



## Role balance of Ukrainian university students during wartime

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**Abstract.** Balancing work, study, and personal life was a major concern among university students. This study aimed to answer the research questions concerning challenges Ukrainian university students face while balancing roles within education, employment, and personal life during wartime and the strategies which can help Ukrainian university students to balance work, study, and life roles. Research indicated that conflicting roles and demands lead to emotional exhaustion, stress, and anxiety. Inter-role conflict theory served as the basis for this research, and the findings supported its main principles: the competing interests of different fields create role conflict, which affects the individual in all spheres. This study employed a mixed methods design. A survey was conducted among 80 Ukrainian university students. 62.5% of the surveyed prioritise academic work, 37.5% prioritise part-time job. 57.5% of Ukrainian respondents do not have enough time for hobbies and entertainment. A thematic analysis was performed with the help of MAXQDA 24 software. The results revealed the challenges Ukrainian students confront: environmental instability (war, power cuts), performance anxiety, emotional depletion. The role conflict within work-study-life led to high levels of stress. The participants struggled with managing time, felt exhausted and burnt out. Among the effective strategies that can help Ukrainian university students to balance work, study, and life roles, the following ideas were mentioned: setting clear boundaries between work, education, and free time, taking rest, avoiding multitasking. Ukrainian

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students expected changes at the system level, such as remote options for education and flexibility. The findings of the study can provide a framework for further empirical research and open interdisciplinary dialogue between psychological and pedagogical fields. Balanced roles of work, study, and life may improve students' academic performance and overall quality of life and well-being

**Keywords:** inter-role conflict; educational institutions; challenges; work-study-life harmony; strategies

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## Introduction

The topic of role balance among Ukrainian university students during the time of war is highly relevant as Ukrainian students are required to simultaneously navigate multiple demanding spheres, including academic engagement, employment, family responsibilities, displacement or migration, and, in some cases, civic or volunteer involvement. War-related stressors such as uncertainty, trauma exposure, financial instability, and interrupted learning environments significantly affect students' ability to maintain a balanced distribution of roles. Understanding role balance in this context is essential, as imbalances may lead to emotional exhaustion, decreased academic performance, and compromised mental well-being, while adaptive role integration can serve as a protective factor fostering resilience and continuity of identity.

According to the statistics provided by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (n.d.), 4,456 educational institutions have suffered bombing since February 2022; 408 have been destroyed. N. Malysh *et al.* (2025) point out that a lot of students have been forced to relocate abroad to survive. Another research findings by Y. Stadnyi (2025) introduce the latest available data of approximately 115,000 students who migrated abroad in the 2023-2024 academic year. Those people who stayed in Ukraine suffer from the bombing. In addition to everyday life threats, people must cope with the hardships of power cuts and blackouts. Pursuing education in such conditions is a huge challenge. In addition to macro adversities, students must confront diverse issues at meso- and micro-levels. Many Ukrainian students must manage the

studies and employment. Some students have additional responsibilities of taking care of the parents or spouses and children. O. Boyko *et al.* (2024) and K. Pallay *et al.* (2024) reported that since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war, a lot of people have started volunteering, which adds responsibility and strain. Balancing all these roles and duties presents an enormous problem for students, affecting mental health and well-being.

This research investigates various challenges faced by Ukrainian university students who are trying to meet the demands of education, work, and personal life. It also studies the effective ways used to cope and overcome obstacles. Working students often experience symptoms of emotional exhaustion and burnout. The clashing requirements from employment and education in wartime can cause excessive anxiety and distress, affecting students' academic performance and personal life. This study was framed by a foundational inter-role conflict theory, which focuses on the challenges that can often arise from competing interests of different fields. As explained by Z. Bello & G. Tanko (2020), the theory suggests that competing interests create role conflict, affecting the individual in both fields. Inter-role conflict is defined as follows: "the form of role conflict that occurs when individuals have multiple roles and the expectations and behaviours associated with one role are not consistent with the expectations and behaviours associated with another" (APA dictionary of psychology, n.d.). Despite the breadth of the described problem, research on inter-role conflict, work-study and personal life balance in wartime

is scarce. The latest studies done by M. Korda *et al.* (2025), M. Polyvianaia *et al.* (2025), and T. Yamchuk (2025) point out students' stress, anxiety, and resilience. The challenges that students in Ukraine in the time of war confront while balancing the work, education, and personal lives have been less explored.

