Revista Portuguesa de Investigação Comportamental e Social 2025 Vol. 12(1): 1–10
Portuguese Journal of Behavioral and Social Research 2025 Vol. 12(1): 1–10
e-ISSN 2183-4938
Departamento de Investigação & Desenvolvimento • Instituto Superior Miguel Torga

ORIGINAL PAPER

Evidence-based practice in psychology during wartime: Self-reported knowledge and attitudes among practicing psychologists and psychology students in Ukraine

Prática baseada em provas em psicologia em tempo de guerra: Conhecimento e atitudes autorreportados entre psicólogos/as em exercício e estudantes de psicologia na Ucrânia

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Received: 06/01/2025; Reviewed: 10/05/2025; Accepted: 04/07/2025.

https://doi.org/10.31211/rpics.2026.12.1.378

Abstract

Background and Aim: Evidence-based practice in psychology (EBPP) constitutes a core framework for delivering effective mental health interventions, particularly during crises such as armed conflict. Prior research has shown that practitioners' knowledge of and attitudes toward EBPP predict the likelihood of its implementation. This study examined self-reported knowledge and attitudes toward EBPP among practicing psychologists and psychology students in wartime Ukraine. **Method**: Self-reported knowledge of and attitudes toward EBPP were assessed in university students (n = 427) and practicing psychologists (n = 356) from across Ukraine. An online survey comprised items addressing sociodemographic characteristics, satisfaction with university EBPP training, perceived EBPP knowledge, and attitudes toward EBPP elements. **Results**: Students rated their university EBPP education more favorably than practicing psychologists did, but reported lower perceived EBPP knowledge. Both groups held generally positive attitudes toward EBPP, yet differed in their endorsement of its specific elements. Students placed greater importance on considering clients' sociocultural characteristics and personal preferences, whereas practicing psychologists placed greater value on evidence derived from professional experience through supervision and collegial consultation. **Conclusions**: These findings suggest that, despite positive attitudes toward EBPP, both groups reported only moderate satisfaction with university EBPP training. The higher perceived EBPP knowledge among practicing psychologists, relative to students, may reflect accumulation of knowledge through professional experience rather than university preparation alone, suggesting that strengthening EBPP content in psychology curricula and continuing professional education in Ukraine warrants attention.

Keywords: Armed conflict; Attitude of health personnel; Evidence-based practice; Perceived knowledge; Psychologists; Students; Ukraine.

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Resumo

Contexto e Objetivo: A prática baseada em provas em psicologia (PBEP) constitui um referencial central para a prestação de intervenções eficazes em saúde mental, sobretudo em situações de crise como os conflitos armados. Investigação prévia demonstrou que o conhecimento dos profissionais sobre a PBEP e as atitudes face à mesma predizem a probabilidade da sua implementação. O presente estudo examinou o conhecimento autorreportado e as atitudes face à PBEP entre psicólogos/as em exercício e estudantes de psicologia na Ucrânia em tempo de guerra. **Método**: O conhecimento autorreportado e as atitudes face à PBEP foram avaliados em estudantes universitários (n = 427) e em psicólogos/as em exercício (n = 356) de várias regiões da Ucrânia. Um inquérito *online* incluiu itens sobre características sociodemográficas, satisfação com a formação universitária em PBEP, conhecimento percebido e atitudes face aos seus elementos. **Resultados**: Os estudantes avaliaram a formação universitária em PBEP de forma mais favorável do que os/as profissionais, embora tenham relatado menor conhecimento percebido. Ambos os grupos manifestaram atitudes globalmente positivas face à PBEP, embora divergissem na valorização dos respetivos elementos. Os estudantes atribuíram maior importância às características socioculturais e às preferências dos clientes, ao passo que as e os profissionais valorizaram mais as provas provenientes da experiência profissional, designadamente através da supervisão e da consulta entre pares. **Conclusões**: Apesar das atitudes positivas face à PBEP, ambos os grupos revelaram satisfação apenas moderada com a formação universitária. O conhecimento percebido como mais elevado entre os/as profissionais poderá refletir a acumulação de conhecimento decorrente da experiência, e não apenas da formação universitária, sugerindo a necessidade de reforçar os conteúdos de PBEP nos currículos e na formação contínua na Ucrânia.

Palavras-Chave: Atitude dos profissionais de saúde; Conhecimento percebido; Conflito armado; Estudantes; Prática baseada na evidência; Psicólogos; Ucrânia.

Introduction

Evidence-based practice in psychology (EBPP) is a framework designed to enhance psychological interventions through the integration of three forms of *evidence* in clinical decision-making: the best available research, practitioners' practical experience, and the client's characteristics, including cultural background and personal values (American Psychological Association, 2006). The promotion of EBPP has contributed to several domains, including the specification of best research practices in psychology and the research literacy required of practitioners (Middleton et al., 2020). A second contribution concerns the translation of research evidence into practice and the generation of research hypotheses derived from practice (Boswell & Schwartzman, 2024; Waltman et al., 2020). A third contribution addresses the client's individual characteristics and preferences when selecting or modifying psychological interventions (Melgarejo et al., 2020; Pfeiffer et al., 2023). In sum, EBPP maintains that a one-size-fits-all approach should be replaced by the joint consideration of empirically supported interventions, individual recipient characteristics, and contextual factors (Čehajić-Clancy & Halperin, 2024). This feature of EBPP renders it particularly valuable in wartime contexts, where interventions must be timely and flexibly adapted to individual circumstances (Dorozhkin, 2024; Pustovoyt et al., 2024; Velykodna, 2023).

