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THE DYNAMIC TRANSFORMATION OF GENDER BARRIERS FOR UKRAINIAN WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION AFTER THE 2022 INVASION

The article investigates the dynamic transformation of gender barriers for Ukrainian women in higher education following the full-scale Russian invasion of February 2022. A mixed-methods design combines quantitative Psychological Capital (PsyCap) survey data from 72 members of the Ukrainian Association of Management Development and Business Education with qualitative findings from five Social Ecological Model-based focus groups involving 26 respondents. PsyCap analysis reveals that women demonstrate higher levels of Hope and Optimism than men while exhibiting lower and more homogeneous Resilience scores. Men display a paradoxical combination of relatively high Resilience and significantly reduced Hope, attributed to martial law mobility restrictions and intensified pressure to fulfil masculine roles. For women who remained in Ukraine, male conscription paradoxically created unprecedented career advancement opportunities while simultaneously generating impostor syndrome and acute institutional support deficits. Refugee women faced qualification recognition barriers, professional deskilling, language obstacles, and forced reversion to traditional caregiving roles. Women engaged in remote professional activity encountered

technological and infrastructural constraints, compounded by war-related stress. Sentiment analysis of focus group transcripts reveals a predominantly neutral-to-positive, task-oriented atmosphere consistent with adaptive psychological strategies under prolonged conflict. The COVID-19 pandemic is contextualised as preparatory stress-testing that readied women for crisis adaptation while reinforcing unequal domestic burden patterns. The study concludes that differentiated support strategies are required: mentoring and resilience-building programmes for women in Ukraine, targeted mechanisms for the recognition of qualifications for refugees, and flexible technological solutions for remote workers.

Keywords: *gender barriers; psychological capital; higher education; wartime Ukraine; impostor syndrome; forced displacement; double burden; women leadership*

JEL classification: *J16, I23, J24, Z13, D74*

Стаття досліджує динамічну трансформацію гендерних бар'єрів для українських жінок у вищій освіті після початку повномасштабного вторгнення Росії у лютому 2022 року. Дослідження реалізовано за змішаним методологічним дизайном: кількісний аналіз психологічного капіталу (*PsyCap*) проведено серед 72 членів Української асоціації розвитку менеджменту та бізнес-освіти; якісні дані зібрано в п'яти фокус-групах (26 респондентів) на засадах соціально-екологічної моделі. *PsyCap*-аналіз засвідчив, що жінки демонструють вищі рівні Надії та Оптимізму порівняно з чоловіками, водночас показуючи нижчі й більш гомогенні значення Стійкості. Чоловіки виявляють парадоксальне поєднання відносно високої Стійкості та суттєво зниженої Надії, що пояснюється обмеженнями на пересування за умов воєнного стану та посиленням тиском традиційних маскулінних ролей. Для жінок, які залишилися в Україні, мобілізація чоловіків-колег парадоксально відкрила безпрецедентні можливості кар'єрного зростання, водночас породивши синдром самозванця та гострий дефіцит інституційної підтримки. Жінки-біженки зіткнулися з бар'єрами визнання кваліфікацій, професійною де-кваліфікацією, мовними труднощами та вимушеним поверненням до традиційних ролей доглядальниць. Жінки, що підтримують дистанційну діяльність, потерпали від технологічних та інфраструктурних обмежень в умовах воєнного стресу. Сентимент-аналіз транскриптів фокус-груп виявив переважно нейтрально-позитивну, орієнтовану на завдання атмосферу, що відображає адаптивні психологічні стратегії в умовах тривалого конфлікту. Пандемія *COVID-19* розглядається як контекстуальний «стрес-тест», що підготував жінок до кризової адаптації, але водночас закріпив нерівномірний розподіл домашніх обов'язків. Дослідження обґрунтовує потребу в диференційованих стратегіях підтримки: менторських і *resilience*-програмах для жінок в Україні, механізмах визнання кваліфікацій для біженок та гнучких технологічних рішеннях для дистанційних працівників.