Consequently, the objective of this study was to fill the existing research gap and delve into the experiences of Ukrainian university students. This study aimed to find out the challenges of balancing various roles within education, employment, and personal life in wartime among Ukrainian university students, to present the results of the survey, and to suggest strategies for improvements.

### Literature Review

The literature review has been performed in two stages to ensure a theoretical support for this mixed methods research. First, the theoretical base for the notion of work-study-life balance (WSLB) is set by examining inter-role conflict theory. Second, the focus is narrowed to the challenges specific to the university student population who balance study, employment, and free time activities. Work-life balance is defined in the works of C. Kirchmeyer (2000) as the achievement of fulfilling experiences in the different aspects of life that require various resources, like energy, time, and commitment and these resources are spread across all the domains. Z. Bello & G. Tanko (2020) reviewed theories that exist to explain work-life balance. The authors include segmentation theory, spill-over theory, compensation theory, instrumental theory, and inter-role conflict theory. WSLB, according to authors M. O'Mahony & D. Jeske (2019) could be defined as a balance of conjoining three "categories of student commitment" – the work obligations, demands of the studies, and the private life.

Extensive research shows that balancing academic responsibilities with employment commitments impacts students' overall well-being, life quality, and satisfaction during the education.

Most university students believe that work and academic overload can cause stress and burnout. The greater number of demands, as stated by the authors K. Szegedi *et al.* (2024), means that students do not have time for hobbies or pay less attention to the families. The authors J. Sprung & A. Rogers (2021) put an emphasis on work-life balance as a predictor of college student anxiety and even depression. The role conflict between education and employment can be a source of stress, absenteeism, and even turnover, which was mentioned by J. Lenaghan & K. Sengupta (2007). The study explores the psychological impact of balancing full-time education with employment. It is particularly relevant given the rising costs of tuition, which necessitate that many students work to continue education. The authors develop a model based on two competing theories of multiple-role engagement. The depletion argument posits that individuals have limited time and energy resources. Engaging in multiple roles (student and worker) creates "compounded adversity" where demands in one area deplete the energy needed for another, leading to strain and reduced well-being. The enrichment argument takes a positive view, suggesting that multiple roles can be gratifying and energy-expanding. It argues that benefits like increased status and self-esteem can improve students' overall mental health. The article concludes that while the "depletion" of time is a real concern for administrators, the quality of a student's emotional engagement is a better predictor of success. By fostering "role-ease" and positive reinforcement, universities can help working students thrive rather than just survive.

The Ukrainian researchers N. Tsybuliak *et al.* (2023) investigated challenges of functioning of the education system in Ukraine in conditions of the war. The researchers point out that forced migration caused a massive loss of students and faculty. The study also highlighted a hard reality of life under occupation, which impacted the ability of students to attend or engage in studies. The study by O. Polovko & S. Glotov (2023) explored the experiences of Ukrainian students

at the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv to understand the impact on the educational process. The invasion shifted classes online, but attendance and learning were disturbed by frequent power cuts and air raids. T. Marchenko (2023), M. Błaszczuk *et al.* (2025), in the research, point out that blackouts disrupt teaching and learning processes; frequent air raid alerts interrupt classes and examinations. The authors introduce the concept of “compounded adversity,” noting that war does not replace typical academic stressors, like performance anxiety and financial pressure, but intensifies these stressors. The findings reveal that students rely on everyday coping strategies, such as collaborative study chats and adaptive time management. A key contribution of this research is the concept of “shared resilience”. The study demonstrates that while institutional adaptations like hybrid learning and flexible deadlines provide a necessary structure, the actual survival of the educational process depends on a dynamic interplay where students and faculty proactively fill implementation gaps.

Other studies examine the psychological well-being and academic performance of Ukrainian students in safer regions of the country during the Russian-Ukrainian war (Korda *et al.*, 2025; Polyvianaia *et al.*, 2025). The authors link high levels of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms, depression, stress, and anxiety to academic performance. These mental health challenges and emotional burdens of war affect students' roles within work-study-life. The adversities that the educational system in Ukraine has been fighting against for almost four years of the full-scale war have been widely documented. The role conflicts of university students and the balance have been studied abroad, e.g., in the US by J. Lenaghan & K. Sengupta (2007). In the UK, S. Cronshaw *et al.* (2024) researched gendered roles of working student mothers. In Israel, L. Kulik (2025) studied role conflict, sense of balance, and well-being among working students who are parents. However, there is a scarcity in mixed

methods research that identifies the role conflicts of Ukrainian university students. Therefore, the presented study aims to fill this gap.

