















“Time to act: Institutional mental health support for Ukrainian academic staff during wartime”

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SPECIAL ISSUE "UKRAINIAN UNIVERSITIES IN NEW REALITIES: 10 YEARS OF WAR"

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TIME TO ACT: INSTITUTIONAL MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR UKRAINIAN ACADEMIC STAFF DURING WARTIME

Abstract

The study examines the impact of institutional mental health support on the career stability of academic staff at Ukrainian universities during the full-scale war, focusing on accessibility, cultural alignment, and tailored mental health initiatives provided by universities. The relevance of this topic arises from the unprecedented stressors affecting academic members in higher education institutions, who face both personal and professional challenges. A cross-sectional analytical design was employed, using an online survey distributed among 429 academic staff members. The findings reveal that nearly half of the respondents frequently contemplate changing careers, highlighting substantial job instability. Accessible mental health support is associated with a 6% decrease in career change intentions, while a supportive institutional culture further reduces these intentions by 8-9%. Notably, self-help practices emerged as the most effective support mechanism, associated with a 12% reduction in career change intentions. These findings suggest that institutions can improve retention by prioritizing and promoting accessible self-help initiatives. The study underscores the importance of structured mental health support in fostering resilience within the academic community, with implications for policy and practice in war-affected educational environments.

Keywords

mental health, academic staff, institutional support, university, Ukraine, war

JEL Classification

I23, I12, J28, I18

INTRODUCTION

The full-scale war in Ukraine has severely affected academic staff, forcing them to contend not only with the personal but also with the societal repercussions of the conflict while striving to maintain educational standards under extreme conditions (Zayachuk, 2024; Tsos & Makaruk, 2023; Lavrysh et al., 2022). The extreme stress, anxiety, and trauma have deeply impacted their professional lives (Kozmenko et al., 2023; Tsos & Makaruk, 2023) and mental health (Tsybuliak, Lopatina, et al., 2024; Popovych et al., 2023).

Mental health in academia is a collective concern, requiring a shared commitment to support faculty well-being (Johnson & Lester, 2022). Institutional mental health support is essential for reducing stress, enhancing job satisfaction and productivity, and influencing decisions to remain in or leave the academic profession (Halat et al., 2023). Key factors such as accessibility to mental health services, culturally sensitive support systems, and tailored initiatives are critical for reducing uncertainty and fostering resilience among academic staff (Halat et al., 2023; Urbina-Garcia, 2020).

Despite the recognized importance of mental health support, there is a paucity of research examining its impact on the career stability of academic staff in wartime conditions. Understanding how these support systems affect intentions to leave academia is vital for developing strategies to retain academic staff and ensure the continuity of the education process in a higher education institution during and after the war conflict, as a critical component of national recoveries (Lugovyi et al., 2023; Sahar & Kaunert, 2021).

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Mental health has become an increasingly critical topic in academia due to its direct impact on well-being, job satisfaction, and career stability (Satuf et al., 2018). Mental health encompasses an individual's emotional, psychological, and social well-being, influencing thought processes, emotions, and behavior (Halat et al., 2023). It is also crucial in determining how individuals manage stress, engage in relationships, and make health-conscious decisions (Halat et al., 2023).

Researchers have determined that among various professional groups, academic staff is particularly vulnerable to physical and mental health problems. The mental health of academic staff is influenced by a combination of factors arising from their professional roles, interactions with students, and the broader organizational and environmental context (Halat et al., 2023). They often face persistent professional challenges that significantly contribute to higher levels of mental fatigue and psychological distress (Kovess-Masféty et al., 2007), anxiety (Tsybuliak, Kolomiets, et al., 2024), development of burnout syndrome (Urbina-Garcia, 2020; Watts & Robertson, 2011). These challenges include intense pressure to publish and compete within academia (Urbina-Garcia, 2020; Guthrie et al., 2018), high societal expectations (Boone et al., 2022), and demands from both administration and students (Sabagh et al., 2018; Winefield et al., 2003). The combination of heavy workloads, long hours, short-term contracts, increasing student numbers (Kinman, 2008), a lack of recognition (Urbina-Garcia, 2020; Makikangas et al., 2019), and the challenge of juggling with work and family duties (Winefield et al., 2014) exacerbates the strain.

Adapting curricula for displaced students and supporting them during turbulent times places additional emotional and professional burdens on faculty (Sibruk et al., 2023; Kornius, 2023). Meeting

the diverse and often complex needs of students, many of whom may have been directly impacted by war or displacement, creates further anxiety and stress, which takes a toll on faculty well-being.

In addition to professional and student-related challenges, environmental and organizational factors, particularly in the context of war, introduce profound difficulties for academic staff. Many are forced to work under constant threats to their safety and their families, while others must navigate relocation challenges, including linguistic and cultural adjustments and uncertainty about the future (Nenko et al., 2023; Lopatina et al., 2023). These pressures are further compounded by rising violence, mass deportations, and propaganda, leaving psychological scars, especially for those in occupied territories (Lavrysh et al., 2022). Additionally, the sudden transition to remote and hybrid teaching modes (Zayachuk, 2024; Matviichuk et al., 2022) created new challenges, requiring academic staff to adapt while managing increased workloads and maintaining educational standards quickly.