Ключові слова: *гендерні бар'єри; психологічний капітал; вища освіта; воєнна Україна; синдром самозванця; вимушене переміщення; подвійне навантаження; жіноче лідерство*

JEL classification: *J16, I23, J24, Z13, D74*

Statement of the problem. Prior to the invasion, Ukraine had made notable progress in gender equality, as evidenced by its 66th ranking out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report 2023 (compared to 81st in 2022) [1]. The Gender Equality Index, which is based on women's political participation, also demonstrated significant progress in 2022, rising to 100th out of 156 countries [1]. Moreover, the higher education (HE) system in Ukraine has long been a female-dominated field. Partially, this could be explained by its perception as a “nurturing” profession, perfectly aligning with traditional gender roles [2]. In pre-war Ukraine, 46.3% of academics were women, which is considerably higher

than in countries like the Netherlands (26.4%), the Czech Republic (26.6%), Germany (27.9%), Luxembourg (28.1%), and France (28.3%) [3] – a figure that nevertheless conceals important seniority disparities, with women significantly underrepresented in the highest academic and managerial positions [4].

At the same time, the HE sector in Ukraine has historically been associated with lower salaries (though high prestige) compared to male-dominated fields such as general business, IT, or engineering, contributing to its feminisation [5]. Before the full-scale invasion, female academics managed to combine professional duties with the time-consuming nature of homecare and childcare – the phenomenon known as the “double burden” or “second shift” [6] – without substantial losses to their career performance. The classical “glass ceiling” concept [7] represents invisible barriers to leadership roles created by gender stereotypes in HE [8]. Correspondingly, the academic landscape was characterised by vertical and horizontal segregation, with women significantly underrepresented in the highest managerial positions, including university presidents and members of the Academy of Sciences [9]. Research conducted in 2021 revealed that women comprised only 33,3% of category “A” civil servants (the highest category) in Ukraine, while representing the majority in lower-level positions [10].

The COVID-19 pandemic as contextual pre-training. The COVID-19 pandemic, beginning in 2020, can be seen as an unprecedented global “stress test” of educational and social systems. For women in Ukrainian higher education, the pandemic created a specific set of challenges and coping mechanisms that were then pushed to their breaking point by the full-scale invasion.

The pandemic forced a sudden, chaotic shift to online teaching and remote work. For female academics, this immediately dissolved the boundaries between their professional and domestic spheres. They were expected to conduct lectures and research from home while simultaneously managing intensified childcare and household duties due to lockdowns and school closures. The concept of the “always-on” academic, available via email and online meetings at all hours, took root. The pandemic disproportionately increased the unpaid care burden on women globally, and Ukraine was no exception. Female academics became responsible for homeschooling their children, caring for sick relatives, and managing household logistics – within a patriarchal structure that did not automatically redistribute these responsibilities to male partners [11] – while simultaneously trying to maintain their teaching and research loads. This cemented the “double burden” as the default operational model for many women in academia.

International studies during the pandemic revealed a significant gender gap in research output. Female academics submitted fewer papers and grant proposals than their male colleagues, as their time was consumed by increased domestic responsibilities whilst adapting to new teaching demands. Access to labs, libraries, and archives was restricted, stalling research momentum.

The 2022 invasion: a gendered displacement crisis. The full-scale invasion of February 2022 radically transformed this situation, introducing new challenges and reshaping existing barriers for women in the Ukrainian higher education system. Approximately 90% of the 3.7 million refugees fleeing Ukraine by April 2022 – the first, most powerful wave of forced displacement – were women and children [12]. Due to martial law restrictions preventing most men aged 18–60 from leaving Ukraine, women make up at least 85% of those forcibly displaced [13].

The gender imbalance among displaced academics is stark: among interviewed Ukrainian academics abroad, only 3 of 43 were male [14].

Prior to the invasion, 44.7% of Ukrainian researchers were women, and by summer 2022, 14.7% of all researchers had relocated abroad, most of them women [15]. For women who left Ukraine, the primary challenge involves a forced withdrawal from professional activities towards classical gender roles centred on survival and caregiving [13]. Women spent 56 hours per week on childcare in 2024, up from 49 hours before the war [16]. Time devoted to childcare increased by 14% for women who went abroad by 2023 [17]. The closure of childcare facilities worsened the burden of unpaid care work both inside Ukraine and in host countries.

