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Original Article

Internal Displacement and Subjective Well-Being: The Case of Ukraine in 2018

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Ukraine is currently experiencing the largest human displacement crisis in the world. However, armed conflict that started in 2014 had already displaced nearly 1.8 million people in Ukraine, resulting in the largest internally displaced population in Europe. Although ethnically and culturally similar to the local population, Ukrainian Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) encounter severe economic, housing, and social challenges, as well as residual trauma from violence. In this study we examine the extent to which the subjective well-being (SWB) of IDPs differs from locals who were not displaced. We explore whether the difference in subjective well-being between IDPs and locals is due to economic hardship, inadequate housing, and/or weak social support. Using a unique survey conducted in 2018 and OLS regression methods, we find a sizable gap in SWB between IDPs and locals. The gap shrinks after accounting for economic and housing status, and support from local networks. Measures of loss in housing and social networks additionally account for the gap. However, none of the factors we measure can account for the difference between locals and IDPs who reported only leaving due to violence, pointing to the enduring impact of trauma on SWB.

Introduction

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has led to a major humanitarian catastrophe. By the end of 2022, around 5.7 million people had fled the country as refugees, and another 11.6 million were displaced within the country (UNHCR 2023). The war has focused the world's attention on Ukraine's situation and the plight of millions who have endured Russia's aggression. However, even before the 2022 invasion, Ukraine suffered from a crisis of internal displacement. Nearly 1.8 million people had been internally displaced due to the war in the eastern Donbas region, which erupted between Russian-backed separatists and Ukrainian government forces in 2014 (Mykhnenko et al. 2022). By 2015, Ukraine was among the 10 countries with the largest

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internally displaced person (IDP) populations in the world (UNHCR 2015). Although the scale of the displacement crisis in Ukraine in 2018 was not the same as in Yemen, Syria, or Colombia, it was the largest displacement of people in Europe since World War II. Despite this, Ukrainian IDPs have been less visible and less studied than other displaced populations or refugees (Mitchneck, 2016).

This study examines the subjective well-being of IDPs in Ukraine approximately 4 years after the war of 2014 began. Although a large literature investigates the impact of war-time trauma and displacement on refugees' well-being around the world (e.g. Hagstrom et al. 2019; Hartonen et al. 2021; Hocking 2018; Walther et al. 2020), far less is known about how the experience of displacement affects the subjective well-being (SWB) of IDPs (although see Shemyakina and Plagnol 2013 for Bosnia–Herzegovina). Like refugees, IDPs potentially lose economic resources, housing, and locally-embedded social connections, and often the process of displacement involves exposure to violence and trauma, all of which intuitively should lower SWB. On the other hand, unlike refugees, IDPs stay in their home country and could have an easier time integrating into the local population, especially when sharing the same language and ethnicity. Yet the communities in which IDPs resettle (hereafter "locals") face their own stressors. Resettlement often occurs in places where conditions have already deteriorated, and the arrival of large numbers of displaced people can cause economic, social, political, and psychological strain. Thus, while IDPs are likely to suffer declines in subjective well-being, they may be no worse off than corresponding locals.

In this study, we analyze the SWB gap between IDPs who fled the conflict-ridden territories of eastern Ukraine and local residents in the areas where they resettled. In contrast to most IDP surveys in Ukraine (IOM 2018; Cheung et al. 2019; Roberts et al. 2019), as well as studies of well-being in other forced migration contexts (e.g., NASEM 2019), our research design features a sample of locals who completed the same survey as the IDPs. Unfortunately, we were unable to conduct the survey among those who stayed in the Non-Government Controlled Area (NGCA), because the Ukrainian survey agency was prohibited from traveling there. Nonetheless, our matched IDP/local sample provides a unique tool to address a methodological challenge: the lack of a baseline (pre-displacement) measure of well-being for those who are displaced. Our approach, while not as optimal as a prospective panel survey, offers a second-best alternative that quantifies the impact of displacement and examines potential mechanisms.

We address three key questions:

1. Recognizing that resettlement after conflict often occurs in unstable settings (IDMC 2018), to what extent does the SWB of IDPs differ from those in the local areas where the IDPs settle?
2. To what extent is the IDP/local SWB gap attributable to economic hardship, inadequate housing, and weak social support among IDPs?
3. How does the *loss* of economic, housing, and social resources—or decline in *relative* status—attenuate the IDP-local SWB gap?

In addition, we are interested in the motivations for leaving the Non-Government Controlled Area. In line with other definitions of forced displacement (Mooney 2005, UN Secretary General 2004), we consider an IDP to be anyone who involuntarily leaves their home as a result of armed conflict or internal strife. In the case of Ukraine, this means someone who moved from the NGCA and resettled in the Government Controlled Area (GCA). Nonetheless, the exact reasons for leaving can differ between IDPs, and they can have mixed motivations (Hynie 2019). Our survey respondents reported fleeing the threat of violence, but also leaving for economic or family reasons. Thus, we investigate the extent to which different reasons for displacement are associated with long-term SWB.

Taken as a whole, this study contributes to our understanding of how adverse events can influence subjective well-being. The study's unique research design captures the effect of an exogenous shock—war—and how individuals cope with forced displacement. Although prior studies have evaluated the mental health of IDPs, they have not identified the key factors

associated with declines in SWB. The context itself, Ukraine, has also been understudied, despite being a site of significant population displacement and a crucial geo-political linchpin. Greater knowledge of the prior Ukrainian IDP experience can inform the humanitarian response to the current crisis in Ukraine.

Theoretical framework

Current conditions

Social scientists studying SWB usually focus on the factors that lead people to subjectively experience their lives as worthwhile and rewarding (Diener et al. 2018, Kahneman et al. 1999 for reviews). Various terms, including "happiness" and "life satisfaction," are often used to conceptualize SWB. Below we focus on life satisfaction, which is typically defined as a process of assessing individuals' perceived quality of life based on current circumstances (Diener et al. 2018), but use the term happiness and SWB interchangeably (Veenhoven 2020).