## Materials and Methods

**Research design.** This study employed a mixed methods design. Participants. N = 80 university students (convenience sampling) from National Technical University of Ukraine “Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute”, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, and Kyiv National Economic University named after Vadym Hetman. The study was conducted from October to December 2025. The research involved a mixed-methods survey to explore the roles, challenges, and strategies of university students. 80 university students aged 17-41 (M = 20.49), 75 females and 5 males, completed a survey in Google Forms. 10 students were married, 8 of these students had children.

**Instruments.** A Google Form containing 15 questions was designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative Data Questions provide numerical data: categorical/ordinal scales measure workload (study and work hours), such as how many hours respondents spend on academic work and part-time work per week. Attitudinal & evaluative scales: use rating (Likert-type) to measure satisfaction, balance, stress, for example, “Rate your current work-life balance on a scale from 1 – unbalanced to 5 well-balanced”. “Rate your stress level related to balancing work and study on a scale of 1-5, where 1 means low and 5 means excessive”. Such scales also include questions about prioritisation: “Which of the following do you prioritise: academic work, part-time job, social life, personal time?”. Qualitative Data Questions provide textual data suitable for thematic analysis: open-ended, for example: “What challenges do you face in balancing personal life with study and work?”, “What improvements could you suggest for better work-study-life balance?”.

Survey data collected via Google Forms were automatically exported to Google Sheets, where quantitative analysis was conducted using built-in

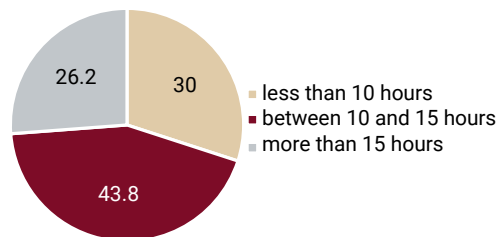
spreadsheet functions. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean values, were calculated to summarise the survey results. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the focus on descriptive statistics, Google Sheets was considered sufficient for the purposes of quantitative analysis. Thematic analysis was applied to the open-ended responses. Thematic analysis of the students' responses was performed with the help of MAXQDA 24 software, following V. Braun & V. Clarke's (2006) six-step approach. Step 1: become familiar with the data. Step 2: generate initial codes. Step 3: search for themes. Step 4: review themes. Step 5: define themes. Step 6: write-up.

**Ethical considerations.** The study was conducted in conformity with ethical standards of the American Sociological Association's Code of Ethics (2018). Participation was voluntary, and no coercion or material incentives were used. Prior to participation, all respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, its procedures, potential risks and benefits, as well as the right to withdraw at any stage without any negative consequences. Anonymity and confidentiality of the collected data were ensured. No personally identifiable information was collected, and the results were used exclusively for scientific purposes. The data were stored in a secure format and were not shared with third parties. Given the potentially sensitive social context related to the combination of work, study, and stress-related factors, the wording of the survey questions was designed to minimise psychological discomfort and avoid re-traumatisation of participants. The study did

not involve any interventions that could cause harm to the psychological or physical well-being of the respondents.

## Results and Discussion

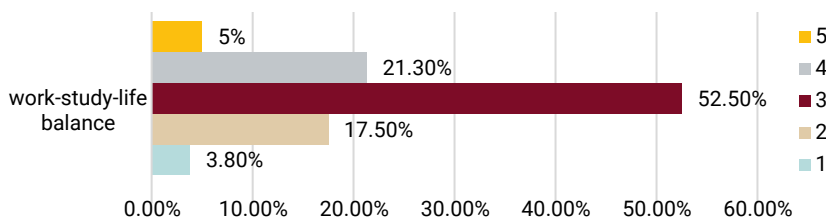
The results show that 43.8% of Ukrainian students spend 10-15 hours a week on academic work outside the class timings, and 26.2% spend even more than 15 hours, which means a high load (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1.** Academic load of Ukrainian students