Once leaders and high achievers in the professional sphere, displaced women now face new barriers in host countries, including linguistic obstacles, unfamiliar bureaucratic systems, and the destruction of professional networks. Cultural differences and unfamiliar academic systems require substantial adaptation, while the recognition of Ukrainian academic qualifications is frequently delayed or incomplete, pushing female academics to accept roles well below their expertise [14]. Such a shift creates feelings of entrapment, as female academics refocus on supporting children and relatives. Some European universities have created specialised programmes for Ukrainian women researchers [18], but these remain insufficient relative to the scale of displacement. A substantial proportion of women academics have simultaneously maintained scholarly activities at their home institutions in Ukraine while managing increased care responsibilities [18].

New dynamics for women who remained in Ukraine. In contrast, women who remained in Ukraine during the invasion have experienced a different set of challenges. The drafting of male colleagues to the Ukrainian Armed Forces has paradoxically removed one of the basic barriers to career advancement, creating unexpected opportunities for leadership and substantially accelerating career progression, enabling women to break through the traditional glass ceiling [19]. The feminisation of leadership has been particularly pronounced in humanitarian efforts and community organisation [20]. The percentage of Ukrainians who believe that “men are better leaders than women” dropped from 43% in 2021 to 24% in 2023 [9].

However, rapid advancement has introduced new challenges. A novel psychological barrier – “impostor syndrome” – has emerged. Women report feeling unprepared for sudden promotions, experiencing intense pressure and self-doubt, and lacking adequate institutional support during their transition into new leadership roles, with solid guidance or mentorship critically absent [21; 22]. The psychological impact of the war, including heightened fear and burnout, disproportionately affects women, further complicating their professional roles [23].

Psychological capital as a theoretical lens. Psychological capital (PsyCap) provides a valuable theoretical framework for understanding how individuals navigate adversity. Comprising four core components – Self-Efficacy, Hope, Resilience, and Optimism – PsyCap offers a structured approach to assessing positive psychological resources in challenging contexts. Resilient academics often report finding new meaning in their profession; crisis forces innovation (such as trauma-informed pedagogy) and strengthens professional identity, demonstrating the capacity to “bounce back stronger”. For many, resilience comes from connections with students and support from fellow teachers in communities of practice. Against this theoretical

backdrop, this study examines the psychological capital profiles and lived experiences of Ukrainian women in higher education in wartime, with the aim of identifying the nature, scope, and location-specific character of the gender barriers they face.

Methods

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative data from semi-structured Social Ecological Model-based focus groups (26 respondents) with quantitative survey analysis (71 respondents). This methodology provides a thorough analysis of the real-life experiences of Ukrainian women in HE, identifying both individual peculiarities and common trends.

Psychological capital research was conducted in April-May 2024 among 72 members of the Ukrainian Association of Management Development and Business Education (UAMDBE), a professional organisation uniting business and management teachers. Among respondents, 65.8% were women, 9.9% of whom had gone abroad. The research used the classical PsyCap survey, distinguishing Self-Efficacy, Hope, Resilience, and Optimism as the main components of Psychological Capital.

Qualitative data were collected through five focus groups involving 26 respondents, conducted both online and offline. Each group lasted approximately one hour and comprised 3–8 members. Focus groups were recorded, transcribed using the Turboscribe platform, and then analysed for sentiment using the Atlas.ti platform. Tag clouds were constructed using Wordart.com to extract additional content from the most frequently used words across sessions. Focus group data were structured using the Social Ecological Model to facilitate systematic barrier analysis at individual, interpersonal, organisational, and sociocultural levels.

Results and Discussion

Psychological Capital Analysis

The general PsyCap profile illustrating differences between women and men is shown in Fig. 1. It is apparent that males’ psychological capital has a lower profile than women’s, especially for components such as Hope and Optimism.

