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ADDRESSING TEEN MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS AT INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY LEVELS

Abstract
The study explored how to support teen resilience by examining the experiences of adolescents in the U.S. and Ukraine. Semi-structured interviews with parents from the U.S. and Ukraine were used to investigate the emotional distress experienced by adolescents and the resilience strategies and resources they use. Ukrainian and U.S. parents' reports share many similarities and demonstrate the importance of community institutions in supporting teens. Findings suggest that libraries can support adolescents by offering curated content and mental health assistance and by providing safe spaces (digital and physical) to obtain information and socialize with peers.

Introduction
Adolescence involves intense physical, psychological, and social transformations (Orben et al., 2020), as well as age-specific stressors, including academic and social pressures, self-esteem and body image issues, conflicts with peers and family (Compas et al., 1985; Lohman & Jarvis, 2000). Recent accounts indicate that U.S. adolescents ("teens") are experiencing an increase in anxiety, depression, suicide, eating disorders, substance abuse, self-harm, and other forms of mental illness (Komisar, 2021). In Ukraine, teens experience the adversity of war, physical and mental health harms ranging from deprivations of basic resources like shelter, water, food, schools, and health care to disrupted family and peer relationships, separation, and displacement (Smith, 2001).

We interviewed Ukrainian and U.S. parents to examine universal and community-specific patterns in teen experiences and produce practical recommendations on how information professionals can support their well-being and resilience. The study illustrates the usefulness of the resilience framework for understanding complex facets needed to support families, particularly teens.

Literature Review

The study relied on the resilience framework to understand coping mechanisms used by adolescents and factors that can support teen resilience at the individual, family, and community levels (Shean, 2015; Zolkoski and Bullock, 2012). Resilience is the capacity of an individual to access resources they need to sustain well-being, as well as the capacity of their communities and governments to provide them with what they need (Ungar, 2011). While the stressors experienced by the teens in peaceful and war times are different, the resilience framework offers a lens to examine structures that support teens' abilities to adapt to the difficult life challenges.

Resilience and social support frameworks often include individual and social layers of support, with the social layer including one's close circle of friends and family and a larger community (Rodriquez and Cohen, 1998; Block and Kremen, 1996; Kumpfer, 2002). Resilient youth typically exhibit: a) social competence: responsiveness, flexibility, communication skill, prosocial behavior; b) problem-solving skills: abstract and resourceful thinking to seek alternate solutions to problems; c) critical consciousness: "insightful awareness of structures of cruelty"; d) autonomy: a sense of identity and an internal locus of control; and e) purpose in goal-setting, achievement motivation, educational aspirations, and hopefulness (Benard, 1991; 1995; Zolkoski and Bullock, 2012). Additional individual traits that improve resilience include: intelligence, positive self-concept, positive outlook, self-regulation and a balance between independence and dependence on others (Friborg et al., 2005; Develos-Sacdalan and Bozkuş, 2018; Infante, 2001; Kaplan, 2005; Artuch-Garde et al., 2017). Ability to manage emotions is another critical indicator of resilience (Mestre et al., 2017), and was found to be a significant predictor of coping, confidence, and adaptation to negative situations (Artuch-Garde et al., 2017).

Individual resilience has been shown to be "intertwined" with resilience of others within a multi-layered "social resilience" (Henley, 2010, p.296), and to depend on supportive environments (Southwick et al., 2014). Family support (including pet companionship), friendship, and community institutions all contribute to social resilience (Shean, 2015; Zolkoski and Bullock, 2012). The importance of family resources and protections for children has been noted in resilience research in the context of adversities and disasters. Close relationships with caregivers and effective parenting typically top the list of predictive factors of childhood resilience (Masten, 2021; Masten and Motti-Stefanidi, 2020). Family cohesion, parental involvement, and the presence of a caring adult in the absence of responsive parents have also been found to support resilience (Mackay, 2003).

Adolescent friendships play vital role in mitigating the effects of negative experiences (Laursen et al., 2021; Waldrip et al., 2008), increasing adolescents' happiness and a sense of connectedness (Schacter and Margolin, 2019). However, friendships can cause anxiety stemming from non-supportive friends, peer pressure, and self-image tied to perceived popularity, making it important to consider the quality, not just quantity, of friendships (Demir and Urberg, 2004).

