

DOI <https://doi.org/10.30525/2592-8813-2025-2-30>

## THE ROLE OF POETRY AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT TOOL FOR STUDENTS IN WARTIME

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**Abstract.** This study explores the role of poetry in providing psychological support to students in stressful situations, particularly in the context of war. The research examines how poetic resources can influence emotional well-being and help students cope with stress. The results indicate that poetry is used less frequently than music for stress relief, but still plays a significant role for some students. Most students tend to favor Ukrainian poetry (especially contemporary), which may indicate a high level of national awareness and a search for emotional comfort in their native culture in stressful situations. Students most often seek support in intimate and landscape lyricism. The survey reveals a tendency to choose optimistic poetic works, confirming their effectiveness in maintaining a positive mood. The number of individuals who turn to poetry as a means of psychological support generally corresponds to the number of those who reported its positive effect.

**Key words:** literature, poems, stressful situations, emotional well-being, positive effect, genres.

**Introduction.** It is widely accepted that stress is an inseparable part of every person's life, yet its specifics, significance, and impact on various groups of people are increasingly attracting researchers' attention. Higher education students, whose educational activities face significant challenges under stressful conditions, are of particular interest. Scientific observations in this field demonstrate that stress undeniably affects a student's personality and, consequently, their learning process. This influence can be both positive, fostering development through overcoming difficulties, and negative, manifesting in various ways, ranging from the emergence of psychosomatic disorders to academic neglect and disruptions in personal and professional development (Fedorova, 2013). While these findings previously applied to peacetime, the situation has become significantly more complex today. Current higher education students encounter an entirely new experience of stress tied to threats to life, health, and safety. Individuals are constantly exposed to numerous stressors, and the situation may remain only partially processed or experienced, potentially leading either to personal growth through overcoming stress or to emotional exhaustion, apathy, and the risk of mental disorders (Kresan, 2023: 193). Under such circumstances, finding effective methods to support psychological health becomes urgent. One such method, we propose, is poetry, which is capable not only of helping express emotions but also of fostering inner harmony and restoring psychological balance amid persistent stress.

The aim of this study is to investigate the significance of linguistic resources, such as poetry, in providing psychological support to higher education students majoring in "Law Enforcement Activities" during wartime. It seeks to determine their impact on respondents' emotional states and assess the effectiveness of using this resource in stressful situations to support their psychological well-being.

**Main text.** The primary objectives of the study are: 1) to characterize poetry as an effective tool for maintaining mental well-being; 2) to compare poetry and songs in terms of their potential to influence a person's psycho-emotional state; 3) to evaluate the role of poetry in fostering positive emotional experiences and resilience among higher education students majoring in "Law Enforcement Activities".

Data collection was conducted through a survey in an online format using Google Forms. A small random sample of 44 higher education students (14 men and 30 women) majoring in "Law Enforcement Activities" at Donetsk State University of Internal Affairs was selected for the study. The composition and size of the sample were determined by the goals of a pilot study, which included developing and testing the research procedure and identifying the most general trends regarding the use of linguistic resources in stressful situations to support psychological well-being.

The study was conducted individually in January 2025, adhering to the principles of voluntariness, anonymity, and an individualized approach while complying with all ethical standards.

The stimulus material consisted of interview questions divided into three groups. The first group addressed the use of linguistic resources (songs and poetry) in stressful situations. The second group focused on the impact of these resources on respondents' emotional states. The third group aimed to determine the importance of linguistic resources in providing psychological support to higher education students. This study analyzes responses related to the use of poetry, with limited information on songs provided for comparative purposes.