These factors highlight the multifaceted challenges academic staff faces, emphasizing the critical importance of institutional mental health support.

Studies indicate that the availability of mental health services within higher education institutions significantly influences staff well-being and career intentions (Halat et al., 2023; Johnson & Lester, 2022; Urbina-Garcia, 2020). Accessible programs can reduce stress, prevent burnout, and improve retention (Dorenkamp & Weiß, 2018; Halat et al., 2023). However, in many institutions, support systems are either unavailable or insufficiently promoted, leaving staff to navigate mental health challenges without adequate resources (Urbina-Garcia, 2020).

Institutional culture is vital in shaping how mental health is perceived and addressed within ac-

ademic communities. A supportive culture fosters resilience, a sense of belonging, and professional commitment, while a lack of support can exacerbate job dissatisfaction and firing intentions (Watts & Robertson, 2011; Kinman, 2008). Fostering a positive culture in high-stress environments can mitigate the negative impacts of prolonged uncertainty (Nicholls et al., 2022). Targeted mental health initiatives, such as self-help programs, counseling, and resilience training, have shown promise in reducing career change intentions among academic staff (Halat et al., 2023; Levin et al., 2020). Such programs allow staff to manage stress effectively and maintain productivity.

While existing studies have explored the general importance of institutional mental health support, few address its specific impact on career stability during wartime. Research on the effectiveness of tailored interventions in conflict-affected academic environments is notably lacking.

The literature review emphasizes the significance of institutional mental health support in improving well-being among academic staff. However, gaps remain in understanding how such support is provided in wartime conditions and how this influences career stability. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the impact of institutional mental health support on the career stability of academic staff at Ukrainian universities during the full-scale war, focusing on its accessibility, cultural alignment, and tailored mental health initiatives provided by universities. The following research questions were identified:

1. How do the accessibility, effectiveness, and institutional culture of mental health support influence the career change intentions of Ukrainian academic staff during wartime?
2. What is the impact of migration status (internal or external) and university relocation on the career stability and professional intentions of academic staff?
3. Which forms of institutional mental health support (e.g., counseling, self-help practices, or training) are most effective in reducing professional stress and fostering career stability?

2. METHODS

This study used a cross-sectional analytical design to assess mental health support among academic staff at Ukrainian universities during the full-scale war. Data were collected through an online survey conducted between December 2023 and February 2024.

The survey questions were developed based on previously validated instruments for assessing mental health support in academic settings under crisis conditions (Badu et al., 2019; Halat et al., 2023; Levin et al., 2020; Moore et al., 2020). Two internal reviewers conducted the initial review of the questionnaire, whose recommendations helped refine the wording and resolve inconsistencies and ambiguities in some questions.

Before the main survey, a pilot test involving 15 academic staff members confirmed the clarity of questions and ensured the survey could be completed within 12 minutes. The final survey was conducted using Google Forms; invitations were sent to official email addresses of all Ukrainian universities, ensuring wide outreach across regions, including conflict zones, temporarily occupied territories, and safer areas. All participants received a briefing on the study's objectives and provided informed consent.

The survey questionnaire, designed to be completed within 10 to 15 minutes, consisted of two main sections (Appendix A). The first section was about the demographic and professional characteristics of participants. This section gathered background details such as age, gender, academic degree, job title, residence changes during the full-scale war, and university relocation status.

The second section focused on various aspects of institutional mental health support and career intentions among academic staff. Participants reported their frequency of considering a career change, ranging from "Almost never" to "Always." They assessed the importance of institutional mental health support, with ratings from "Not important" to "Very important," and evaluated their institution's mental health culture as "Low," "Moderate," or "High." Respondents also rated the availability of support on a 0–5 scale, where

0 indicated very low support availability, and 5 represented high support. Accessibility of mental health support was rated on a scale from “Very low” to “Very high.” Additionally, participants indicated whether their institution offered mental health programs, with responses including “No, but necessary,” “Yes, effective,” and other options. Finally, participants selected which institutional mental health initiatives they found effective, such as counseling with psychologists, peer support, self-help practices, courses, training on stress resilience, and mobile apps, with an option to suggest other initiatives. These responses provide insights into staff perceptions of the importance, culture, accessibility, and effectiveness of institutional mental health support.

As a result, 429 academic staff members from diverse backgrounds and roles within Ukrainian universities participated in the study, representing a cross-section of individuals affected by the war (Table 1). The final sample represents voluntary respondents who decided to participate. Eligibility criteria required participants to be the academic staff employed at Ukrainian universities during the war. Since the sample is based on voluntary responses, its results reflect the group of academic staff who were interested in supporting their mental health. Although this is a voluntary sample, its demographic and professional composition pro-

vides a general understanding of the state of mental health support in the academic environment. Demographic information such as age, gender, academic degree, and migration status was collected to ensure a comprehensive analysis.

The outcome variable, a respondent’s desire to change professional fields, was recoded from the original 4-scale measure into a binary variable, with 1 representing “often” or “very often” thoughts about leaving academia and 0 representing seldom or absent cases. Thirteen observations were excluded when respondents refused to provide a determined answer. Consequently, 46.9% of respondents in the final sample of 416 observations are classified as individuals contemplating a career change.