One of the most important factors influencing life satisfaction is relationships with others (Diener & Seligman 2002; Gable and Bromberg 2018, Umberson and Karas Montez 2010 for reviews). Marriage is often found to be associated with greater life satisfaction, compared to being single (Mikucka 2016; Stutzer and Frey 2006). Divorce lowers SWB, although potentially only in the short-term (Kalmijn 2017). Children have a mixed effect, often lowering SWB directly after childbearing (Balbo and Arpino 2016). Living arrangements—living alone, with nuclear or extended family or others—can be a source of both support and strain (Umberson and Karas Montez 2010). Social ties with friends and neighbors can provide support that mitigates the stress response to a negative event, for example, providing help when needed (Gable & Bromberg 2018). Having someone to rely on can be comforting and signal social embeddedness (Siedlecki et al. 2014). Thus, social support and contact often buffers against threats and helps to cope with stress (Gable & Bromberg 2018).

Happiness also depends on the fulfillment of basic material and psychological needs (Tay and Diener 2011). Income and economic status often represent the ability to achieve basic needs, with higher income helping to maintain a certain standard of living or buffer against major life events (Diener et al. 2013). Also, income relative to others may signify social status, such that individuals with higher income are happier than those with lower income (Tay et al. 2018). Correspondingly, unemployment is consistently associated with lower subjective well-being (Clark et al. 2008). Besides lowering one's standard of living, unemployment incurs psychological and social costs, with pernicious consequences for perceived social approval and self-esteem, especially for men (van der Meer 2014).

Housing is also hypothesized to affect SWB, not only as a basic human need, but as the locus of family life, community connections, and household wealth (Clapham et al. 2018). Associations of SWB with multiple aspects of housing, including tenure, quality, and quantity, have been found across many contexts, although causation is more difficult to establish (Zavisca & Gerber 2016). Homeowners' higher SWB may stem from social status and pride of ownership; a sense of ontological security; residential stability; or wealth accumulation (Angel & Gregory 2021; Zhang et al. 2018). More space per capita, as well as privacy, is associated with higher SWB (Campagna 2016; Evans et al. 2000). Finally, factors such as quality of housing materials and access to utilities are associated with SWB (Cattaneo et al. 2009; Clark & Kearns 2012; Devoto et al. 2012).

Loss and recovery

Research has debated whether the impact of adverse life events on SWB is permanent or if people eventually return to baseline levels of SWB (Luhmann & Intelisano 2018). According to set-point theory, negative events lead to temporary declines in SWB, but recovery eventually occurs (Lykken & Tellegen 1996). However, adaptation often depends on the specific type of event (Lucas 2007). For example, on average, people quickly adapt after marriage and divorce (Kalmijn 2017), but are slower to adapt to bereavement and widowhood (Luhmann et al. 2012). Loss of friendship

and support networks can harm SWB, even producing emotional responses like bereavement. Job loss and disability can have long-term scarring effects on psychological well-being (Lucas 2007, Strandh et al. 2014, Mousteri et al. 2018), even after reemployment (Lucas et al. 2004). Natural disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina, have been found to have long-term effects on mental health (Paxson et al. 2012); although other studies found that happiness levels returned to baseline after four years (Calvo et al. 2015).

One of the main reasons negative events continues to be painful is due to the experience of loss. A likely mechanism is relative deprivation in both material and social status relative to one's past. For example, prior research has found that income losses have a stronger influence on life satisfaction than income gains, indicating little adaptation in the long run (Wolbring et al. 2013; Boyce et al. 2013). Downward occupational mobility can be perceived as a "fall from grace" (Newman 1988), deflating self-esteem, identity, and sense of purpose. Loss of employment not only influences available resources, but can entail the loss of the worker role, family strain, and declining relationship quality (Blom & Perelli-Harris 2021).

Similarly, loss of housing could affect psychological well-being more than persistent deprivation. The limited literature on housing and SWB concentrates on upward mobility, finding that transitions from renting to owning, house value appreciation, and home quality improvements have mostly positive SWB effects (Cattaneo et al. 2009; Diaz-Serrano 2009; Zheng et al. 2020), although they may dissipate over time (Foye 2017). A rare study of downward housing mobility found that loss of homeownership reduces life satisfaction and housing satisfaction (Clark & Díaz Serrano 2020).

Most studies emphasize within-person changes due to loss, but studies comparing those who have and have not experienced negative events are important for understanding long-term consequences for life satisfaction (Luhmann & Intelisano 2018). Proximity to disasters also matter: for example, the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe had a stronger long-term impact on mental well-being for those closer to the reactor (Danzer & Danzer 2016). Yet studies that compare residents living in an area where some have directly experienced minimal loss and others have experienced profound loss are rare.

Forced displacement and subjective well-being

Data and research on forced displacement and SWB are limited. Although prior studies have found that migrants in general have lower life satisfaction than the native population (see Hendriks 2015 for a review), far fewer studies have examined the experiences of refugees or internally displaced persons. Also, displaced persons are distinct from migrants in that they have left their homes under dire conditions produced by violence and force (Mandic 2022). As a result, displacement is a life-changing, potentially tragic, experience that can have have a lasting impact (Mykhnenko et al. 2022). Thus, the selection, assimilation, and integration processes of forced migration should be studied separately from economic migration (Castles 2003; Mandic 2022).

Prior studies have found that displaced persons are likely to suffer from poor mental well-being. Studies from psychology using clinical measures of mental well-being find war refugees experience long-term mental health disorders and depression (see Mesa Veira et al. 2022; Bogic et al. 2015; Blackmore et al. 2020; Lindert et al. 2009 for reviews). Shemyakina and Plagnol (2013) studied subjective well-being in Bosnia-Herzegovina and found that victims of war-related displacement had worse life satisfaction 10 years after the conflict than others in the area, but the association seemed to decline over time. Although most research indicates that negative events such as violence and trauma lower life satisfaction, the impact among displaced persons varies, and some individuals may even experience posttraumatic spiritual growth and a renewed appreciation for life (Tedeschi & Calhoun 2004).