**Source:** created by the authors based on data from the surveys in Google Forms

62.5% of surveyed students prioritise academic work, 37.5% prioritise part-time job. 32.5% of Ukrainian participants spend up to 10 hours a week working; 36.3% of Ukrainians spend up to 15 hours or more at work being students, which are quite high percentages. Consequently, it is not surprising that 57.5% of Ukrainian respondents do not have enough time for hobbies and entertainment. The average rating for work-study-life balance on the Likert scale, where 1 is unbalanced, and 5 is well-balanced, for Ukrainian stu-



**Figure 2.** Students' current work-study-life balance on a scale

**Note:** 1 – unbalanced; 5 – well-balanced

**Source:** created by the authors based on data from the surveys in Google Forms

dents is 3.06 (Fig. 2).

As a result, the average rating of a stress level related to balancing work and study on the Likert scale (where 1 means low and 5 stands for excessive) is 3.35. To manage stress, Ukrainian students prefer either family support or self-therapy. Only 10 out of 80 Ukrainians who took part in the survey use counselling services, which means that psychological help is still stigmatised. 98.7% of Ukrainian students, as the data obtained from the Google Forms show, feel overwhelmed by the responsibilities. The average rating of satisfaction with the current time management skills on the Likert scale (where 1 stands for low and 5 means total level of satisfaction) for respondents is 2.95. Some activities students engage in to relax when

students find free time from the work and study are socialising, reading, and sports. Only 38.8% of Ukrainian students who took part in the research, answering questions in Google forms, think that the universities provide adequate resources for work-study-life balance, which should give food for thought for administration and stakeholders of the educational institutions. The responses to open-ended questions: "What challenges do you face in balancing personal life with study and work?" and "What improvements could you suggest for better work-study-life balance?" provided textual data suitable for thematic analysis. The data underwent the analyses with the help of MAXQDA 24 software. Table 1 below shows the challenges Ukrainian students face in balancing

**Table 1. Challenges Ukrainian students face in balancing roles of work, study, and personal life**

Themes	Codes	Quotes
Inter-role conflict (time-based)	Mutual incompatibility	"I study and work, so I don't always have the opportunity to attend classes and submit assignments on time"
	Sacrifice	"You constantly have to sacrifice one thing or the other to be able to be present everywhere... personal life ends up on pause"
	Time deficit	"I need extra hours a day... not enough time to focus on long-term academic tasks when I'm trying to do hobbies"
Inter-role conflict (strain-based)	Cognitive overflow	"Troubles with concentration on one without thinking about the other"
	Emotional depletion	"After a long day you feel emotionally drained, so you can seem distanced to your partner... they think you don't put enough effort"
Inter-role conflict (behavioural)	Resource exhaustion	"Intensive studying consumes most of my energy. Even when I have some time left, I often lack the strength to truly enjoy my personal life"
	Conflicting responsibilities	"My roles as a student and a wife sometimes conflict with each other, making it difficult to maintain inner balance"
External stressors	Domestic vs. academic	"After a long day of studying you have to go home, do your homework, make dinner, do other chores etc."
	War	"The war in our country also significantly affects the level of difficulty... an unstable emotional state"
Psychological impact	Schedule	"Studying in the second shift takes up the whole day, there is not enough time for work in the morning"
	Stress	"Constant sense of overload... feelings of guilt for not managing to do everything"
	Performance anxiety	"Trying to do everything perfectly often leads to exhaustion... due to perfectionism, I spend a lot of time on tasks"

**Source:** created by the authors

the roles of personal life with study and work.

In addition to above-mentioned challenges, married students and those who are in relationships highlight the clash of the roles: "Considering I have a family, children, a dog, constant work,

and war, this is very difficult for me". "Sometimes deadlines, exams, or work tasks take up so much attention that there's little energy left for rest or hobbies. It can also be difficult to maintain social relationships when you're constantly busy". "Com-

binning academic responsibilities with personal needs leads to emotional fatigue and feelings of guilt for not managing to do everything. Moreover, my roles as a student and a wife sometimes

conflict with each other, making it difficult to maintain inner balance and stability". The improvements that Ukrainian students suggested for balancing the roles and responsibilities are