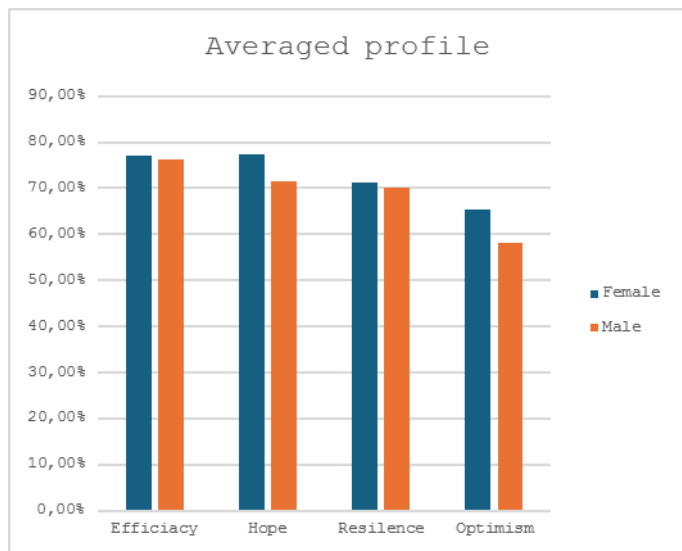


Fig. 1. PsyCap profile for 72 members of UAMDBE

A more detailed analysis is presented in Fig. 2 and 3, where the confidence margins of the sample are shown alongside the modes. The logic of this representation is to superpose the sample deviation with the most typical reaction observed.

The confidence margins for the PsyCap components among women (Fig. 2) are notably narrow, suggesting a degree of conformity in attitudes. Quite interesting is the case of Resilience: the confidence margin – the narrowest of all four components – does not contain the mode. Even though some women demonstrate high resilience, the majority report feeling neither resilient nor stable. An almost identical situation holds for Optimism, where the mode only just touches the confidence margin, though that margin is somewhat broader.

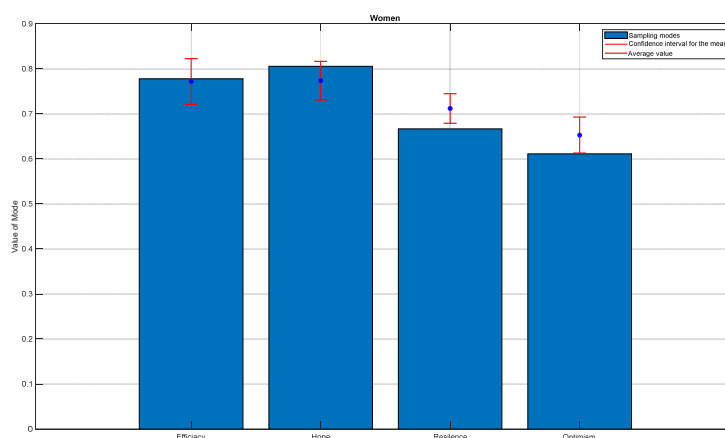


Fig. 2. Superposition of modes and confidence margins for PsyCap components for women

The confidence margins for the PsyCap components in men (Fig. 3) are wider than those for women, indicating a greater variety of attitudes. The confidence margin for Hope is considerably broader and is quite far from the mode: even though some men demonstrate high hope, the mode indicates that men are more frequently pessimistic about the future than women. Men's resilience is higher than women's; moreover, the mode almost coincides with the mean, suggesting greater male consistency.

Men faced increased pressure from traditional masculine norms, which may explain the paradox of higher resilience coupled with lower hope. Social expectations of masculinity, strength, and the ability to protect can contribute to the development of resilience as a coping mechanism, but at the same time, hinder the expression of vulnerability and the planning of alternative life strategies.

Women who remain in Ukraine (89.1% of the sample) have been given unexpected opportunities to realise their potential, previously limited by gender barriers. As described in the Introduction, war has led to the feminisation of leadership in education, which may have contributed to the higher levels of Hope and Self-Efficacy observed in the data.