Most studies of well-being of the displaced do not investigate the mechanisms that may help to explain poor well-being. However, some studies among refugees find associations with access to private housing; social support and networks; labor market status, and relative change in occupational and social status (Walther et al. 2020; Ambrosetti et al. 2021). A related literature

focuses on refugee integration, defined as the "mutual adaptation of migrants and the host society" (IOM 2018). While conceptually distinct from SWB, integration studies often examine many of the same factors found to influence SWB generally. For example, Ager and Strang's (2008) influential framework for refugee integration recognizes employment, housing, education, and health as key markers and means of integration.

Study Context: Internal Displacement in Ukraine

Ukraine's IDP crisis started in late 2013, when protests in Kyiv brought down Ukrainian president Yanukovich and Russia forcibly annexed Crimea. In March 2014, Russia supported armed uprisings by pro-Russian separatists, who took control of 35% of the territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in Ukraine's southwestern Donbass region. At least 1.8 million IDPs fled the fighting.[1] Most settled relatively close to the Line of Contact which divided Government and Non-Government Controlled Areas, but significant numbers moved to cities such as Kyiv and Lviv (IOM 2018). Most Ukrainian IDPs settled into private rentals or with extended family. Ukrainian government benefits for IDPs, especially related to housing, have been meager and humanitarian assistance from NGOs waned over time. Especially now during the war of Russian aggression, IDPs from the original conflict face protracted or new displacement and even more uncertainty about whether and when they can return home.

In comparative perspective, the scale of Ukraine's IDP crisis at the time of our study was relatively moderate. Although Ukrainians represented the 3rd largest population of newly displaced IDPs globally in 2015, it was dwarfed by the much larger ongoing crises in Yemen, Colombia, and Syria (UNHCR 2015). The UN's Internal Displacement Index for 2019—a composite based on measures of the impacts of displacement, contextual drivers, and policies and capabilities—placed Ukraine on a par with Azerbaijan, Colombia, Georgia, and Nigeria, and significantly better off than, for example, Myanmar, Somalia, and Syria. Ukraine's IDPs were a relatively small proportion of the population, limiting economic impact on the nation as a whole. Nevertheless, the IDI index identifies significant challenges for IDP's own pursuit of livelihoods and rights, exacerbated by a context of high political instability (IDMC 2020). In this context, international humanitarian support was limited and fleeting, and the vast majority of IDPs received minimal government or NGO aid and was required to find shelter and employment privately. This stands in contrast to other IDP contexts in the post-Soviet region, such as Georgia and Azerbaijan, where international and government aid was more extensive, and collective settlements were constructed to house IDPs (Mooney 2011; Yunusov 2013).

As a group, Ukrainian IDPs have encountered serious economic and social challenges during resettlement. IDPs have consistently named housing, employment, and income as their key problems and obstacles to successful integration (IOM 2018), and studies have documented downward mobility in employment (Vakhitova & Iavorskyi 2020) and housing (Zavisca et al. 2023). Displacement also often takes a psychological toll. Surveys of Ukrainian IDP mental health report high levels of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic distress disorder, and somatic disorder (Cheung et al. 2019; Roberts et al. 2019). Qualitative research in Ukraine finds levels of psychological stress symptoms and struggles with social adaption among IDPs akin to that experienced by military veterans (Singh et al. 2021).

Ukrainian IDPs, however, are not homogenous. Although they all experienced the exogenous shock of war, they left for a range of reasons. The initial wave of migrants fleeing immediate war and violence gave way to subsequent decisions driven by plummeting economic conditions, job prospects, and state capacity (Mykhnenko 2020). These distinctions in motivations for leaving may correspond to differing levels of trauma based on exposure to conflict-related violence, which could have enduring impacts on subjective wellbeing. Furthermore, IDPs differ in their access to resources, networks, and transferrable skills (Bulakh 2017; Sereda 2020; Uehling 2020).

Importantly, locals have also faced challenges related to the conflict that could impact SWB. While IDPs experienced the worst upheaval, Ukraine's broader population has also seen living

standards fall—as the conflict occurred in the context of a deep economic recession, with a cumulative real GDP decline of 17% from 2013 to 2015, and the currency losing one-third of its value against the dollar (RFERL 2016). They also experienced the psychological stress of a nation at war. According to Gallup surveys (Bikus 2016), Ukrainians' ratings of their present life and future prospects declined precipitously from 2012 to 2015 (about 20% on a 10-point scale). Locals near the conflict zone have felt the largest impact with continuous violence and strained resources. Coupe and Obrizan (2016) found that the average level of happiness declined substantially in the eastern regions most affected by conflict, while other regions of Ukraine experienced little decline in happiness. Thus, an analysis of both IDPs and locals is needed to identify the factors that specifically lower SWB among IDPs, relative to locals who also experienced fallout from the war.

Data and Methods

CHESS survey

We use the 2018 Ukraine wave of the Comparative Housing Experiences and Societal Stability (CHESS) survey, which interviewed 1600 IDPs and 1600 locals aged 18–49.[2] The age range reflects the larger study's focus on working during the reproductive ages. The survey sample is drawn from 12 urban settlements with large concentrations of IDPs, which are not nationally representative. Within the oblasts (regions) near the conflict zone, in which the vast majority of IDPs reside, settlements were selected to ensure variation in type of place (oblast capital versus other city), distance from the line of contact between Government Controlled Areas and Non-Government Controlled Areas, and density of IDP populations. In addition, Kyiv and Lviv, Ukraine's two largest cities, with sizeable IDP populations but distant from the conflict zone (at the time of the survey), were included.

Random local samples within each settlement were drawn using random walk selection of residential addresses, followed by random selection of one individual among eligible residents at the address.[3] The local response rate was 24.4%. The IDP sample consists of a combination of IDPs encountered during random walk, referrals from the local sample (who were asked to provide contact information for IDPs who they knew), and purposive recruitment via organizations serving IDPs. The response rate for the IDP sample was 38.2% (among attempted interviews with known IDPs and not including those encountered while surveying the local population).