Similarly, other explanatory variables were recorded as binary: relocation of a respondent’s university (with single or repeated relocation combined into “yes,” as only 6% of respondents mentioned repeated relocation) and the importance of institutional mental health support (as 90% of respondents agreed on its importance). Additionally, responses about a respondent’s degree were combined into a simple “yes/no” answer rather than differentiating between those without a degree, graduate students, candidates, or doctors of science since only 20% reported either studying or

Table 1. Social-demographic characteristics of participants

Variable	Subcategory	Distribution, %	Distribution, N
Age	Under 35	17	73
	35-45 years	35.4	153
	46-60 years	38.9	167
	61 older	8.7	37
Gender	Male	25.4	109
	Female	74.6	320
Scientific degree	Ph.D. Student	19.4	83
	Ph.D. Holder	63.6	273
	Doctor of Science	17	73
Job title	Assistant	9.6	41
	Senior Lecturer	16.5	71
	Associate Professor	57.4	246
	Professor	16.5	71
Change of permanent personal residence	Internal migrants	30.1	129
	External migrants	14.4	62
	Remained in place	55.5	238
University relocation status	Remained	62.9	270
	Relocated	37.1	159

Note: (N) – number of respondents, indicated in parentheses; [st.d] – standard deviation, indicated in square brackets.

having no degree, and only 17% reported a doctor of science degree. The primary rationale for these transformations was to simplify the analysis and increase statistical efficiency. Some categories had a small number of observations, which could reduce the robustness of the regression model. For example, less than 10% of respondents reported “repeated relocations,” justifying its merging with “single relocations.” Similarly, distinctions between academic degrees were streamlined due to the limited representation of certain groups (e.g., Doctor of Science).

By consolidating categories, the study ensured sufficient statistical power while maintaining the interpretability of the results. This transformation aligns with commonly accepted practices in research when specific categories have a small number of observations. Binarization ensures sufficient statistical power and reliability in regression analyses while maintaining interpretability.

Survey responses were initially exported from Google Forms into Excel, followed by STATA® for comprehensive statistical analysis. Data validation checks were conducted prior to analysis to confirm data integrity, ensuring accuracy across key variables and participant characteristics. Descriptive statistics, including mean, median, standard deviation, and percentile ranges, were calculated to summarize the sample distribution and core variables.

The following regression model was employed to estimate the relationship between mental health support and career change intentions:

$$\begin{aligned} sci_{quit} = & \beta_0 + \beta_{dem} dem + \beta_{reloc} reloc \\ & + \beta_{MH_{culture}} MH_{Culture} + \beta_1 MH_{Avail} \\ & + \beta_2 MH_{Importance} + e, \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

where *dem* is a vector of socio-demographic variables (age group, gender, scientific degree, and scientific position), *reloc* is a vector of personal and institutional relocation variables, *MH culture* is a vector of institutional measures for the mental health support culture and accessibility, and finally, *MH avail* and *MH importance* are numerical measures of availability and importance of mental health support.

The regression analysis was conducted using binarized variables to ensure statistical clarity and robust estimation of the relationship between institutional mental health support and career change intentions. All analyses were conducted using OLS regression, with alternative logistic regressions confirming the robustness of the results. A series of regression analyses were conducted to explore the relationship between variables and the desire among academic staff to change professional fields. Statistical significance was determined with *p*-values set at conventional levels (e.g., $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$) to identify key predictors.

This study adhered to rigorous ethical standards for research involving human participants, following the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki and the Belmont Report. Participants provided informed consent and were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly kept throughout the research process. Ethical approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of Berdyansk State Pedagogical University (Protocol No. 12/2023), ensuring compliance with ethical standards.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Desire to change professional fields among Ukrainian academic staff during the full-scale war

The desire to change professional fields among Ukrainian academic staff has become a prominent issue since the onset of the full-scale war. Figure 1 highlights that a substantial portion of academic staff is frequently considering a career shift, with 30.1% thinking about it “often” and an additional 15.4% reporting they think about it “very often” or “always.” This means that nearly half (45.5%) of respondents regularly contemplate leaving their profession, while only a minority (27.5%) rarely or never consider a career change. These data suggest that thoughts of career change are relatively common. This trend likely reflects the significant toll of the war on job satisfaction and stability among academic staff.