The unique psychological, emotional, and cognitive aspects of poetry are best reflected in the Ukrainian Small Encyclopedia (Buenos Aires, 1963), where one of the compiler's proposed definitions describes it as follows: "POETRY – beauty diffused throughout all of nature, particularly felt by so-called POETIC SOULS, in which it evokes a POETIC MOOD" (Onatskyi, 1963: 1410). This definition positions poetry not only as a literary genre but also as a way of perceiving the world, where a person senses and interprets surrounding beauty through poetic, emotional perception. In turn, the poetic mood mentioned in the definition arises from a deep emotional response to the world's beauty, often leading to the creation of poetic works. This aspect is closely linked to bibliotherapy or literary therapy, a widely used therapeutic method for addressing numerous psychological issues, particularly during crises (e.g., divorce, death in the family, severe illness), as well as in cases of depression, addiction, mood disorders, and more (Martseniuk, 2020: 221). For instance, when writing poetry or reading a poem, a person actively engages their mind in problem-solving through interpreting and processing the text, which can be more effective and profound than standard relaxation techniques. Poetry facilitates deep emotional self-expression, enabling individuals to articulate their deepest emotions, experiences, fears, or anxieties, thereby releasing internal tension. Moreover, it allows individuals to choose a form of expression – narrative poetry, prose poetry, phonetic poetry, etc. – that provides greater awareness of their states than mere conversation or conventional relaxation methods. The sounds, rhythm, and imagery of a poetic work also contribute, offering not only aesthetic pleasure but also serving as a form of meditation, as many poems focus on rhythm and melody, aiding concentration. An example is M. Vinhranovskyi's poem "Я тій сльозі сказав: не йди..." (*I told that tear: don't go... – переклад наші*), where "...oppositions of harmony/disharmony, past/present, summer/winter (light/frozen) are present. If the key sound in the first line is 'L,' in the second it is 'R'" (Borysiuk, 2002: 47). Only by deeply focusing on the sound orchestration can a reader perceive the opposition of two sounds "r" and "l" as embodiments of masculine and feminine principles. Such concentration on each word and phrase helps shift from a state of distraction to experiencing the "here and now," reducing anxiety levels, while reflecting on the poem's problems and issues helps redirect focus from negative thoughts.

It is also worth noting that poetry can strengthen the reader's connection with others, as many poems touch upon themes reflecting universal human experiences – loneliness, anxiety, loss. Readers may feel that their experiences are not unique, and this virtual connection fosters a sense of support and empathy, which becomes particularly significant in stressful situations. The similarity of described cases may also encourage deeper reflection on the situation, exploration of hidden aspects of the problem, and discovery of new possibilities for resolution.

At times, creating one's own poetic works allows a person to feel a sense of control over a situation, even amidst chaos, aiding in coping with difficulties. A vivid example is shaped poetry, known for over two millennia, where the author creates a visual image from the words of the poem (e.g., a star, heart, fountain, rain, trees, tower, ship, altar, etc.). In this context, it is worth mentioning the writer Lewis Carroll and his poem shaped like a mouse's tail in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Poetry can also serve as a form of escape from reality, immersing a person in another world – perhaps one far better and safer than the real one. This temporarily reduces stress, as the individual focuses on the aesthetic or meaningful rather than their problems.

Another advantage of poetry as a potential means of overcoming stress is its accessibility anytime and anywhere. Unlike some stress-coping methods that may require specific conditions (e.g., physical exercise or professional assistance), poetry can be read or written whenever a person feels the need.

To test the hypothesis regarding the effectiveness of using songs and poetry in stressful situations, an empirical study was conducted. According to the survey results, 35 participants reported listening to music in such cases, while 9 chose poetry. We aimed to analyze only the results concerning poetry, but we need to mention some aspects about music and songs as well. So, poetry and songs are closely related. Primarily, songs and poetry are united by the use of language as a foundation for conveying emotions or ideas, rhythmic organization, widespread use of artistic devices, and thematic diversity. Both art forms seek to evoke a wide range of feelings in the listener or reader, from joy to melancholy. Among the differences, the musical arrangement of songs stands out: music enhances the text and allows the expression of feelings that are difficult to convey with words alone, stimulating the release of endorphins – happiness hormones – helping to uplift mood, reduce stress levels, and create a positive emotional backdrop that improves overall mental well-being (Dudnyk, 2023: 91). Poetry, on the other hand, lacks this musical component, yet as an artistic-verbal creation, its recitation involves intonation and rhythm. There are also differences in presentation. Songs are designed for vocal performance, often tailored to the singer's abilities, while poetry is read aloud or silently, offering more room for individuality. The combination of music and lyrics in songs facilitates perception and broadens the audience, whereas poetry demands greater focus from the reader, providing space for reflection and analysis. It is also worth emphasizing that many modern songs are created purely for entertainment, mass consumption, or commercial success, while poetry tends to be more personal and oriented toward artistic self-expression. Thus, songs and poetry intersect as forms of verbal art, but music adds a new dimension to songs, while poetry remains a purely literary phenomenon.

We hypothesize that this and other factors contribute to poetry, unlike music, not being a primary means of restoring emotional balance for most respondents, as only 20,5 % answered affirmatively to the question, "Do you read poetry during periods of stress?"