Community support enhances resilience in children, particularly those affected by stress or trauma (Okwori, 2022, p. 455). This support includes informal networks (e.g., neighbors, friends), institutional structures (e.g., school, church, social workers), and opportunities for age-appropriate work (Shean, 2015; Zolkoski and Bullock, 2012). A study in Canada found 47 community-based parenting programs that promote mental health support for adolescents, particularly those in ethno-culturally diverse populations through curriculum and support groups (Ruiz-Casares et al., 2015). During the COVID-19 pandemic, emotional, social, and community support received through Information Technology (ICT) improved loneliness and negative moods (Fumagalli et al., 2021; Lopatovska et al., 2022b; Luchetti et al., 2020; Pitt et al., 2021; Saltzman et al., 2020). Social media strengthened resilience during the Russia-Ukraine war by allowing to share experiences and information in circumstances of social isolation, increasing feelings of solidarity and togetherness among people affected by the war (Zasiekin et al., 2022).

Information institutions, particularly libraries, support communities' mental health needs by offering resources like webinars, mindfulness sessions, animal petting, and improved spatial design to increase positive experiences for patrons and staff (Oudshoorn et al., 2022). In response to the Russia-Ukraine war, libraries reconfigured spaces and services to meet the needs of displaced people, expanded work/study spaces, access to wifi and computers, employment assistance and other resettlement resources, organized support groups and activities for children, cultural programming such as screenings of Ukrainian films, and collecting Ukrainian language children's books for displaced children (Medved, 2022; Trotta, 2022). Many libraries in Europe and Canada became collection sites for donated goods, Ukrainian educational materials, and other resources to this displaced population (IFLA, 2022). The Ukrainian National Federation of Quebec was inspired to revitalize an old space into a reading room for Ukrainian literature with the understanding that books and cultural material are vital for comfort and anxiety relief for teen refugees (Javanbakht, 2022; Lechat et al., 2023).

Method
The semi-structured interviews with 14 parents from the U.S. and 15 from Ukraine (6 currently displaced) were used to collect information about a) teen experiences and coping mechanisms and b) current and potential community resilience resources. Parents are instrumental in supporting teen resilience (see above) and have first-hand, accurate knowledge of their children's emotional states (Jokovic et al., 2004; Wood et al., 2019; Serafimova et al., 2021). Ukrainian participants were recruited using the snowballing method as a continuation of the earlier study of Ukrainian teens (Lopatovska et al., 2022). A similar snowballing method was used to recruit a

comparable group of U.S. teens (teen accounts are reported in Lopatovska et al., 2024) and parents. During the virtual interviews, participants were asked to recall and describe a recent incident when teens felt negative emotions (i.e., distress, anger, sadness) and common triggers of these emotions, to share the coping strategies employed by the teens in dealing with stressful situations, and share recommendations for desirable information services, programs or features that could support the teens' internal and external resilience. Participants were only asked to share information that they were comfortable sharing, and could withdraw from the study at any time. The data shared by participants were anonymized. The study was approved by the IRB.

The study used a thematic analysis framework to analyze interview transcripts (Nowell et al., 2017). Two researchers coded the transcripts, comparing their findings and seeking agreement on the coding process and outputs. The narrative report of interpreted findings, backed by selected quotes, is presented below. The parent participants are referred to by a numeric ID and a letter "U" for Ukrainian parents and "US" for parents in the U.S.

Findings
Negative emotions and their causes
Both Ukrainian and U.S. parents reported similar emotional problems experienced by their teens: school-related stress, interpersonal relationships, negative news/media, disappointment in behaviors of adults, anxiety about unmet expectations, age-related mood swings, sadness caused by difficulties fitting in, death of a pet, loneliness due to lack of friends, and anger related to arguments with parents and friends.

Differences in participant accounts included specific causes of sadness, with two U.S. participants attributing sadness to bullying and 11 Ukrainian participants attributing sadness to the breaking of social connections due to the relocation of their families or friends.

Fear for personal safety and the safety of loved ones who remained in Ukraine was mentioned by six Ukrainian participants, including three who specifically mentioned fear experienced during air sirens/shelling. Stress and disappointment related to extracurricular activities were mentioned only by U.S. parents, while Ukrainian parents mentioned feelings unique to war-affected/displaced youth, including fear, homesickness, and fear of missing out (FOMO) compared to their peers.

Parents from both countries mentioned teens coping by seeking distraction in the consumption of digital content, engaging in creative activities, spending time alone, and changing mindsets. Unique themes for the U.S. included seeking refuge in athletic activities, while Ukrainian parents mentioned teens' information-seeking, and spending time outdoors.