Figure 2 illustrates the desire to change professional fields among Ukrainian academic staff dur-

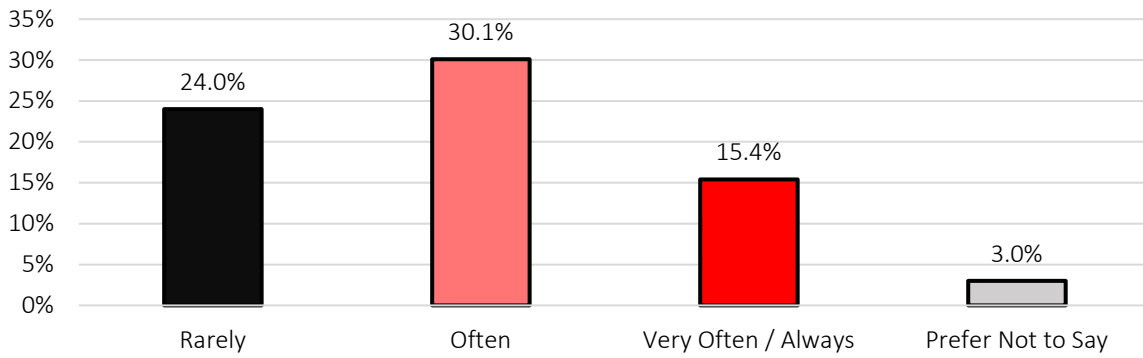


Figure 1. Desire to change professional fields since the beginning of the full-scale war

ing the full-scale war, broken down by age, job title, gender, university relocation status, scientific degree, and changes in permanent residence.

Younger academics, particularly those under 35, display a stronger inclination to consider leaving their fields, a trend that decreases with age, as

those aged 61 and older are more likely to “almost never” consider a career change. In terms of job title, assistants and senior lecturers show a greater tendency to contemplate a change, whereas professors and associate professors appear more stable in their roles. Gender also plays a role, with female staff reporting higher rates of “always” consider-

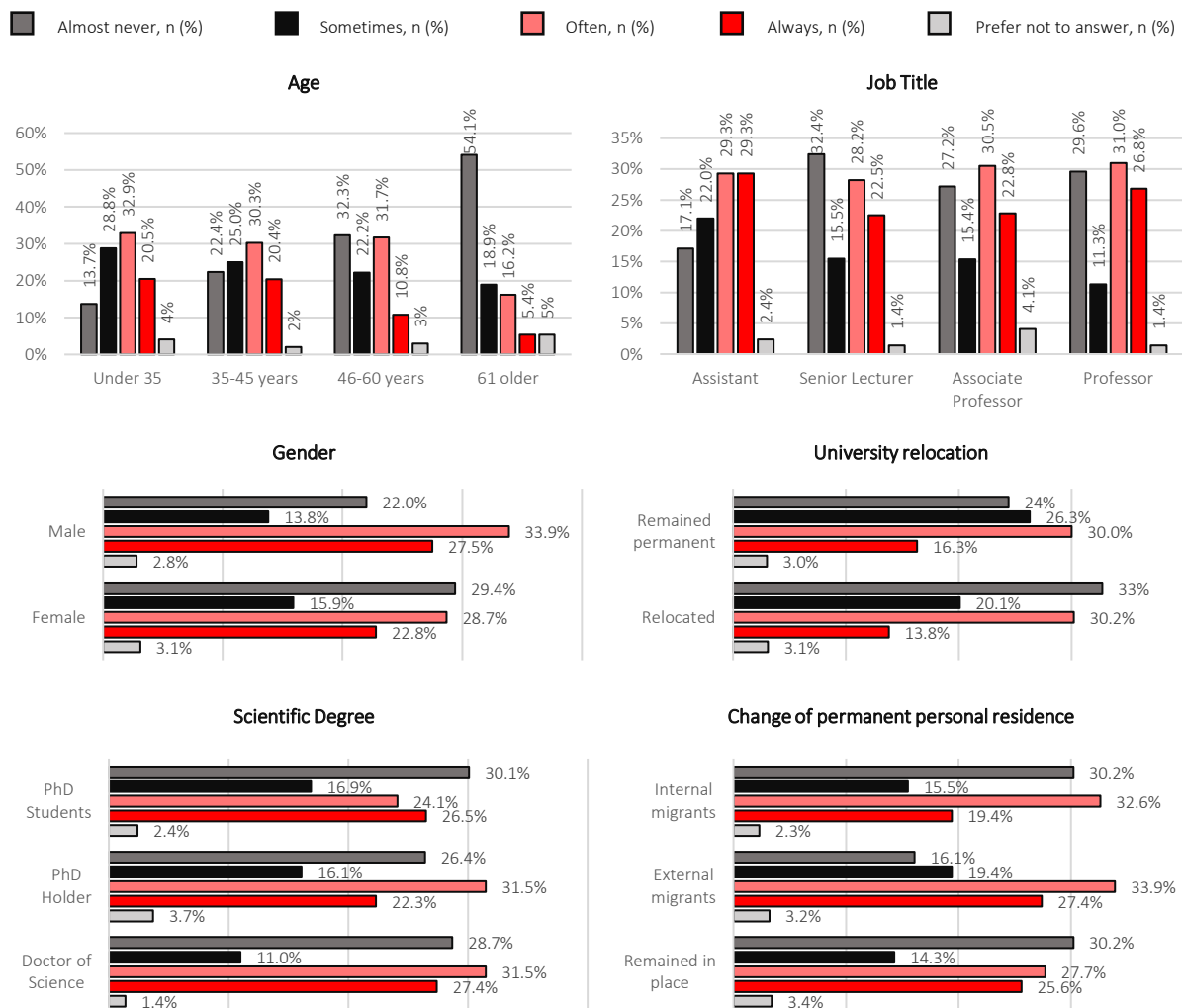


Figure 2. Desire to change professional fields among Ukrainian academic staff during the full-scale war depending on different characteristics

ing a change compared to their male counterparts. Additionally, staff at relocated universities and external migrants shows heightened intentions to leave, likely due to the additional stressors associated with displacement. Conversely, Ph.D. students and those who have not relocated report a lower inclination to change fields. These patterns suggest that demographic and situational factors, such as age, job status, and relocation, may amplify thoughts of leaving academia during wartime, underscoring the widespread impact of the conflict on career stability within the academic sector.