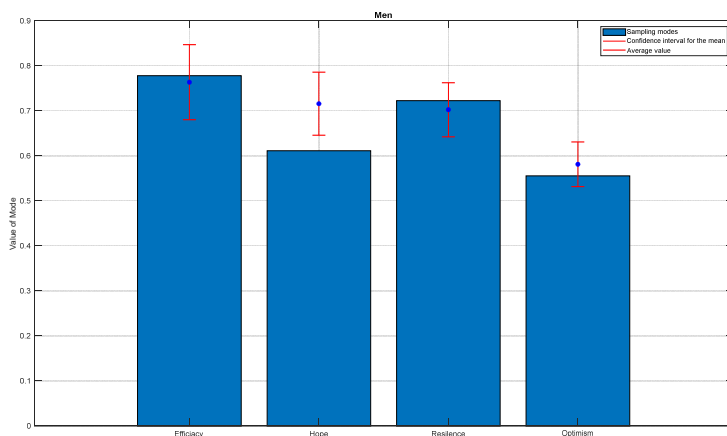


Fig. 3. Superposition of modes and confidence margins for PsyCap components for men

Scientific activity level has a significant positive influence on the PsyCap of teachers of economics and management, because scholarly work requires high commitment and focus, which, in turn, is a direct consequence of increased self-efficacy, a basic component of PsyCap. This is supported by the fact that while involvement in scientific activity is equal between men and women, both demonstrate approximately the same level of Self-Efficacy (Figs. 2 and 3), the only difference being that men's self-estimation spans a broader range.

The level of involvement in volunteering has a significant positive influence on UAMDBE members' PsyCap, as it clearly indicates higher commitment, which, in turn, is an outcome of greater resilience. At the same time, although men and women are involved in scientific activity approximately equally, women are more frequently less resilient, as noted above.

Psychological coping mechanisms under prolonged stress

The uniqueness of the Ukrainian situation lies in the duration of the military conflict, which has been ongoing for more than three years since the full-scale invasion and, in the broader sense, since 2014 [13]. Studies [24] show that 87% of Ukrainians are in a state of chronic stress, with the most common emotions being fatigue (55%), tension (41%) and hope (36%).

The prolonged nature of stress leads to specific changes in the structure of psychological capital. Men tend to polarise their psychological reactions, which explains the broader range of PsyCap self-assessment. Some men develop high resilience and adaptability, while others experience a significant decline in psychological resources. Discussions with colleagues indicate that the only way to raise psychological capital is to "exchange" it through mutual support. It should be noted that such a process of cooperative generation of psychological capital through exchange is difficult to trace when analysing open systems, such as professional associations, which constitute the basis of the empirical data, because people communicate and exchange PsyCap not only within the association but also within the organisations (universities) where they are directly employed.

One might suggest that the return of capital through volunteering to the “external environment” happens very quickly at almost any level of involvement.

Women, as the survey demonstrates, show more stable patterns of adaptation, which may be due to their traditionally greater involvement in social support networks and more developed emotional regulation skills. However, the prolonged burden of wartime caregiving – compared with the pre-war shift towards career development – could lead to a gradual depletion of psychological resources, particularly for those who went abroad.

Men in war face a unique set of psychological challenges. Traditional masculine norms prescribe the role of protector and warrior, contributing to resilience as a psychological resource [25]. Research from the Iraq conflict shows that men are more likely to be directly exposed to military action, which may explain their higher resilience scores [26]. Paradoxically, however, men demonstrate significantly lower levels of hope. First, men aged 18–60 are not permitted to leave Ukraine under martial law, limiting their ability to plan alternative life strategies. Second, the traditional male role as breadwinner is severely tested in a war economy, which may negatively affect their sense of control over the future. The large variance across all PsyCap components in men indicates a high degree of heterogeneity in male responses to wartime stress, shaped by participation or non-participation in military operations, socio-economic status, regional characteristics, and individual coping styles.

Female patterns of psychological adaptation

Women in the context of the military conflict in Ukraine – both since 2022 and since 2014 – found themselves in a dual situation. On the one hand, many gained unprecedented opportunities for professional and personal growth as a result of men being called up for military service. On the other hand, they faced a dramatic increase in the burden of caring for children and elderly relatives.

Studies show that women who remained in Ukraine exhibit higher levels of hope than men [27]. This may be due to greater flexibility in planning life strategies, more developed social support networks, and the traditional female caregiving role, providing meaning and direction in times of uncertainty. However, women’s lower resilience scores may reflect differences in socialisation and traditionally lower preparedness for extreme situations. The narrower sample variance for women indicates more homogeneous responses, suggesting more consistent coping strategies in the female population [23].