A probability sample of IDPs was infeasible given the lack of a systematic and comprehensive sampling frame; other scholarly surveys of IDPs in Ukraine also employ non-probability methods to survey this difficult to reach population (Cheung et al. 2019; Sasse & Lackner 2020; Vakhitova & Iavorskyi 2020). Because most IDPs in Ukraine find their own accommodation, we could not draw on collective settlements for a sampling frame. Despite these limitations, the achieved sample resembles benchmark comparison surveys of urban and IDP populations in key characteristics (see Appendix Table A1). As descriptive statistics below demonstrate, the local and IDP samples in our survey are similar in their demographic characteristics in 2018 (table 2), and in their socioeconomic characteristics at baseline before displacement (Appendix Table A3). Our survey design does not permit application of sampling weights to make our sample representative of the national population; however, our OLS regressions include control variables that would typically be incorporated in sampling weights.

Variables

Subjective well-being

Our measure of subjective wellbeing and key dependent variable is general life satisfaction, based on the widely used question "To what extent are you satisfied with your life on the whole?" The response categories are: completely dissatisfied (1); somewhat dissatisfied (2); neutral (3); somewhat satisfied (4); completely satisfied (5). Non-respondents to this key question were dropped from the analytical sample (N = 21, 0.66% of the total sample).

IDP status

Our main explanatory variable is IDP status. We further subdivide IDPs by their primary reasons for moving (see Appendix Table A2). IDPs were asked to choose up to two main reasons from among nine options for leaving at the time of initial displacement. Respondents were categorized into three groups: those who selected *only* violence-related reasons (fear of military conflict, fear of local authorities, threat of violence, home was destroyed); those who selected both a violence-related reason and an economic or family-related reason (work prospects, education prospects, to join/reunite with family or friends, other); and those who selected only education/family reasons or did not provide a reason.

Family and network variables include *marital status* (married or cohabiting; separated, divorced or widowed; and never married), a dummy variable indicating whether the *respondent has children*, and *living arrangements* (living alone; with only nuclear family (one's own spouse and/or children); with extended family; and with non-relatives). *Size of social support network* refers to the number of non-family members to whom the respondent could turn for help if ill, assistance finding work, a modest loan, or advice with personal problems, coded as 0, 1, and 2 or more.

Economic status includes variables capturing current employment status (employed, unemployed, not in the labor force), total household income (a linearized version of a 10-category ordinal variable with midpoints to each category), and a durable goods possession scale (number of the following items the household possesses: dishwasher, washing machine, refrigerator with freezer, microwave oven, personal computer, smartphone, and car). In cases of nonresponse (29.6% of the analytical sample) on household income, we substitute the sample mean and include a dichotomous indicator of missingness.

Housing status is also a well-known factor of SWB in general and for wellbeing of displaced persons in particular (Zavisca et al. 2023). *Homeownership* is a dichotomous variable indicating that respondents and/or other members of their household own their current residence. Housing quantity includes logged square meters of *housing space per capita* and a dichotomous indicator of *having a room of one's own* (including a room shared with a spouse/partner, and/or children up to 3 years old). Housing quality is measured with separate additive scales capturing amenities and comfort derived by Zavisca et al. (2023) based on data from four post-Soviet societies, including Ukraine. Housing amenities include a kitchen, toilet, bath/shower, and PVC windows, and ordinal measures of frequency of access to piped water, hot water, central heating, and pipeline gas. The housing comfort scale is based on the frequency of problems with leaky roofs or pipes, temperature control, noise, air quality, and the safety of infrastructure. Both variables are rescaled to range from 0 to 1.

Controls

We specify age as a linear variable, education as a dummy for university degree, and language spoken at home as three groups: Ukrainian, Russian, and mix or other. We classify localities based on distance from the line of contact (following IOM 2018 zones) and IDP density: (1) cities in Donetsk GCA; (2) Eastern cities with 50 or more IDPs per 1000 host population; (3) Eastern cities with under 50 IDPs per 1000 host population; (4) Kyiv; (5) Lviv.

Change variables

Our second set of models incorporates measures of change in friendship networks, occupational status, consumer possessions, and housing status. All respondents were asked about their situation in December 2013, before the conflict started, and 2018. Note that the responses could be affected by recall bias.

Network change

Based on respondents' retrospective perceptions, we constructed a variable on self-reported change in the respondent's circle of friends from 2013 to 2018: no change, better before, or better now.

Economic status

The *change in durable goods scale* is estimated as an absolute difference between 2018 and 2013 indicators, with three categories: same, lower now, and higher now. Because respondents' individual or household income in 2013 is unavailable, we use occupation and employment status in both 2013 and 2018 to construct a rough proxy for *upward or downward earnings mobility*. First, we map respondents' occupations in both years onto a 10-category version of the Erikson–Goldthorpe class schema developed by Gerber and Hout (2004) for post-Soviet societies. We then calculate the mean earnings for each class category in 2018 using a linearized version of 2018 individual earnings (based on the midpoints in the intervals for each of 10 response categories) and assign the means corresponding to the respondent's class category in 2013 and 2018, respectively. In effect, these variables represent occupational earnings in both years. We subtract 2018 occupational earnings from 2013 occupational earnings to yield a measure of change in occupational earnings, which we view as a crude proxy for changes in earnings between the two years. To allow for asymmetric effects of increases and decreases in earnings and deal with non-employment in either year, we compare four categories: no change (the baseline), decreased occupational earnings, increased occupational earnings, and non-employment in either 2013 or 2018.

We also included changes in housing status between 2018 and 2013, including loss of home-ownership, loss of one's own room, and changes in the number of housing amenities.[4] We do not include gains in ownership or own room, because there are too few cases to support estimation. The change in housing amenities is constructed analogously to the change in durable goods scale.