3.2. Institutional mental health support for academic staff

Table 2 outlines the assessments of institutional mental health support among Ukrainian academic staff, providing insights into perceived importance, cultural attitudes, program availability, and accessibility of mental health initiatives.

The data indicate that most academic members view mental health support as highly important, with 53.4% rating it as “very important” and 36.8% as “important.” It reflects a strong perceived need for robust mental health support within institutions.

When assessing their institutions’ mental health culture, staff responses varied, with 38.7% rating it as “moderate” and 37.1% as “low.” The overall

mean of 1.87 suggests that many employees feel their institutions lack a supportive mental health culture. This indicates a need for institutions to foster an environment that prioritizes mental health and openly addresses staff well-being.

Program availability emerged as another key concern. A substantial portion of respondents (23.5%) indicated that while no programs are available, they believe it is necessary to implement them.

Accessibility ratings further reflect variability, with 21.9% rating accessibility as “very low” and 17.2% as “low,” while only 14.7% rated accessibility as “very high.” The overall accessibility mean of 2.32 suggests that for many, mental health support remains out of reach. These findings imply that improving accessibility to mental health resources within institutions could help mitigate stress levels among academic staff.

In summary, results reveal a broad consensus among Ukrainian academic staff on the importance of institutional mental health support, although current programs and accessibility are perceived as lacking. Those experiencing limited access to effective programs and a low-support institutional culture tend to report higher stress levels, underscoring the potential positive impact of targeted improvements in institutional mental health support.

Table 2. Assessment of institutional mental health support by Ukrainian academic staff

Variable	Sub-variable	Distribution, N	Distribution, %
Importance of institutional mental health support	Absolutely not important	2	0.5
	No, not important	2	0.5
	Neutral	38	8.8
	Yes, important	158	36.8
	Yes, very important	229	53.4
Institutional culture regarding mental health support	Low	159	37.1
	Moderate	166	38.7
	High	104	24.2
Availability of institutional programs or initiatives for mental health support	No, and not needed	5	1.2
	No, but should be implemented	101	23.5
	Do not know	125	29.1
	Yes, but they are ineffective	104	24.2
	Yes, and they are effective	94	21.9
Accessibility of mental health support	Very low	94	21.9
	Low	74	17.2
	Adequate	49	11.4
	Moderate	84	19.6
	High	65	15.2
	Very high	63	14.7

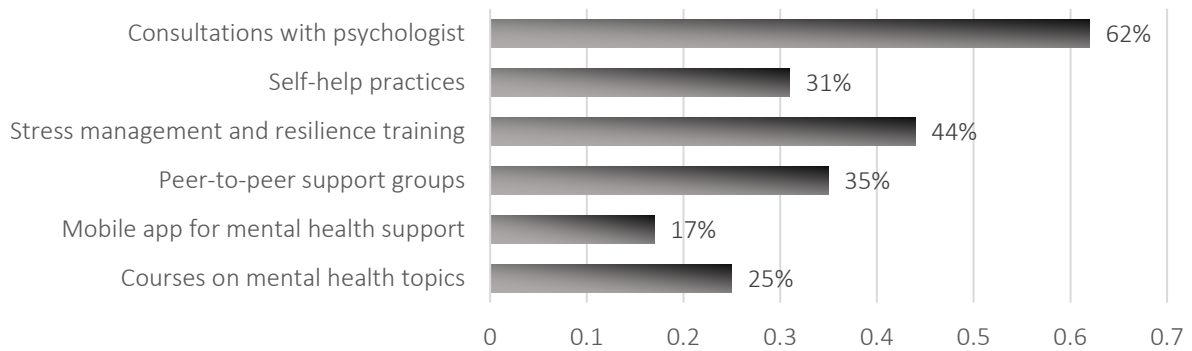


Figure 3. Distribution of preferences for specific institutional mental health support initiatives among academic staff during wartime

These findings are further clarified in Figure 3, which highlights academic staff preferences for specific mental health support options. Among Ukrainian academic staff, more formal and interactive mental health support options, such as counseling with psychologists and resilience training, are notably more commonly utilized, whereas less interactive options, like mobile apps, see significantly lower engagement.

3.3. Relationship between institutional mental health support and the desire to change the professional field among Ukrainian academic staff

This study aimed to clarify the relationship between migration status, institutional mental health support, and the desire among Ukrainian academic staff to change their professional field.

The primary rationale for combining values into binary variables was to reduce statistical clutter from smaller categories, as they did not add value to the estimation with excessive detail. However, the categorization of personal displacement was left as internal and external outcomes, as these answers represent distinct paths and have different implications for the decision variable.

