enabled the construction of a model that considers each of these factors in the determination of the emotional states of the children of combatants. The determination of the emotional states of these children is indicative of the need for forms of psychological support for these children at various levels within their lives and their communities.

A limitation of the study is its theoretical framework and dependence on the synthesis of academic sources, which restricts the potential for empirical validation of the identified patterns and their quantitative affirmation. Subsequent research should concentrate on the empirical analysis of the interrelations among individual traits, familial environment, and the psychological and emotional states of children of combatants, employing quantitative and longitudinal methodologies.

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◆ References

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Особистісні детермінанти психоемоційних станів дітей учасників бойових дій: теоретичний аналіз

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♦ **Анотація.** Метою дослідження був теоретичний аналіз впливу особистісних характеристик на психоемоційні стани дітей із сімей учасників бойових дій. Методологія ґрунтувалася на аналізі наукових джерел із проблеми психоемоційних станів дітей у кризових умовах, особистісних детермінант зазначених станів, сімейного впливу і механізмів адаптації та дезадаптації, що дало змогу шляхом теоретичного аналізу виокремити основні підходи до вивчення проблеми, через порівняння зіставити трактування ключових особистісних чинників, а завдяки систематизації, узагальненню та інтерпретації – визначити взаємозв'язки між особистісними характеристиками, сімейним контекстом і психоемоційними станами дітей. Результати аналізу засвідчили, що психоемоційні стани дітей у воєнних умовах формуються під впливом поєднання стресових і травматичних факторів, які мають як гострий, так і тривалий характер. Встановлено, що тривога, страх, дистрес, емоційне виснаження та посттравматичні прояви утворюють взаємопов'язану систему реакцій, інтенсивність якої зростає внаслідок накопичення стресового досвіду. Показано, що важливу роль відіграють особистісні детермінанти, зокрема тривожність, резильєнтність, самооцінка та емоційна регуляція, які визначають варіативність реагування дітей. Сімейний контекст, включаючи структуру сім'ї, емоційний стан батьків, якість взаємодії та умови розлуки, виступає ключовим посередником впливу війни на дитину. Узагальнення результатів дозволило визначити, що психоемоційні стани дітей учасників бойових дій формуються внаслідок взаємодії особистісних детермінант, сімейного контексту та тривалого воєнного впливу, що зумовлює їх варіативність від адаптивних реакцій до стійких дезадаптивних проявів. Отримані дані можуть бути використані психологами, психотерапевтами, соціальними працівниками, фахівцями системи освіти та сфери психічного здоров'я під час розроблення програм психологічної підтримки, психодіагностичного супроводу і профілактики дезадаптивних станів у дітей із сімей учасників бойових дій

♦ **Ключові слова:** тривожність; резильєнтність; самооцінка; емоційна регуляція; адаптація; війна; дистрес