Analytical strategy

Our analytical focus is on quantifying the IDP/local gap in life satisfaction using OLS regression[5]:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \ldots \beta_n X_n + \varepsilon,$$

where:

Y– life satisfaction,
β_0– the constant term,
β_1– the coefficients relating to IDP status.
β_2 *to* β_n– the coefficients relating to *X* explanatory variables,
ε – random error term.

We first briefly discuss differences between all IDPs and locals (β_1) but then address our interest in experiences with war trauma by distinguishing IDPs based on their reasons for leaving $\beta_{1a,b,c}$. This introduces some measurement error: IDPs may have experienced fear of violence even if they did not say it was one of the two main reasons for leaving. However, it is reasonable to assume that *on average,* IDPs who cited violence-related factors had more exposure to violence than those who cited only non-violence-related factors. Thus, our three categories of IDPs are reasonable proxies for levels of trauma, at least insofar as those experiences related to the migration decision.

We introduce our explanatory variables (β_2 *to* β_n) of current family/network, economic, and housing conditions—both individually and as a group—to assess differences across groups in each set of current conditions (at the time of the survey in 2018). We then introduce measures of *changes* in these same sets of conditions since 2013 to assess to what extent the IDP/local gaps in life satisfaction are compounded by the changes that the IDPs experienced.

Results

Descriptive analyses

Table 1 presents IDP status by self-reported satisfaction with life. Note that by design, locals and IDPs each constitute half the sample. Among IDPs, most (73%) left primarily for only

Table 1. IDP status and mean life satisfaction

	N	%	Life satisfaction	
			Mean	95% CI
IDP status				
Local	1590	50.0	3.52	(3.45, 3.58)
IDP, displaced only due to violence	1153	36.3	2.89	(2.83, 2.95)
IDP, displaced due to both violence and economic/family reasons	319	10.0	3.16	(3.06, 3.27)
IDP, displaced due to only economic/family reasons, or did not respond	117	3.7	3.23	(3.05, 3.41)
Total	3179	100.0	3.25	(3.21, 3.28)

Note: Excludes 21 cases with missing values on life satisfaction.

violence-related reasons; another 20% left for both violence-related and economic or family considerations; while just 7% did not report any violence-related reasons for leaving (including 56 who gave no reason at all). Mean life satisfaction is highest for locals (3.52) and lowest for IDPs who cited only violence-related reasons for leaving (2.89), while IDPs who cited either one or two non-violence reasons for departing fall in between the two extremes (3.16 and 3.23, respectively). The statistically significant differences among the groups of IDPs are consistent with the argument that threat of violence contributes to more enduring trauma among the displaced.

Turning to current conditions, IDPs and locals are similar with respect to marital and parental status; although those who left for reasons other than violence are more likely to be single and childless (table 2). IDPs are more likely to live alone or with nonrelatives and lack social support. They also have lower average income, own fewer durable goods, and are less likely to be employed (although mainly because they are more likely to be out of the labor force: they have only slightly higher rates of unemployment). IDPs are particularly disadvantaged with respect to housing. There is a stark gap in homeownership, as 90% of locals live in homes they or their families own, versus just 9% of IDPs. Around one-third to a quarter of IDPs do not have their own room, compared to 12% of locals.

According to retrospective measures, IDPs were very similar to the local population in 2013 with respect to employment and housing status (Appendix Table A3). However, table 3 shows that many IDPs experienced a decline in relative status by 2018 (at the time of the survey). Most IDPs, particularly those affected by violence, reported a negative change in their friendship networks, while most locals reported no change. Notably, however, 9–17% of displaced persons claimed to have a better circle of friends now than before, (versus only 7% of locals), which shows that post-displacement experiences can be positive for some individuals.

Compared to locals, IDPs are more likely to experience downward occupational earnings after displacement that is to be in an occupational class with lower average earnings than their occupational class in 2013. Still, downward occupational earnings mobility rates are modest: 8–10% for IDPs, compared to 2% for locals, which is nearly offset by upward mobility (6–7.5% for IDPs versus 5% for locals). On the other hand, more IDPs were not working in either 2013 or 2018. A far greater proportion of IDPs experienced a loss of durable goods (59–63%) compared to locals (12%). In addition, nearly three-quarters of IDPs reported a loss in homeownership compared with 3% of locals, and 36–49% of IDPs reported a decline in housing amenities compared with 3% of locals. Thus, IDPs would have felt an acute loss in material conditions after displacement.

Regression results

OLS regression results with basic demographic controls confirm significant differences in life satisfaction by IDP status regardless of reason for displacement (Appendix Table A4). However, table 4 indicates that the magnitude and significance of the life satisfaction gap between IDPs

Table 2. Descriptive statistics: current status and conditions, 2018

	Local	IDP, displaced due to only violence	IDP, displaced due to both violence and economic/family reasons	IDP, displaced due to only economic/family reasons, or did not respond
Life satisfaction				
Completely dissatisfied	2.8	8.0	4.1	4.3
Somewhat dissatisfied	15.7	28.0	19.8	19.7
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	27.0	35.8	37.3	33.3
Somewhat satisfied	35.4	23.4	33.5	34.2
Completely satisfied	19.2	4.8	5.3	8.6
Family/Network				
Marital status				
Married/cohabiting	60.7	58.3	53.9	53.0
Separated/divorced/widow	17.6	23.1	23.5	12.8
Single	21.8	18.7	22.6	34.2
Have any children	67.5	71.2	66.1	53.9
Living arrangements				
Living alone	8.4	12.3	15.4	13.7
Nuclear family	54.3	60.3	60.8	41.9
Extended family	34.8	18.1	14.4	29.9
Living with non-relatives	2.5	9.3	9.4	14.5
N of people could ask for help				
0	13.3	27.5	29.5	29.1
1	18.1	19.1	11.3	10.3
2 or more	68.6	53.4	59.3	60.7
Economic status				
Employment status				
Employed	69.3	56.6	63.6	59.0
Unemployed	7.2	9.3	11.3	7.7
Not in labor force	23.6	34.2	25.1	33.3

(*Continued*)

Table 2. Continued.