All four specifications were estimated using simple OLS regression. The same specifications were also analyzed with logistic regressions, yielding strikingly similar results both numerically and in terms of statistical significance. As

such, these results are not reported in this paper but are available from the authors upon request.

The socio-demographic variables are included in all four specifications, but neither variable is statistically significant (except for a strong negative coefficient for individuals in the oldest age group, which is explained by a standard negative age gradient toward changes) and hence are not reported individually. Detailed regression results are presented in Table 3.

For migration status, internal migrants initially show a significant, positive association with the desire for a career change, with a coefficient of 0.150** in Model 1. However, as additional variables related to mental health support are added, the effect size diminishes, suggesting that the initial significance might be partly explained by other factors. Besides, the explanatory power of displacement variables is very low (Adjusted R -square is only 0.023), which calls for richer specifications with the inclusion of mental support variables. External migrants, on the other hand, demonstrate a consistent and significant impact across all models, with coefficients ranging from 0.177 in Model 1 to 0.116 in Model 4. This persistent positive association indicates that external migrants are more inclined toward a career change than non-migrants.

The university relocation variable is not statistically significant in any model, implying that university relocation alone does not appear to influence staff's desire to change professions. This finding highlights that individual migration status or factors tied to mental health support may have a more direct impact on career intentions.

Table 3. Regression analysis of migration status and institutional mental health support on the desire to change the professional field

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Internal migrants	0.150** (0.076)	0.114 (0.072)	0.110 (0.073)	0.094 (0.073)
External migrants	0.177** (0.075)	0.134** (0.068)	0.130* (0.069)	0.116* (0.069)
University relocated	-0.108 (0.069)	0.008 (0.066)	0.012 (0.067)	0.027 (0.067)
Accessibility of mental health support		-0.041* (0.022)	-0.041* (0.022)	-0.059** (0.023)
Institutional culture regarding mental health support		-0.086*** (0.023)	-0.087*** (0.023)	-0.086*** (0.022)
Importance of institutional mental health support			0.046 (0.083)	0.021 (0.086)
Availability of institutional programs or initiatives for mental health support				0.120** (0.054)
Demographic controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Adj. R-Square	0.023	0.173	0.171	0.180
N obs.	416	416	416	416

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Model 1 serves as the baseline model, including only migration status variables. Model 2 builds on Model 1 by adding the variable for accessibility of mental health support. Model 3 expands on Model 2 by incorporating institutional culture regarding mental health support. Model 4 adds the availability and importance of institutional mental health support programs to the variables in Model 3.

The accessibility of mental health support shows a modest but consistent negative association with the desire to change fields in Models 2 through 4. For example, Model 4 has a coefficient of -0.059 , indicating that enhanced accessibility to mental health support decreases the likelihood of career change desires by approximately 6%. This suggests that accessible mental health support can help individuals better cope with stress, thereby reducing their inclination to leave the profession.

The impact of institutional culture regarding mental health support is strongly significant, with coefficients around -0.086^{***} across Models 2 through 4. This indicates that in institutions fostering a supportive mental health culture, staff members are about 8-9% less likely to consider leaving their field. A positive institutional culture for mental health seems to foster a sense of belonging and resilience among academic staff, which can mitigate career change intentions.

For institutional programs or initiatives, the perceived importance of mental health support programs alone does not significantly affect career change desires. However, the availability of institutional mental health programs shows a positive and significant effect in Model 4, with a coefficient

of 0.120. This suggests that institutions offering specific mental health programs can reduce career change desires by around 12%, likely by addressing the specific mental health needs of staff and helping them manage their professional roles more effectively.

While simply recognizing the importance of mental health support does not directly influence career intentions, actively providing accessible mental health programs within institutions plays a more impactful role. A regression analysis of the relationship between institutional mental health support initiatives and the desire to change the professional field among Ukrainian academic staff reveals several trends (Table 4).

Model 4 was further extended to include six indicator variables for desired institutional support measures, as mentioned by the respondents. Since the model coefficients remained unchanged compared to Model 4, only the additional parameters were reported. Surprisingly, only access to self-help information shows a statistically significant relationship with the desire to change the professional field (coefficient = -0.117 , p -value = 0.019), showing that such resources may be associated with a decreased likelihood of wanting to change

Table 4. Institutional mental health support initiatives and relationship with a desire to change the professional field among Ukrainian academic staff

Institutional support initiatives for academic staff	Coefficient	p-value	Lower CI	Upper CI
Counseling with psychologist	-0.036	0.446	-0.132	0.058
Self-help practices	-0.117	0.019**	-0.215	-0.019
Stress management and resilience training	0.077	0.121	-0.021	0.175
Courses on mental health topics	0.057	0.143	-0.031	0.186
Peer-to-peer support groups	0.034	0.479	-0.061	0.13
Mobile apps for mental health support	0.015	0.805	-0.105	0.135

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

the professional field. This suggests that individuals who engage in or have access to self-help practices are approximately 12% less likely to express the desire to leave academia. Therefore, self-help resources can play an essential role in career retention.