The influence of sociocultural factors

Gender differences in psychological capital profiles during wartime cannot be understood without accounting for the sociocultural context. Traditional gender roles, which had been partially transformed in the pre-war period, underwent radical revision during the war. Men faced increased pressure to conform to traditional masculine norms, explaining the paradox of higher resilience with lower hope. Women, on the other hand, were given the opportunity to realise potential previously limited – and in many contexts still limited – by traditional gender barriers. As the literature reviewed in the Introduction indicates, war has led to a feminisation of leadership across various spheres of public life, which may contribute to higher levels of hope and self-efficacy among women who remained in Ukraine.

Barrier Analysis

Barrier analysis was conducted across the five focus groups using the Social Ecological Model. All five groups demonstrated certainty, determination, and a focus on results.

Women who remained in Ukraine

Individual and psychological barriers

Women who remained in Ukraine during the hostilities faced a unique set of psychological barriers. The most significant was impostor syndrome, which emerged after rapid career growth following the conscription of male colleagues. Women reported feeling unprepared for sudden promotions and experiencing a need for institutional support and mentoring, both critically lacking in their new roles.

The psychological impact of the war disproportionately affected women, exacerbating fears, emotional instability, and burnout. Focus group participants noted that men perceive women as less emotionally stable, which affects their own desire for leadership roles. Fear of negative consequences and stereotypes created additional psychological barriers. The problem of lack of self-confidence and the need for external approval became apparent.

A possible psychological margin to cope with this barrier is Hope (see Section 3.1, Fig. 2). It is quite indicative that for Hope, the mode not only lies inside the confidence margin, but is close to its upper range, reflecting the fact that most women maintain high hopes, while a limited number of respondents had lost self-confidence.

Organisational and systemic barriers

Despite the opportunities for career growth that have opened, organisational barriers have intensified. Rigid work policies have become particularly problematic in wartime, when the need for flexibility has increased. Women repeatedly cited difficulties balancing family responsibilities and work due to tight schedules and a lack of family support.

This may explain why Self-Efficacy for women shows broader confidence margins, with the mode almost coinciding with the mathematical expectation (Fig. 2). Greater polarisation of attitudes suggests that Self-Efficacy is a resource that can be “consumed” when women attempt to overcome new organisational barriers. The degree of cross-referencing between PsyCap survey results and focus group findings should be further developed in subsequent drafts. Pay inequality, lack of transparency in financial matters, and inadequate incentive systems continued to hinder women’s advancement. Supervisors’ subjectivity and nepotism – classical elements of the “glass ceiling” [7] – remained significant problems. The lack of institutional support and inadequate policies for women leaders became particularly noticeable when women suddenly took on leadership positions.

Interpersonal and social barriers

Paradoxically, women’s successes created new interpersonal barriers. Stereotypes and men’s anxieties about competent women manifested in fears of appearing “less intelligent”. Jealousy and social pressure became more pronounced. Limited prior leadership experience hindered progress, as women were often unprepared for the sudden increase in their responsibilities.

Resilience, as the basic indicator of collaborative PsyCap accumulation processes among women, shows a narrower confidence interval and a lower mode, which does not belong to the latter, indicating that this barrier is truly substantial. Most women signal that their Resilience is insufficient, while some appear to give socially expected answers. Barriers arising from jealousy and social pressure block mutual support. Women in newly promoted positions were desperately seeking institutional support, unable to perceive that adequate support and extra resilience could be obtained through allies walking the same path – turning potential competitors into allies.

Social and cultural barriers

Deeply entrenched gender roles and expectations continued to influence career decisions. The perception that “women are responsible for the family” added to the pressure. Systemic issues related to a “shifted focus” due to military needs affected the resources and priorities of organisations. The limited representation of women in leadership roles continued to perpetuate the notion that such positions were intended for men.

The impact of the “double burden”

The concept of the “double burden” (work plus family responsibilities) took on new dimensions during wartime. Women faced limited time for professional development as family responsibilities increased amid instability. The closure of childcare facilities exacerbated the burden of unpaid care work, reinforcing patterns observed during COVID-19.

Refugee women in host countries

It should be noted that approximately 10% of focus group members are located abroad, and 9.9% of PsyCap survey respondents were in foreign countries. Findings for this sub-group should therefore be read as exploratory and indicative rather than definitive.