	Local	IDP, displaced due to only violence	IDP, displaced due to both violence and economic/family reasons	IDP, displaced due to only economic/family reasons, or did not respond
Total household income (mean)	8.1	6.8	7.0	6.5
Missing total household income	33.3	25.5	24.1	35.0
Durable goods scale (mean)	4.7	3.1	3.6	3.4
Housing status				
Homeownership				
Homeowner	90.3	8.2	9.4	9.4
No homeownership	8.7	87.5	87.5	84.6
Missing	0.9	4.3	3.1	6.0
Have own room	87.7	68.8	64.9	75.2
Living space per capita (mean m^2)	2.9	2.5	2.6	2.5
Housing amenities scale (mean)	0.91	0.77	0.81	0.79
Housing comfort scale (mean)	0.78	0.77	0.78	0.76
Controls				
Women	58.6	72.3	60.2	51.3
Age (mean)	35.3	37.1	35.3	34.0
Higher education	43.4	39.4	46.4	41.0
Language spoken at home				
Ukrainian	14.9	5.7	9.1	3.4
Russian	56.5	66.5	69.3	49.6
Mix/other	28.6	27.8	21.6	47.0
Locality type				
Cities in Donetsk GCA	12.5	11.5	17.2	7.7
Eastern cities: ≥ 50 IDPs/per 1000	25.0	25.4	21.9	29.1
Eastern cities: < 50 IDPs/per 1000	37.5	39.3	31.4	37.6
Kyiv City	12.5	11.9	14.7	12.0
Lviv City	12.6	11.9	14.7	13.7
N	1590	1153	319	117

Notes: All figures are percentages unless otherwise noted. For dichotomous measures, small numbers of missing cases are combined with the residual ("no") category.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics: change in status and conditions, 2018 compared to 2013

	Local	IDP, displaced due to only violence	IDP, displaced due to both violence and economic/family reasons	IDP, displaced due to only economic/family reasons, or did not respond
Network				
Change in circle of friends				
Better now	7.3	13.7	16.9	9.4
No change	72.2	16.2	18.2	35.9
Worse now	19.0	66.4	60.5	49.6
Missing	1.5	3.6	4.4	5.1
Economic status				
Change in occupational earning				
Better now	4.8	6.5	7.5	6.0
No change	50.6	34.1	37.9	35.9
Worse now	2.4	7.8	8.2	10.3
Not working in 2013 and/or 2018	42.0	52.0	46.0	48.0
Change in durable goods scale				
Higher now	48.4	14.5	15.4	18.8
No change	40.0	22.5	24.8	22.2
Lower now	11.6	63.1	59.9	59.0
Housing status				
Change in homeownership				
Lost	2.8	74.5	71.8	76.1
Did not lose	96.1	19.9	23.8	15.4
Missing	1.1	5.6	4.4	8.6
Lost own room	0.6	25.3	26.0	19.7
Change in housing amenities scale				
Higher now	4.8	14.3	17.6	18.0
No change	92.1	37.1	46.4	41.9
Lower now	3.1	48.6	36.1	40.2
N	1590	1153	319	117

and locals varies according to the reason for displacement, as confirmed by F-tests which indicate significant differences between the IDP coefficients. The life satisfaction gap is largest between locals and IDPs who moved for "violence only" reasons (−0.595, significant at the 0.001 level), while IDPs who did not cite violence as the main reason for leaving have levels of life satisfaction closest to that of locals (−0.293, significant at the .01 level).

Measures of family and network resources, economic conditions, and housing have intuitive effects on life satisfaction, and in each case their addition to the models reduces the estimated net life satisfaction gap between IDPs and locals (Models 2–4). Individually, some variables are not statistically significant (notably, homeownership and housing space per capita) [6], but the statistically significant factors have the expected signs: divorce/separation/widowhood, residence with non-relatives, and unemployment reduce life satsifaction, while having multiple people to turn to for help, more durable goods, higher income, a room of one's own, and higher quality home amenities and comforts all tend to increase it.

When considered together, family/network factors are less important in explaining the difference in life satisfaction between IDPs and locals than economic and housing conditions. This reflects the lower degree of variation between IDPs and locals in family/network conditions compared to economic and housing conditions. In fact, net of the controls for economic and

Table 4. OLS regression models of life satisfaction: current status and conditions

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
IDP status (ref. = local)					
IDP, displaced due to only violence	−0.595***	−0.556***	−0.348***	−0.412***	−0.367***
IDP, displaced due to both violence and economic/family reasons	−0.351***	−0.311***	−0.156*	−0.181*	−0.165*
IDP, displaced due to only economic/family reasons, or did not respond	−0.293**	−0.264**	−0.070	−0.110	−0.090
Male (gender)	−0.064	−0.091*	−0.077*	−0.089*	−0.126**
Age	−0.019***	−0.016***	−0.015***	−0.018***	−0.012***
Higher education	0.165***	0.137***	0.063	0.107**	0.040
Locality type (ref. = cities in Donetsk GCA)					
Eastern cities: ≥ 50 IDPs/per 1000	−0.072	−0.129*	−0.145*	−0.112	−0.204**
Eastern cities: < 50 IDPs/per 1000	0.116	0.063	0.033	0.129*	0.020
Kyiv City	−0.167*	−0.233**	−0.271***	−0.127	−0.278***
Lviv City	0.030	−0.055	−0.069	0.029	−0.086
Language spoken at home (ref. = Ukrainian)					
Russian	−0.110	−0.111	−0.130	−0.104	−0.113
Mix/other	−0.110	−0.130	−0.129	−0.110	−0.122
Family/Network					
Marital status (ref. = married/cohab.)					
Separated/divorced/widow		−0.239***			−0.118*
Single		−0.057			0.019
Have any children		−0.043			−0.036
Living arrangements (ref. = living lone)					
Nuclear family		−0.117			−0.099
Extended family		−0.091			−0.070
Living with non-relatives		−0.191*			−0.025
N of people could ask for help (ref. = 0)					
1		0.095			0.018
2 or more		0.207***			0.099*