> *"He, fortunately, doesn't take social media too seriously and has no trouble blocking people who are rude or annoy him."* US05

> *"it's amazing how quickly they find distraction, during air sirens she calls her friends and they start making jokes about Putin, and start giggling"* U10

Both groups of participants acknowledged the support teens receive from talking to and spending time with families and friends. Helpful external community resources included school and professional therapists. Ukrainian participants also acknowledged the positive influence of adult mentors and the availability of summer camps as social places. Three Ukrainian parents felt that their teens had no support from the community.

Desired external resilience support for U.S. and Ukrainian teens

In describing external resources that would support teens, both Ukrainian and U.S. parents mentioned informational resources that could help their teens develop skills to cope with life challenges (Table 1). Both groups indicated the need for more accessible, affordable, and trustworthy professional help. U.S. parents mentioned informational posters about teens' mental health that could be displayed in public spaces. Several Ukrainian parents talked about specific features/availability of ICT in supporting their teens.

Table 1. Recommendations for Improving External Support for Resilience

Ukrainian Parent Recommendations	U.S. Parent Recommendations
Easily accessible resources on teen development and mental health	
Informational resources to help teens develop social and communication skills (6) Accessible, affordable, non-judgmental counseling (2) *"Not all children have access to psychological help. Either due to lack of parental consent, or lack of money, or stigma associated with the use of school counselors."* U05 *"Counseling services are currently available to children who lived through extremely traumatic [war] experiences, but we all can use some help."* U10 Technology features that encourage teens to take breaks from gadgets or limit the time they use them Free hardware to connect to friends *"Not everybody has smartphones"* U01 Ability to connect to international peers	Informational resources to help children recognize and cope with emotions (11) *"Implement early education on emotions and on how to address them in a healthy and productive manner."* US03 Trusted, convenient, accessible mental health resources (counseling, psychologists, therapists, tools, apps, literature) (10) *"Make counseling more accessible and affordable."* US03 *"Interestingly enough, the teen is against the counselors at school because their privacy had been breached. The teen's peers have said, if you say anything to the school counselor they're going to tell your parents. There is a strong mistrust there"* US08 Brochures and posters in public spaces (8)
Access to safe/empowering communities and spaces (both virtual and physical)	

| Community events/opportunities to meet new friends/socialize, including dedicated non-commercial spaces for teens to spend time together and free after-school programs (6)
 "*My child's school has been online since pandemic. It would be great for her to have access to physical events, activities, spaces where she could properly socialize with her peers.*" P04
 "*Provide spaces where teens can meet each other, since adults don't always understand their problems or might appear to be patronizing. Our local town offers such dedicated center for teens where they can come, have tea, play table games or pool, talk. My child's friends took her here and she enjoyed it.*" U05 | Libraries and schools as safe/educational spaces (11)
 "I think having a lot of programs, a lot of dedicated space, outreach into schools to let teens know that there is space/programs for them, providing food/snacks, games, anything to bring teens into the library space. The goal isn't just to fill the library, but to give teens a place to go so that they can be themselves." US08
 Access to safe and empowering online spaces (4)
 "We need ways to keep children safe online without impinging on their sense of autonomy." US06 |

Both groups stressed the importance of community institutions in supporting teen resilience. Ukrainian parents talked about community events and non-commercial spaces where teens could socialize. Eleven U.S. parents discussed the specific roles of libraries and schools in offering resources and safe spaces. U.S. parents also mentioned the need for safer online spaces for teens.

Discussion and Conclusion
Stressors and their causes
Parents' observations regarding teens' negative emotions and their causes are similar to accounts shared by the teens (Lopatovska et al., 2022a; Lopatovska et al., 2024). Recent studies have found increased levels of teen anxiety and loneliness (Çelikkaleli & Demir, 2022; Christ and Gray, 2022), also reported by the parents in our study. Participants' accounts of the everyday stressors and negative emotions associated with interpersonal relationships, current events, school, and extracurricular activities, loss of a pet, and conflicts with parents and friends have also been previously reported (Compas et al., 1985; Kerr et al., 2021). One solution to current events-related stress involves providing teens with opportunities to become actively involved with their chosen causes (Kuzujanakis, 2021). This method was deployed in the Ottawa-Carleton School District with student-designed solutions for school stressors (Hardie, 2019).

Stress caused by school and extracurricular activities has been widely reported in the context of pressure for academic achievement (Student Stress 101; Smith and Prior, 1995), especially in the form of perfectionism that leads to increased levels of anxiety and depression (Ahmed et al., 2021; Kaur et al., 2022; Lessin and Pardo, 2017; Simpkins et al., 2015).