Professional and qualification barriers

Women who left Ukraine faced radically different obstacles. The main problem was the incomplete or delayed recognition of Ukrainian academic qualifications, forcing highly qualified specialists to accept positions significantly below their expertise. The destruction of professional networks led to the loss of career connections and opportunities. Language barriers became a serious obstacle to professional integration. Cultural differences and unfamiliar academic systems required significant adaptation. Foreign bureaucratic systems created additional administrative barriers to employment and professional recognition.

Socio-economic barriers

The forced return to traditional gender roles became a major obstacle to professional development. Women were forced to focus on survival and childcare. As noted in the Introduction, the time women devoted to childcare increased by 14% by 2023 [17]. A sense of being trapped became common among refugee women as they refocused on supporting their children and relatives, depriving them of the opportunity to pursue professional goals. Economic dependence on host-country social support systems limited their autonomy and choices.

Psychological and emotional barriers

The traumatic experience of war and forced displacement created significant psychological barriers. Refugee women experienced feelings of loss of identity, professional de-skilling, and social isolation. The stress of adapting to a new

environment was compounded by concerns about family safety and uncertainty about the future. Depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress became common problems, affecting their ability to work and develop personally. Feelings of guilt about leaving their homeland and colleagues created an additional emotional burden.

Institutional barriers in host countries

Despite the creation of specialised programmes for Ukrainian women researchers by some European universities, the overall provision remains insufficient relative to the scale of displacement. The absence of adequate retraining and professional adaptation programmes to meet local labour market requirements has hindered professional integration. Limited access to childcare and social services has exacerbated the difficulties of balancing professional and family responsibilities.

Women supporting remote work in Ukraine

Technological and infrastructure barriers

Women attempting to maintain their professional activities remotely in Ukraine faced serious infrastructure problems. Unstable power supply, damaged internet infrastructure, and limited access to laboratories and libraries significantly hampered research work. The need to constantly adapt to changing technological conditions created additional stress. The loss of access to specialised equipment and research resources limited opportunities for scientific activity.

Temporal and organisational barriers

Balancing remote work with increased domestic responsibilities became a critical issue. The blurred boundaries between work and home time were exacerbated by wartime conditions. Constant anxiety about safety and the need to respond to air-raid sirens disrupted the work process. Coordination with international colleagues and participation in research projects became more challenging due to time constraints and unpredictable circumstances.

COVID-19 as “pre-training”: barriers within Results context

The preparatory effect of the pandemic

As discussed in the Introduction, the COVID-19 pandemic can be seen as a kind of “stress test” for education systems, preparing women for some of the challenges of wartime – though also reinforcing patterns of unequal domestic burden. Within the context of the barrier analysis, it is important to note that pandemic-era coping strategies and adaptations directly shaped the psychological and organisational resources women brought into the wartime period.

Comparative analysis of barriers by location

Common patterns

Regardless of location, all groups of women faced reinforced gender stereotypes and traditional expectations. The “double burden” became a universal problem, although it manifested differently across contexts. Psychological barriers – including stress, anxiety, and trauma – affected all women, although their sources and intensity varied. The PsyCap survey results offer a quantitative complement to these focus group findings and should be cross-referenced more explicitly.

Specific differences

Women in Ukraine gained unexpected opportunities for career advancement but faced impostor syndrome and a lack of institutional support. Refugee women experienced professional deskilling and a return to traditional roles. Women

working remotely struggled with technological and infrastructural limitations. These location-specific differences underscore the need for differentiated support strategies tailored to each group.

Conclusion

An analysis of the impact of war on the psychological capital profile of men and women in Ukraine reveals a complex picture of gender differences shaped by multiple factors: sociocultural norms, economic conditions, the nature of traumatic experience, and the availability of social support.

The key findings indicate that men demonstrate a paradoxical combination of high resilience and low hope, related to mobility restrictions and increased pressure from traditional masculine roles. The high variance across all PsyCap components in men reflects the heterogeneity of male responses to wartime stress, requiring a differentiated approach to psychological support.