When examining the frequency of poetry use, it was found that 93 % of respondents rarely turn to poetry in stressful situations. This may suggest that poetry is not the first or primary tool for stress relief for most people. They may prefer other, perhaps more accessible or effective support methods, such as listening to music, physical activity, socializing with loved ones, or even relaxing on social media. In contrast, lyrical works may seem complex to process or unsuitable for quick distraction. The limited use of poetry for this purpose may also indicate that some respondents do not associate it with emotional relief or do not see its potential for stress reduction. Only a small part of readers – 7 % – chose the "daily" option. We assume such respondents actively use poetry as a tool for emotional self-expression or support, are passionate about it, or even create their own works. In these cases, poetic works serve as a vital means of processing emotions, understanding oneself, or contextualizing one's circumstances.

Further research revealed that respondents prefer various poetic works for emotional support. Notably, the majority (63 %) favor Ukrainian poetry. We suggest this preference stems from the proximity of native literature to their current context, cultural, and social realities of both present

and past times. Among them, 36 % read contemporary Ukrainian poetry specifically. This can be explained by the fact that, amid war and social changes in Ukraine, modern Ukrainian poets may offer works whose themes and issues directly resonate with people's experiences, reflecting national self-awareness and serving as a strong emotional stimulus. These include themes related to war, national revival, and struggle, transforming such poems into powerful tools for processing difficult emotions and reflection. Another 27 % of respondents turn to classic Ukrainian poetry, suggesting a deep connection to national traditions and heritage. The works of classic Ukrainian poets (e.g., T. Shevchenko, L. Ukrainka, V. Symonenko) often carry a rich cultural context, which students may perceive as a source of strength, support, and inspiration during challenging times. We attribute this to respondents seeking not only emotional support but also a deeper understanding of the cultural and historical significance of Ukrainian literature. A smaller group (36 %) opts for foreign poetry for psychological support in stressful situations, indicating students' openness to world literature. Classic foreign authors (e.g., W. Wordsworth) and contemporary poets from other cultures can offer fresh perspectives on stressful situations, helping to contextualize emotions within global themes and serving as "a tool for healing emotional wounds and scars" (Beg, 2023). Foreign poetry provides universal emotional themes that resonate across cultures and offers a variety of stylistic approaches.

Within this study, we also analyzed higher education students' preferences regarding poetry genres they find beneficial for psychological support in stressful situations. Topping the list was intimate lyric poetry, chosen by 30 % of respondents. We believe this choice reflects the importance of poetry's personal dimension during periods of stress. Intimate lyrics typically address themes of love, loneliness, and inner experiences, helping individuals feel understood in their personal emotional struggles. This genre can create a sense of closeness and empathy, crucial in stressful situations. Landscape poetry came in second (22 %), described as depicting "aesthetic experiences of humanized, animated, or spiritualized, often personified nature" (Virsh-peizazh, 2007: 193). Landscape poetry frequently focuses on natural imagery, serving as a therapeutic tool for stress reduction. Descriptions of nature can evoke feelings of calm and peace, making it logical that some respondents chose this genre to restore emotional balance and reduce anxiety by focusing on the beauty of the world rather than their problems. Philosophical lyric poetry ranked third (19 %). The preference for philosophical poetry suggests students' desire to find deeper meaning and understanding in complex life situations. Philosophical poems often help reframe problems, suggesting that difficulties are part of the human life cycle, and provide answers to existential questions. Next was political poetry (15 %), likely chosen by those who find support in poems addressing social or political themes. Political lyrics allow students to comprehend and process social challenges or reinforce their beliefs, fostering a sense of unity and active societal engagement. A slightly smaller group (11 %) selected satirical poetry, which features sharp critique and mockery of negative social phenomena or human flaws. This genre can be useful in stressful situations by offering a different, ironic perspective on difficulties, easing the experience and aiding coping through humor. The smallest percentage (4 %) chose religious poetry, characterized by prayerfulness, adulatory pathos, reflections on the divine, and appeals to higher powers (Tkach, 2013: 95). Such poetry may serve as a support for students seeking solace in spirituality, helping them find faith, hope, meaning, and peace in difficult times.