Bullying, particularly cyberbullying, mentioned by the U.S. participants[1] (Horowitz and Graf, 2019), has been linked to a range of mental health issues in adolescents, from depression and anxiety to self-harm and suicidality (Agosto et al., 2012; Rauschenberg et al., 2021). Bullying wasn't mentioned by Ukrainian participants either due to the lack of awareness or absence of this issue in their child's experiences.

Not surprisingly, unique themes in the responses of Ukrainian parents referred to war-related fear, homesickness, and lack of stability. Previous research has found that adolescents displaced by war face unique challenges that may require different coping mechanisms from non-war-affected teens (Akgül et al., 2021).

Coping strategies employed by Ukrainian and U.S. teens
Parents discussed resilience strategies used by teens to cope with negative emotions including seeking distractions, engaging in creative activities and hobbies, self-care and re-focusing, seeking support from external and/or professional sources, and other strategies reported in previous studies (Campbell, 2015; Perlman and Peplau, 1998; Sundqvist and Hemberg, 2021). Talking to family and friends, professional therapy, school resources, and adult mentors are also well-known coping mechanisms for psychological stress reported by the participants (Forsythe and Forsythe, 2014; Seligman, 2011; Dray et al., 2017; Fisher and Frey, 2018; Peter et al., 2022; Ungar et al., 2019). Differences in cultural values and norms might explain mentions of sport as a coping strategy for U.S. teens, as opposed to time spent outside and attending cultural events for Ukrainian teens.

Overall, Ukrainian and U.S. parents shared similar stories about their teens' emotional problems and resilience. Additional war-caused adversity in the lives of Ukrainian teens further highlights the importance of institutional and community support in mitigating traumatic events.

Recommendations for external resources to support teen resilience
Both groups of parents expressed interest in easily accessible, nonjudgmental sources of support and information about mental health, digital and physical spaces for teens to learn and discuss problems with peers. Known barriers to seeking professional help include limited mental health awareness, perceived social stigma and embarrassment, negative perceptions of therapy, and structural barriers (i.e., finances, Radez et al., 2021). These barriers create opportunities for information institutions to support teen resilience in digital and physical spaces.

U.S. participants explicitly linked the need for information, programming, and safe, non-commercial spaces to libraries, a connection possibly less recognized in Ukrainian communities. Library assistance can help adolescents develop skills related to problem-solving, planning,

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[1] Bullying is also a significant problem for Canadian teens
("Pink Shirt Day (Anti-Bullying Day)." *Statistics Canada*, 22 Feb. 2023,
www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/3037-pink-shirt-day-anti-bullying-day.)

decision-making, self-esteem, and productive conflict resolution (Brautigam, 2008). Agosto, et al. (2012) suggest that Young Adult Librarians are uniquely positioned to provide resources and coping mechanisms to teens through informal check-ins and formal interventions. A school or public library could proactively help teens seek resources related to negative emotions. Information professionals can guard against information overload by directing teens to resources that best suit their needs (Jurkowski, 2006). Ukrainian teens are experiencing traumatic events that could have disastrous consequences for their mental health (Javanbakht, 2022; Shaw, 2000; Yang et al., 2004). In times of disasters, libraries have been found to offer safe space, trusted information, and access to information and community (Patin, 2020). Libraries can offer similar support to displaced people, as evidenced in European libraries' services before the Russia-Ukraine war (Barckow, 2016; Vårheim, 2014), as well as basic mental health aid and creative group-based interventions to war-affected patrons (Javanbakht, 2022).

Physical library spaces play important roles in the lives of many adolescents, providing them with helpful resources in nourishing and safe spaces (Takahashi, 2019). School library spaces can help teens recharge, be creative, do homework, and socialize (Merga, 2021). Libraries can promote well-being through the purposeful design of activities and physical spaces for teens to discuss stigmatized issues (Kirkland, 2021; Torres, 2020).

Another need identified by our participants is the accessibility of trustworthy digital resources on mental health. Efforts to provide high-quality, evidence-based mental health collections at the national level have been reported in the U.K. and Canada (Dearness and Tomlin, 2003; Lal, 2019), but local public libraries can offer more immediate community support, both virtual and in-person.

Information institutions, particularly libraries, have a history of supporting communities. We hope our findings will help these institutions to better understand and support adolescents through age-related challenges and major disasters.

Acknowledgments

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