(*Continued*)

Table 4. Continued.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Economic status					
Employment status (ref. = employed)					
Unemployed			−0.157*		−0.164*
Not in labor force			0.041		0.020
Total household income (mean)			0.016*		0.015*
Missing total household income			0.020		0.009
Durable goods scale			0.147***		0.125***
Housing status					
Homeownership (ref. = no homeownership)					
Homeowner				0.112	−0.016
Missing				0.009	0.032
Have own room				0.224***	0.147**
Living space per capita				0.051	0.022
Housing amenities scale				0.222*	−0.108
Housing comfort scale				0.791***	0.725***
cons	4.223***	4.229***	3.417***	2.973***	2.866***
N	3179	3179	3179	3179	3179
adj. R^2	0.108	0.120	0.161	0.146	0.182
F	33.2***	22.6***	36.9***	31.2***	23.8***

Notes: Unstandardized OLS regression coefficients are reported. $^{*}p < 0.05$ $^{**}p < 0.01$ $^{***}p < 0.001$ The regression coefficients for IDP categories are not equal and at least one coefficient differs statistically from the others (Model 5): $F_{2, 3147} = 8.34$, $p < 0.001$.

housing conditions, even when entered as separate blocks, IDPs who did not cite violence-related reasons for leaving do not differ statistically from locals in terms of their life satisfaction (the corresponding coefficients in Models 3 and 4 are not significant at the .05 level.)

All of our measures of current conditions combined account for considerable portions of the gap in life satisfaction between locals and IDPs (Appendix Table A4, Model 5); however, large differences between all IDPs and locals remain (−0.298, significant at the .001 level), reflecting the large proportion of IDPs (73%) who reported two violence-related reasons for fleeing. Table 4 indicates more nuances by reason for leaving. Model 5 shows that those who experienced the most violence saw a 38% reduction from .595 to .367, although still significantly different from the local population at the .001 level. Those who reported one violence-related reason saw a 52% reduction from .351 to .165 and only significant at the .05 level. This pattern indicates that current conditions account for more of the life satisfaction gap for IDPs who experienced less severe violence and associated trauma. However, current conditions explain the entire statistically discernible gap for those who experienced the least violence (−.0.90 and no longer statistically significant at the .05 level).

Change in conditions

We next add to Model 5 our measures of changes in family/network, economic, and housing conditions (table 5 and Appendix Table A5), first as separate sets (Models 6–8), then all together (Model 9). As individual sets, the change measures offer only modest improvements to model fit, as shown by the small increases in adjusted R-square. None of the changes in housing conditions have statistically significant associations. However, both better and worse self-reported friendship networks have the expected association with life satisfaction, as does downward occupational earnings mobility. Moreover, accounting for changes in conditions reduces the gap between locals and IDPs who reported both violence-related and non-violence reasons so that the coefficient is no longer significant at the .05 level. It reduces the remaining gap for the "violence-only" IDPs (net of current conditions) from .367 (model 5) to .306 (model 9), a 17% reduction. Overall, differences in current conditions and changes in conditions account for all of the statistically significant life satisfaction gap between locals and IDPs who did not cite violence-related reasons as the two main reasons for their departure. Current conditions and changes in conditions reduce the gap between IDPs and locals by about half (from .595 to .306, or 49%), but half of the original gap (net of demographic controls) remains unexplained and significant at the .001 level.

Conclusions

In this study we find that the experience of forced displacement, even within one's own country, has a profound impact on well-being. Up to 4 years after resettlement[7], internally displaced persons in Ukraine continued to be less satisfied with their lives than local people who were never forced to move, even though they share a similar language, culture, and economic background. In line with other studies which find a negative impact of war-related displacement on life satisfaction (Shemyakina & Plagnol 2013), our findings suggest that individuals who were directly affected by the exogenous shock of war do not return to the "baseline" of comparable locals who were only indirectly affected. Although local populations also experienced social upheaval and strain, they were still better off than those who were driven from their homes.

Nonetheless, IDPs are heterogeneous and move for a variety of reasons, which can influence how they adapt to their new lives and assimilate with local populations. We find that multiple mechanisms help to explain the gap between locals and IDPs. We first evaluate compositional factors known to influence SWB, for example education and family situation (Diener & Seligman 2002). While these factors were associated with SWB, they did not eliminate differences between IDPs and locals. We then examined specific factors previously found to differ between IDPs and locals: support networks, employment status, and homeownership (Zavisca et al. 2023). These sets of factors each reduced the gap independently, indicating that not only relative economic

Table 5. OLS regression models of life satisfaction: changes in status and conditions, 2018 compared to 2013

	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
IDP status (ref. = local)				
IDP, displaced due to only violence	−0.338***	−0.362***	−0.324***	−0.306***
IDP, displaced due to both violence and economic/family reasons	−0.145	−0.163*	−0.133	−0.124
IDP, displaced due to only economic/family reasons, or did not respond	−0.070	−0.076	−0.053	−0.037
Change in social support				
Circle of friends (ref. = no change)				
Better now	0.171**			0.156*
Worse now	−0.123**			−0.114*
Missing	0.013			0.018
Change in economic status				
Change in occupational earnings (ref. = no change)				
Better now		0.090		0.085
Worse now		−0.278***		−0.267***
Not working in 2013 and/or 2018		0.038		0.019
Change in durable goods scale (ref. = same)				
Higher now		−0.030		−0.042
Lower now		0.012		0.032
Change in housing status				
Change in homeownership (ref. = did not lose homeownership)				
Lost			−0.101	−0.083
Missing			0.058	0.078
Lost own room			−0.086	−0.078
Change in housing amenities scale (ref. = same)				
Higher now			0.086	0.069
Lower now			−0.075	−0.073
cons	2.880***	2.857***	2.935***	2.943***
N	3179	3179	3179	3179
adj. R^2	0.188	0.185	0.183	0.191
F	22.6***	21.0***	20.8***	18.0***

Notes: All models include the variables from Model 5 in Table 4. Unstandardized OLS regression coefficients reported. $^*p < 0.05$ $^{**}p < 0.01$ $^{***}p < 0.001$. The regression coefficients on IDP categories are not equal and at least one coefficient differs statistically from the others (Model 9): $F_{2, 3134} = 7.27$, $p < 0.001$.

deprivation affects SWB, but also social support networks. The addition of these factors also started to reveal differences between IDPs dependent on the reason for leaving. After controlling for employment, income, and housing status, IDPs who left for economic, family, or other reasons were nearly indistinguishable from locals. However, IDPs who reported fear and violence as a main reason for leaving continued to differ significantly from locals.