We consider the survey results regarding the emotional tone of poems chosen by higher education students in stressful situations particularly interesting. Specifically, 94 % of respondents read works with an optimistic tone, while only 6 % prefer pessimistic tone. We interpret this ratio as a desire to find support and comfort through positive emotions. People often seek ways to reduce anxiety and depression during stress, so optimistic works can foster hope for a better future and even motivate action, instilling self-belief and strength. Sporadically, an opposite trend emerges, where readers do not shy away from deep or heavy emotions, opting for pessimistic works. We suggest that in such cases, depressive tone may enhance understanding of one's emotions and challenges.

A positive impact of poetry on emotional states in stressful situations was reported by 22,7 % of respondents, roughly aligning with the proportion who turn to poetry for psychological support (20,5 %). Meanwhile, among those who rate poetry's impact as neutral or negative (77,3 %), a nearly identical percentage (79,6 %) prefer music in stressful situations. We link positive feedback to the fact that, for some higher education students, poetry is a valuable and effective resource during stress, helping to relieve tension and improve emotional well-being. After reading it, most respondents felt joy, with surprise and sadness reported less frequently. Possible reasons for neutral or negative assessments include personal preferences (e.g., listening to music, talking with friends) or an unsuitable choice of poetic works or genres that do not meet their emotional needs.

The survey results position poetry as an individual resource for psychological support, serving as an effective means of stress reduction and emotional restoration for a small subset of higher education students. However, when asked about the importance of using poetry for psychological support during wartime, 52,2 % of all respondents indicated it was important or very important. Notably, this figure is more than double the percentage of those who currently turn to poetry during stress (20,5 %) or report a positive impact (22,7 %). We explain this discrepancy by suggesting that some respondents recognize poetry's potential benefit in stressful conditions but, for various reasons (e.g., lack of habit or insufficient access to suitable works), do not use it in practice. In wartime, with heightened stress and emotional strain, students may more consciously view poetry as a psychological support tool, yet due to inexperience or its unfamiliarity in real-life application, only a minority actively engages with it. Thus, there is a gap between recognizing poetry's importance and its actual use as a resource for emotional recovery.

**Results and Discussion.** Comparing our findings with those of other researchers, we confirm observations that poetry is an effective tool for exploring and expressing emotions and feelings (Sarma, 2023) and holds significant therapeutic potential, helping to maintain mental health and inner peace, improve mood, and prove especially beneficial for those experiencing stress or trauma (Beg, 2022: 39). However, we note that a substantial portion of our respondents assess poetry's impact as neutral or negative, preferring to listen to songs.

We also consider the findings of the article "The emotional power of poetry: neural circuitry, psychophysiology and compositional principles," where the authors experimentally demonstrated that recited poetry is a potent stimulus, capable of evoking chills and goosebumps similar to music, though differing in neural correlates. This highlights the unique qualities of poetic language, which cannot be fully replaced by music or singing in the evolution of human emotional expression (Wassiliwizky et al., 2017: 1239). Our respondents similarly confirm that poetry elicits strong emotions, including joy, surprise, anger, fear, disgust, and more.

Our results also align with a study on the impact of ancient Chinese poetry on students with depression, which showed that using poems with positive values for therapeutic purposes had a positive effect and improved participants' mood (Sun & Liu, 2023). Ukrainian students likewise demonstrate significant interest in classic Ukrainian poetry and choose it for emotional balance restoration.

**Conclusions.** Poetry is an ancient resource for psychological support in stressful situations, yet it is currently not among the most actively used methods. Nevertheless, it has its audience, who turn to it infrequently or consistently. Most students lean toward Ukrainian poetry (especially contemporary), possibly indicating a high level of national self-awareness and a search for emotional comfort in their native culture during stress. At the same time, classic and foreign poetry retain an important place in their preferences, suggesting a pursuit of universality in understanding psychological support through literature. The majority seek support in intimate and landscape poetry, which facilitate emotional release and stress reduction through personal experiences or nature imagery. Philosophical, political, satirical, and religious poetry are less in demand in stressful situations. The survey reveals a prevailing trend toward choosing optimistic poetic works, confirming their effectiveness in maintaining a

positive mood, with only a small minority finding solace in heavier or pessimistic tone. The number of those who use poetry as a psychological support tool generally matches the proportion reporting its positive effect. A significant portion of students report neutral or negative emotions, underscoring the importance of an individualized approach to selecting support methods and the potential need to develop skills for choosing poetry that could be beneficial in stressful situations.

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