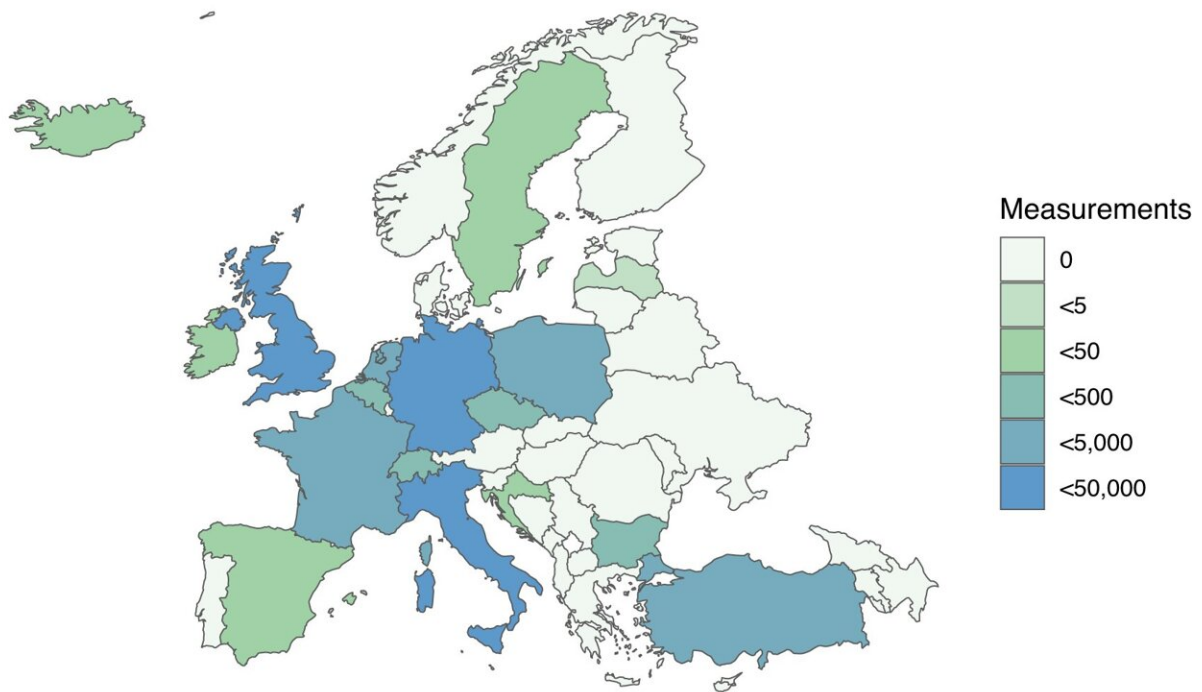


Research finds collective downturn in Europe's psychological well-being following the outbreak of war in Ukraine

February 20 2024, by Anke Poppen



Number of experience-sampling measurements in European countries between January 24 and March 27, 2022. Credit: *Nature Communications* (2024) DOI: 10.1038/s41467-024-44693-6.

The outbreak of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine almost two

years ago led internationally to a collective downturn in people's sense of well-being—irrespective of age, gender, political views or any other attributes which the people questioned had. However, individual personality traits play a decisive role as regards the issue of recovering from the shock.

These are the results of a study carried out by an international team of researchers headed by psychologists Julian Scharbert and Prof. Mitja Back from the University of Münster. The study was based on around 45,000 individual surveys taking in 1,300 people from 17 European countries, with over 50 researchers involved. [The results](#) of the study have been published in *Nature Communications*.

The study, carried out between late 2021 and summer 2022, made it possible to look at the course of the moods which the interviewees experienced day by day in the weeks surrounding the outbreak of war.

"Normally, it isn't possible to examine such impactful events in a precise timeframe and, at the same time, with such a wide geographical reach," is how Mitja Beck sees the importance of the study. The data are "unique," he says. The researchers concentrated on people in Europe, in a two-month period round about the outbreak of war on 24 February 2022.

The most important results in brief:

- The measurable collective mental stress is larger than after the nuclear catastrophe in Fukushima in 2011 and after the COVID lockdown in 2020.
- In the period surveyed, people in Europe had a significantly lower sense of well-being than those in the rest of the world.
- The survey gives no indication of any connection between levels of concern and active solidarity, for example through donations

or taking part in demonstrations.

- A deterioration in the average level of mental health was observed on days on which the war had a particularly strong presence in the [social media](#).

The study focusing on mental health adds a further dimension to the debate on the humanitarian, political, and economic consequences of the war. While people's well-being was stable before the war broke out, there was a collective downturn on the day of the Russian invasion. When they looked at the question of people's recovery from this shock, however, the researchers came across systematic differences.

"In comparison with people who had a stable personality, those who had a more vulnerable and less stable personality hadn't recovered a month after the beginning of the war," explains Julian Scharbert, a Ph.D. student and lead author of the study.

"In addition to the obvious consequences of the war, such as the flow of refugees and disrupted supply chains, there are less obvious dimensions: the impact of daily news and images on the psyche," Scharbert points out.

"Our data indicate that political and social players should focus on [mental health](#) in times of crisis too—especially in the case of people who are in any case more vulnerable to stress," he says. People in Ukraine and Russia have probably been subject to much higher levels of stress—but no data are available for these countries.

More information: Julian Scharbert et al. Psychological well-being in Europe after the outbreak of war in Ukraine. *Nature Communications* (2024) [DOI: 10.1038/s41467-024-44693-6](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-024-44693-6).

Provided by University of Münster

Citation: Research finds collective downturn in Europe's psychological well-being following the outbreak of war in Ukraine (2024, February 20) retrieved 27 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-02-downturn-europe-psychological-outbreak-war.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.