We then evaluated the hypothesis that IDPs differ from locals because they experienced substantial losses which lower well-being. We found that reporting a worse friendship network and housing situation narrowed the gap between IDPs and locals, and the gap disappeared completely for those who reported leaving for both violence and economic/family reasons. Loss of earnings narrowed the gap less but was still detrimental to life satisfaction. After controlling for both current conditions and loss of prior social and material resources, those who reported leaving for a variety of reasons no longer differed from locals. However, even after accounting for a large range of socio-economic conditions, we found that IDPs who were forced to flee because

of fear, threats of violence, or the destruction of their homes continued to suffer years later. Thus, the lasting impact of forced displacement on life satisfaction seems to be directly attributed to the psychological trauma and fear experienced by IDPs, not only loss of socio-economic resources.

Our study has the following limitations. First, we have no measure of baseline life satisfaction from before the conflict, which would have been ideal for capturing the impact of displacement on SWB. Nor do we have prospective measures of change. While a nationally-representative longitudinal panel would have been most suitable, it is rare that such a survey is set up in advance before an impending crisis, especially with a large enough predicted sample of IDPs. In Ukraine, existing large-scale surveys from before the conflict are rare, with data collection largely stalling in the 2000s. The sample size for the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in any of these surveys makes it infeasible to do a pre-conflict comparison. It also would have been nearly impossible to trace IDPs from any original survey samples. Thus, given the data had to be collected after the conflict and we required an oversample of IDPs, our existing survey design is optimal for approximating a counterfactual by comparing IDPs with local compatriots.

Second, although we included a large set of potential explanatory variables, we were unable to control for unobservables, or account for any migrant selection. Although using an instrumental variable is one approach to dealing with endogeneity, we do not have an appropriate IV for this study. Keep in mind that while Ukrainian IDPs were to a large extent forced out due to violence or loss of employment, many Ukrainians stayed in the non-Government Controlled Areas, even though they might also have experienced violence and the severe degradation of economic and social conditions. Although the war was an exogenous shock that few predicted would be so violent, some people were able to leave while others were not. While some IDPs had no choice because their homes were destroyed and they feared for their lives, others who fled may have been selective in that they had the means to start new lives, relatives to live with in resettlement areas, or some hope to transfer their skills. Those who remained behind were often unable to leave because they were caring for elderly relatives, or they felt that they were better off staying in place because they had homes and jobs, despite the fear and anxiety of living in a conflict zone. Thus, our survey does not capture the complexity of decision-making or severity of trauma, nor does it capture the life satisfaction of those who stayed behind, which may in fact be more similar to the IDPs who fled than the local populations where IDPs resettled.

In conclusion, our study provides evidence that adverse conditions, as well as losses in earnings, housing, and social networks, explain about half the gap in life satisfaction between IDPs and locals. However, the trauma and violence associated with displacement has had a profound impact on life satisfaction above and beyond contextual factors. Given the scale of the current mass displacement in Ukraine as a result of Russian aggression, our findings are likely to be even more pertinent. With a substantially greater proportion of the population displaced in mid-2023 (nearly 40% of the entire population, Karasapan 2022), and the war still ongoing, the entire nation is suffering from collective trauma. Still, as Ukrainians resettle or return, the experience of war and displacement will have a differential impact on livelihoods, homes, and networks. Programs aimed at restoring economic and housing resources can be quite effective at mitigating some of the adverse impact of displacement for some IDPs. However, the trauma associated with displacement will likely have a long-term impact on life satisfaction above and beyond contextual factors. Thus, additional measures, such as trauma counseling and support groups, are necessary to provide psychological support for the millions of IDPs who have fled this cruel war.

Endnotes

1. As of June 2016, 1.8 million IDPs were officially registered with the government (Mykhnenko et al. 2022); UNHCR estimated that real figure was .8–.1 million higher.
2. Data were collected by the authors in collaboration with SOCIS, the Centre for Social and Market Research in Ukraine. Data are available upon request and will be archived with ICPSR in 2023.

3. Due to the lack of a reliable list of addresses for a sampling frame, we used a random walk procedure. Starting at the geographical center of election districts, supervisors were instructed to follow a specified random route (with turns at intersections also randomized) and randomly chose addresses. Supervisors then provided interviewers with specific addresses.
4. Loss of homeownership refers to a change in status from owning to not owning the *respondent's place of residence* (likewise for having versus not having own room), regardless of whether the respondent still owns their pre-displacement home, in which they are not currently residing.
5. None of our findings change when using ordinal logistic regression models, and we prefer to report OLS results because coefficients are easier to interpret.
6. This does not mean that homeownership is irrelevant to IDPs; lack of ownership is the top housing-related concern reported in IOM surveys as well as our survey. If we restrict analysis to only the IDP sample, homeownership is a highly significant predictor of life satisfaction.
7. Unfortunately, we cannot include the exact duration since displacement in our models, because it is highly correlated with reason for moving (e.g., those who directly experienced violence was more likely to flee in 2014).

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Supplementary Material

Supplementary material is available at *Social Forces* online.

Data Availability

Data come from the 2018 Ukraine wave of the Comparative Housing Experiences and Societal Stability survey. These data are available from the authors upon reasonable request

(corresponding author for data is Jane Zavisca, janez@arizona.edu). Public-use data files will also be archived with the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (in process).

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