Women, on the other hand, show higher levels of hope and more homogeneous responses, potentially reflecting greater adaptability to changing conditions and better integration into social support networks. However, their lower resilience scores indicate a need for special programmes to develop psychological resilience – a point that must be reconciled with the broader narrative of wartime opportunity and advancement. The PsyCap data suggest a nuanced picture of women who are hopeful and self-efficacious, yet who also report insufficient resilience – a finding worth foregrounding.

Sentiment analysis of the focus groups reveals a predominantly neutral atmosphere with positive elements, creating a favourable environment for constructive research into gender barriers in Ukrainian HE. The professional approach of participants, their willingness to cooperate, and their focus on solutions indicate the maturity of the Ukrainian academic community in wartime conditions. Gender differences in emotional responses confirm the need for a differentiated approach: women demonstrate greater emotional openness, potentially enabling deeper personal insight into barriers, while men bring analytical perspectives. Care should be taken, however, not to overstate these differences in ways that reproduce gender stereotypes.

The influence of the military context is manifested in an increased focus on constructive aspects of the discussion and minimisation of negative emotional expression – reflecting the adaptive psychological defence mechanisms of Ukrainian society under prolonged stress. The barrier analysis, drawing on focus groups and PsyCap survey data, reveals the complex, multi-layered nature of the barriers faced by women, which vary by geographical location.

Women who remained in Ukraine paradoxically gained new career opportunities while simultaneously facing psychological barriers and a lack of institutional support to manage sudden increases in responsibility. We found that impostor syndrome became a key issue for those who unexpectedly assumed leadership positions – and yet these women also thrived, demonstrated resilience, and emerged as leaders in conditions of extreme adversity.

Refugee women experienced the most dramatic transformation, though the evidence base from this study's relatively small refugee sub-sample is necessarily limited. Incomplete recognition of qualifications, language barriers, and cultural differences created systemic obstacles to professional reintegration in host countries. Focus group responses suggested that technological and infrastructural

limitations were decisive for women trying to maintain professional activities remotely in Ukraine. The blurred boundaries between home and work, exacerbated by war conditions, created new forms of professional stress.

The COVID-19 pandemic prepared the academic community for some wartime challenges but also reinforced patterns of unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities. All groups of women faced an intensification of traditional gender expectations, with manifestations varying across contexts.

The study's findings highlight the need for differentiated support strategies. Mentoring and psychological support programmes are critical for women who remain in Ukraine. Refugee women need targeted qualification recognition and professional integration programmes. Women working remotely require technological support and flexible working solutions. These recommendations are offered as a foundation for further policy development and for integration into the continuing education curriculum for which this research was originally conducted.

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THE DYNAMIC TRANSFORMATION OF GENDER BARRIERS FOR UKRAINIAN WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION AFTER THE 2022 INVASION

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The article investigates the dynamic transformation of gender barriers for Ukrainian women in higher education following the full-scale Russian invasion of February 2022. A mixed-methods design combines quantitative Psychological Capital (PsyCap) survey data from 72 members of the Ukrainian Association of Management Development and Business Education with qualitative findings from five Social Ecological Model-based focus groups

involving 26 respondents. PsyCap analysis reveals that women demonstrate higher levels of Hope and Optimism than men while exhibiting lower and more homogeneous Resilience scores. Men display a paradoxical combination of relatively high Resilience and significantly reduced Hope, attributed to martial law mobility restrictions and intensified pressure to fulfil masculine roles. For women who remained in Ukraine, male conscription paradoxically created unprecedented career advancement opportunities while simultaneously generating impostor syndrome and acute institutional support deficits. Refugee women faced qualification recognition barriers, professional deskilling, language obstacles, and forced reversion to traditional caregiving roles. Women engaged in remote professional activity encountered technological and infrastructural constraints, compounded by war-related stress. Sentiment analysis of focus group transcripts reveals a predominantly neutral-to-positive, task-oriented atmosphere consistent with adaptive psychological strategies under prolonged conflict. The COVID-19 pandemic is contextualised as preparatory stress-testing that readied women for crisis adaptation while reinforcing unequal domestic burden patterns. The study concludes that differentiated support strategies are required: mentoring and resilience-building programmes for women in Ukraine, targeted mechanisms for the recognition of qualifications for refugees, and flexible technological solutions for remote workers.

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