Other types of support do not demonstrate significant impacts, suggesting their limited effectiveness in influencing career decisions. Overall, this implies that while these other institutional support initiatives may contribute to overall mental well-being, they do not have a notable impact on reducing the desire to leave the academic field. Only targeted self-help resources play a meaningful role in career retention, pointing to areas where policymakers and institutions can focus their efforts for a more significant impact.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings provide insight into the relationship between migration status, institutional mental health support, and the desire to change professional fields among Ukrainian academic staff during the full-scale war.

The results illustrate the significant impact of the full-scale war on career stability among Ukrainian academic staff, with nearly half of respondents frequently considering a change in professional fields. This high rate of career-change contemplation suggests substantial job instability, likely due to increased stress, financial pressures, and institutional disruptions brought about by the conflict. Similar trends in career re-evaluation are observed in other conflict-affected regions, where professionals, especially in high-stress roles, feel a heightened sense of uncertainty (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010; Tereshchenko & Tolkunova,

2023). Crisis encourages them to reconsider their career trajectories as they search for stability, fulfillment, and a sustainable work-life balance (Kwon, 2022; Kachmarchyk, 2021; Yablonska & Sirokha, 2020).

External migrants demonstrated a higher propensity to consider leaving academia, likely due to the layered challenges of adapting to new environments alongside disrupted professional and personal support networks. These findings align with prior research suggesting that the stresses associated with relocation and resettlement contribute to heightened levels of anxiety and burn-out, often resulting in increased career dissatisfaction (Plokhikh et al., 2024; Popovych et al., 2023; Tsybuliak, Kolomiets, et al., 2024). Unexpectedly, this analysis revealed that university relocation, as an institutional factor, did not significantly influence intentions to leave academia. This suggests that while institutional relocations influence operational aspects, the broader, individualized experience of migration exerts a more profound effect on career trajectories. This is consistent with McAlpine's (2012) findings on the enduring influence of relocation on the career paths of early-career researchers, highlighting that personal migration challenges bear greater weight on professional outcomes than institutional transitions.

Also, in crisis contexts, career change decisions often shift away from being influenced by socio-demographic factors, focusing instead on immediate concerns about stability and well-being (Higgins, 2001). The current findings reflect this pattern, showing that age, gender, position, and academic degree did not significantly affect the inclination to leave academia, likely due to the overwhelming and unifying stress of the crisis. In high-stress environments, research shows that intense stress-

ors, such as those in conflict zones, tend to outweigh individual demographic characteristics, highlighting a shared sense of vulnerability that shapes career intentions beyond personal attributes (Shirom et al., 2008). Additionally, factors such as work environment and available support systems often play a more central role in career retention decisions than demographic variables, as the context of insecurity becomes a predominant influence (Haase & Lautenschläger, 2014; Farivar et al., 2019).

The findings underscore the critical need for mental health support in academic institutions, as frequent thoughts of career change may signal that academic members feel insufficiently supported amid the unique stressors of wartime conditions. Notably, accessible mental health support correlates with a 6% decrease in career change intentions, and a positive mental health culture further reduces these intentions by 8-9%. These insights align with prior studies that emphasize the impact of supportive workplace cultures and mental health resources on reducing burnout and enhancing job satisfaction (Berkbekova & Lin, 2024; Nicholls et al., 2022; Halat et al., 2023; Moulin, 2020). The current study highlights the importance of fostering mental health and well-being support to improve faculty commitment, contributing to a conceptual framework for understanding and evaluating academic staff's mental health needs.

Interestingly, while the importance of mental health support was acknowledged, its perceived significance alone did not correlate with a reduced desire for career change. However, the availability of specific mental health programs significantly decreased career change intentions by about 12%. This suggests that recognizing mental health's importance is insufficient; institutions must provide tangible, effective support programs to make a substantial impact. Similar findings in other studies emphasize that practical resources and structured mental health programs are often more effective in retaining employees than awareness alone (Gewurtz et al., 2022; Falcon et al., 2021; Attridge et al., 2023; Baskar et al., 2021).

The analysis of various types of institutional mental health support initiatives revealed that self-help practices are uniquely effective in decreasing

the desire for career change, with a 12% reduction. This finding is somewhat surprising, as more conventional support types, such as psychological counseling, stress resilience training, and peer support groups, did not show significant impacts. Self-help resources provide academic staff with autonomy and flexibility, allowing them to integrate mental health practices into their routines in ways that suit their personal needs and schedules without reliance on structured programs (Galffy et al., 2022; Levin et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2020). The study underscores that self-help strategies can be particularly effective in fostering individualized coping mechanisms and sustaining mental well-being in challenging contexts. In these settings, accessible, self-directed practices serve as valuable resources for maintaining mental health and resilience. Given the generally low rating of institutional culture, many staff members may feel skeptical about institutional changes. However, the independence offered by self-help practices gives them a sense of control and stability, which may help to counteract the desire to leave the profession.