**Table 2.** Students' recommendations for better work-study-life balance

Themes	Codes	Quotes
Boundary management	Strict division	"Set strict boundaries between work, studies, personal life"
	Digital disconnection	"Do not bring work home... disconnect after work... get rid of phone addiction/reduce time on social media"
	Role protection	"Set clear boundaries between study time and personal time... to protect your rest, relationships, and well-being"
Cognitive & behavioural strategies	Prioritisation (anti-perfectionism)	"Identify what truly needs to be done first and what can wait... don't try to be perfect in everything."
	Multitasking vs. focus	"Avoid multitasking... improve deep focused work"
	Planning	"Keep a diary and listen to yourself... write a schedule for everyday"
Energy & resource recovery	Time off	"Schedule personal time like an appointment... take regular breaks to avoid burnout"
	Physiological essentials	"Establish a sleep schedule... find a hobby for the soul... prioritise rest, especially in conditions of increased stress because of war"
Structural & institutional changes	Flexibility	"Negotiate flexibility (remote days, flexible hours) ... more flexible schedules and realistic deadlines"
	Curriculum optimisation	"Better university curriculum, less written assignments and more practical assignments... recordings of lectures"
Support & communication	Relationship harmony	"Open communication with my partner... better planning makes it easier to maintain stability and harmony"
	External support	"Find additional sources of support... have financial savings to feel more secure"

**Source:** created by the authors

introduced in Table 2.

The respondents' recommendations suggest that role balance is not a static state but an active negotiation of boundaries. Many students recommend lowering the "perfectionist" bar. "By choosing which tasks to perform well, energy remains for health, sleep, and relationships". A repetitive sub-theme is the "war context". Balance for these students is not just about work and study. It is about maintaining mental stability under chronic environmental stress. Such pieces of advice as "finding a hobby for the soul" and "prioritising mental recovery" are seen as essential survival instruments.

The results received from the conducted survey support the inter-role conflict theory, that formed the basis for this research. The theory states that the pressures and demands from one life

role (e.g., student) make it difficult or impossible to meet the demands of another life role (e.g., friend, parent, employee). The roles are seen as mutually exclusive, as stressed by Z. Bello & G. Tanko (2020), with success in one requiring a sacrifice in the other, and the time required for one role interferes with the time available for the other. The stress, fatigue, or tension generated in one role make a person too exhausted or irritable to perform well in the other role. The basic principles of this theory were observed in the results of the survey: the students reported high stress levels, feeling overwhelmed by the responsibilities. In addition, the thematic analysis of the challenges mentioned by the participants demonstrated the following: students struggle with managing time and maintaining a balance; respondents report exhaustion and a lack of personal time;

boundaries between study and life are unclear. The war context plays a “background role” that exhausts emotional resources and makes work-study-life balance even more unstable. The frequently mentioned feeling of guilt for failing in some roles causes a decrease in students’ motivation. These results support the findings of the earlier study reporting that the students’ struggles with motivation, time management, and performance anxiety – common in higher education – were intensified by air raid alerts, power outages, and psychological strain (Błaszczuk *et al.*, 2025).

There is a clash of the roles. The surveyed Ukrainian students frequently cited a triangular conflict between work, study, and domestic or relationship roles (e.g., being a wife, mother, or partner). The most conflicting role, which was proved by the research done earlier, is the role of mother (Cronshaw *et al.*, 2024). Work and study overload, anxiety, conflicting “mothering” responsibilities, feelings of guilt reported in that study were also observed in the responses of the participants. The present study not only proved the theory described above, but also supported earlier research on work-study-life balance. Some studies suggest that students who work up to fifteen hours per week benefit from this, but that working longer hours can have a harmful impact on students’ well-being and performance (Curtis & Lucas, 2001).

Educational institutions play a vital role in creating a favourable environment for students. By offering flexible scheduling, mental health resources, and workshops on time management, universities can assist students in achieving a more balanced lifestyle. The recommendations communicated by the Ukrainian students as desirable actions for better work-study-life balance resonate with the key messages of the previous studies: using flexible scheduling, enabling online and distance learning, considering working students’ WSLB as a root of the emotional state (Martinez *et al.*, 2013; Lowe & Gayle, 2016; Vokić *et al.*, 2021). Some Ukrainian educational institutions have already taken measures to adapt

to wartime. Many universities have established psychological support hotlines where students can receive consultations from qualified specialists (Yamchuk, 2025).

However, it can be assumed that not all universities have taken such measures or these measures are not enough, because the participants of this research repeatedly point out these issues, and less than 40% of respondents think that the universities provide adequate resources to help balance work-study-life roles. Taking measures at micro (personal) and meso (institutional) levels is much easier than confronting challenges at the macro level (threat, danger, and destruction of the war).

## Conclusions

The results of the research support inter-role conflict theory, the theoretical basis of work-study-life balance. The survey results show that academic work is a high priority for Ukrainian students. A substantial percentage of Ukrainian students also dedicate 10-15 hours or more per week to part-time jobs. Due to these demands, most Ukrainian students report a lack of time for hobbies and entertainment. The research identified the number of challenges Ukrainian university students face while balancing academic responsibilities, employment, and personal life in wartime. These challenges encompass environmental instability (war, power cuts), performance anxiety, and emotional depletion. The role conflict within work-study-life leads to high levels of stress and an overwhelming feeling of responsibility for nearly all surveyed students. To cope with stress, Ukrainian students turn to family support or self-therapy; only a few choose professional counselling services. The participants struggle with managing time, feel exhausted and burnt out, especially those who are married and have children.

Among the effective strategies that can help Ukrainian university students to balance work, study and life roles, the following ideas were mentioned: setting clear boundaries between work, education, and free time, taking rest, and avoiding

multitasking. Resilience is paramount as well. Moreover, Ukrainian students expect changes at the system level, such as flexible remote options for education. Although this research advances the literature on balancing roles within education, employment, and personal life in wartime, limitations of the study must also be acknowledged. First, it is based on a relatively small sample, and the findings cannot be generalised. There is also an unequal distribution of female versus male participants. The participants were the students from Kyiv universities only. Consequently, the obtained findings should be viewed as preliminary. To generalise the results of this research, further studies are recommended involving larger and more diverse samples

from various regions of Ukraine. The findings can provide a framework for further empirical research and open interdisciplinary dialogue between psychological and educational fields. Balanced roles of work, study, and life may improve students' academic performance and overall quality of life.

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### Conflict of Interest

None.

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**Анотація.** Поєднання навчання, роботи та особистого життя є однією з ключових проблем для студентів закладів вищої освіти. Метою цього дослідження було отримання відповідей на наукові запитання щодо викликів, з якими стикалися українські студенти університетів у процесі поєднання освітніх, професійних та особистих ролей в умовах воєнного стану, а також визначення стратегій, що можуть сприяти досягненню балансу між роботою, навчанням і особистим життям. Результати досліджень засвідчили, що конфлікт ролей і вимог призвів до емоційного виснаження, стресу та тривожності. Теоретичною основою дослідження стала теорія міжрольового конфлікту, а отримані результати підтвердили її ключові положення: конкуруючі інтереси різних сфер сформували рольовий конфлікт, який впливав на особистість у всіх вимірах життєдіяльності. У дослідженні було застосовано дизайн змішаних методів. Анкетне опитування проведено серед 80 українських студентів закладів вищої освіти. З них 62,5 % респондентів надали пріоритет навчанню, тоді як 37,5 % – роботі з неповною зайнятістю. Встановлено, що 57,5 % опитаних не мають достатньо часу для хобі та відпочинку. Тематичний аналіз здійснено за допомогою програмного забезпечення MAXQDA 24. Результати засвідчили основні виклики, з якими стикалися українські студенти: нестабільність середовища (війна, відключення електроенергії), тривожність щодо результатів діяльності та емоційне виснаження. Міжрольовий конфлікт у системі «робота – навчання – особисте життя» зумовив високий рівень стресу. Учасники дослідження відчували труднощі з управлінням часом, втому та емоційне вигорання. Серед ефективних стратегій досягнення балансу між роботою, навчанням і особистим життям респонденти відзначили встановлення чітких меж між професійною діяльністю, освітнім процесом і вільним часом, повноцінний відпочинок та уникнення багатозадачності. Українські студенти також очікували змін на системному рівні, зокрема розширення можливостей дистанційного навчання та підвищення гнучкості освітнього процесу. Отримані результати можуть слугувати основою для подальших емпіричних досліджень і розвитку міждисциплінарного діалогу між психологічною та педагогічною науками. Збалансоване поєднання ролей роботи, навчання та особистого життя сприятиме підвищенню академічної успішності студентів і загальної якості життя та благополуччя

**Ключові слова:** міжрольовий конфлікт; заклади освіти; виклики; гармонія між роботою, навчанням та особистим життям; стратегії