The findings indicate that commonly used digital mental health tools, such as mobile apps and online courses, have limited impact on reducing career change intentions among academic staff, likely due to a lack of depth and personalization to address specific stressors. Prior research supports this, suggesting that while digital solutions offer convenience, they are most effective in retention when tailored to job-specific challenges (van der Feltz-Cornelis et al., 2023; Oliveira et al., 2023). Tailored interventions, such as those that facilitate communication about workplace stressors (Truong & McLachlan, 2022) or adapt to user needs and job contexts (Balcombe & de Leo, 2022; van der Feltz-Cornelis et al., 2023), are associated with greater improvements in productivity, mental health, and retention. These insights highlight the importance of institutions implementing mental health tools customized to the unique pressures of academic environments, which could better support career stability and long-term engagement.

Overall, institutions aiming to retain academic staff, especially in high-stress or conflict environments, should prioritize creating a supportive mental health culture and providing accessible, targeted self-help resources. Implementing com-

prehensive mental health programs, rather than merely promoting mental health awareness, is likely to have a stronger impact on staff retention in academia.

This study encountered several limitations. First, the use of convenience sampling limited the generalizability of the findings, influenced by war-related constraints, physical distancing requirements, and academic migration patterns.

The cross-sectional design further restricted the ability to establish causality between variables. Additionally, reliance on self-reported data may have resulted in the underreporting of mental health issues or the introduction of social desirability bias. Lastly, the unknown number of individuals who viewed the survey invitations made it challenging to determine the survey response rate, potentially affecting the sample's representativeness.

CONCLUSION

The study examines the impact of institutional mental health support on the career stability of academic staff at Ukrainian universities during the full-scale war, focusing on its accessibility, cultural alignment, and tailored mental health initiatives provided by universities. The findings highlight the significant toll of war on academic staff's career stability, with nearly half of respondents (45.5%) frequently considering a career change. At the same time, accessible mental health support is correlated with a 6% reduction in career change intentions, while a supportive institutional mental health culture further decreases these intentions by 8%. This trend underscores the urgent need for effective institutional mental health support to help staff cope with stressors unique to the wartime context.

The study reveals several novel insights. First, the positive association between accessible mental health support and reduced career change intentions underscores the practical value of making mental health resources readily available. Institutions with a supportive mental health culture can lower teachers' career change considerations, highlighting the role of institutional culture in fostering resilience and professional commitment. Second, the availability of tailored mental health initiatives, particularly self-help practices, was found to be the most effective, reducing career change intentions by 12%. Self-help resources empower academic staff by providing flexible, individualized coping strategies, which proved more impactful than more traditional interventions such as psychological counseling or digital tools.

These findings have practical implications for universities aiming to retain academic staff during crises. By prioritizing accessible mental health resources, fostering a culture supportive of mental health, and investing in self-directed support options, institutions can strengthen resilience among their academic communities. This approach not only addresses immediate mental health needs but also promotes long-term career stability and engagement.

For future research, longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into the evolving effects of mental health support on career intentions in conflict-affected areas. By advancing this analysis, institutions can better equip themselves to support academic professionals, ultimately preserving Ukraine's intellectual potential.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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APPENDIX A

Table A1. Exploring institutional mental health support for academic staff: A survey on accessibility, perception, and effectiveness of initiatives

Category	Select the appropriate answer
Section 1: Socio-demographic information	
1. What is your age group?	
Under 35	
35–45 years	
46–60 years	
61 and older	
2. What is your gender?	
Male	
Female	
3. What is your scientific degree?	
Ph.D. Student	
Ph.D. Holder	
Doctor of Science	
4. What is your current job title?	
Assistant	
Senior Lecturer	
Associate Professor	
Professor	
5. Have you changed your permanent place of residence recently?	
Internal Migrant (moved within the country)	
External Migrant (moved to a different country)	
Remained in Place (have not moved)	
6. Has your university relocated or remained in its original location?	
Remained	
Relocated	
Section 2. Institutional mental health support	
7. Indicate your desire to change professional fields, choosing from the following options:	
Prefer not to answer	
Almost never	
Sometimes	
Always	
8. Assess the importance of mental health support within your institution, selecting from:	
Absolutely not important	
No, not important	
Neutral	
Yes, important	
Yes, very important	
9. Rate the perceived institutional culture regarding mental health support, with options:	
Low	
Moderate	
High	
10. Rate the perceived availability of institutional mental health support at your institution on a 0–5 scale, with 0 indicating low support availability and 5 representing high support availability.	
0	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

Table A1 (cont.). Exploring institutional mental health support for academic staff: A survey on accessibility, perception, and effectiveness of initiatives

Category	Select the appropriate answer
11. Assess the accessibility of mental health support within your institution using the following scale:	
Very low	
Low	
Adequate	
Moderate	
High	
Very high	
12. Does your HEI provide institutional mental health support programs for academic staff?	
Do not know	
No, but it is necessary to implement	
No, and it is not necessary	
Yes, but they are ineffective	
Yes, and they are effective	
13. Within a list of potential mental health support initiatives, select those you consider effective:	
Available counseling with professional psychologists for academic staff	
Peer-to-peer support groups for academic staff	
Self-help practices	
Courses on mental health topics	
Training sessions on stress resilience and mental well-being	
Dedicated mobile apps for mental health support of academic staff	
Other (open-ended for additional suggestions)	