Concerning the factors associated with EBPP utilization, the level of EBPP knowledge appears relevant to its implementation among psychologists (Lilienfeld et al., 2013). Evidence also suggests that psychologists are more likely to adopt specific interventions when they hold positive attitudes toward them (Mendes-Santos et al., 2020). A systematic review of 46 empirical studies found that attitudes exerted a strong influence on EBPP implementation across most included studies (Fishman et al., 2021). Additional research suggests that attitudes toward EBPP predict its utilization, with more positive

attitudes observed among early-career professionals (Hamill & Wiener, 2018). EBPP training increases knowledge and enhances attitudes toward this approach in some contexts (Lim et al., 2012), and more intensive training formats are more effective in facilitating EBPP implementation (Frank et al., 2020). Furthermore, university-based EBPP instruction has been associated with positive attitudes toward EBPP (Nguyen-Thi et al., 2023).

In Ukraine, a lack of EBPP knowledge and skills was documented prior to the 2022 Russian invasion (Hook et al., 2021), potentially exacerbating the mental health crisis precipitated by the ongoing war (Seleznova et al., 2023). Following 2022, training and support initiatives were launched to address this gap among Ukraine-based psychologists (Palii et al., 2024; Velykodna et al., 2023). More recent data indicate that psychologists' self-reported EBPP knowledge was associated not only with perceived implementation but also with EBPP-consistent behavior in professional practice (Lazos et al., 2024). However, satisfaction with university-based EBPP training was not associated with its implementation in practice (Lazos et al., 2024). It thus remains unclear whether current university curricula serve as a perceived source of EBPP knowledge or positive attitudes toward EBPP.

To address this gap, the present study examined current self-reported EBPP knowledge—including knowledge attributed to university training—and attitudes toward EBPP among practicing psychologists and psychology students in wartime Ukraine. The following research questions guided the investigation:

1) What are the levels of self-reported knowledge of and attitudes toward EBPP characterize practicing psychologists and psychology students?
2) Do practicing psychologists and psychology students differ in self-reported EBPP knowledge?
3) Do practicing psychologists and psychology students differ in satisfaction with university EBPP education?
4) Do practicing psychologists and psychology students differ in their attitudes toward EBPP?

Method

The present cross-sectional study compared two independent groups—practicing psychologists and psychology students—and is reported in accordance with the Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology (STROBE) guidelines for cross-sectional studies (Von Elm et al., 2007). An online survey format was deemed most appropriate, as it enabled recruitment of participants from diverse regions of Ukraine; regional distribution was monitored throughout data collection.

Participants

Two groups were recruited for comparative analysis. The first group comprised Ukrainian psychologists eligible if they held a university degree in psychology and reported current professional practice experience. The second comprised psychology students eligible if they were enrolled in bachelor's, master's, or postgraduate programs and reported student status with no concurrent professional practice. Given wartime constraints, a representative sampling strategy was not feasible. Instead, a nonprobability voluntary-response sampling approach was used, and the target sample size was determined using a rule

of thumb criterion of at least five participants per questionnaire item, setting a recruitment target of at least 200 participants per group (400 overall). A total of 1,094 individuals accessed the survey, of whom 793 completed it (response rate = 72.5%). Ten respondents who identified as practicing psychologists but did not hold an academic degree in psychology were excluded, yielding a final analytical sample of 783.

Measures

A purpose-developed questionnaire assessed sociodemographic characteristics, educational background, employment status, and EBPP knowledge and attitudes. Items addressing EBPP (i.e., satisfaction with the university EBPP education, perceived EBPP knowledge, and attitudes toward EBPP elements) were formatted as 7-point Likert scales. Attitudes toward EBPP elements—encompassing the best available research, practical experience, and clients' characteristics—were operationalized as three two-item scales (see Table 2).

Procedure

Data collection occurred from December 14, 2023, to March 7, 2024, via multiple recruitment channels: direct email correspondence to psychology departments at universities across Ukraine, professional psychological association networks, and social media. A nonprobability voluntary response sampling approach was used. The survey was self-administered online via the SurveyMonkey platform. Electronic informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to participation. The study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical approval was obtained from Ukraine Sigmund Freud University on November 11, 2023 (Protocol No. 3). Responses were collected confidentially, and participation was voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any time. No incentives were provided.

Data Analysis

All analyses were conducted in Jamovi (Version 2.3.28). Data were first screened using descriptive statistics, distributional indices, and graphical inspection to examine response patterns and evaluate normality. Descriptive statistics were then calculated for all study variables. The factor structure of the EBPP attitude items was examined using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). A three-factor model was specified, corresponding to the three EBPP elements: best available research, practical experience, and client characteristics, with two items loading on each factor. The three factors were allowed to correlate, and the model was estimated using the maximum likelihood (ML) estimator. Model fit was evaluated using the comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the 95% confidence interval for RMSEA, and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). Group differences in categorical sociodemographic variables were tested using chi-square (χ^2) tests, with Cramér's V reported as the corresponding effect size. Differences between practicing psychologists and students in continuous variables (i.e., perceived EBPP knowledge, satisfaction with university EBPP training, and EBPP attitude scores) were examined using Welch's t tests to account for potential heterogeneity of variances. Effect sizes for continuous group comparisons were estimated using Cohen's d, with corresponding 95% confidence intervals. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

Results

Sample Characteristics

A total of 783 respondents provided complete responses eligible for analysis, of whom 54.5% were currently studying psychology (n = 427) and 45.5% were practicing psychologists with university degrees in psychology (n = 356). Sociodemographic characteristics and group comparisons via chi-square tests are presented in Table 1. The majority of participants in both groups were female and residing in Ukraine; however, the proportion of male respondents and Ukraine-based participants was significantly higher in the student group. Age ranges were broad in both groups (students: 18–64 years; practitioners: 21–67 years), and practicing psychologists were significantly older on average (M = 38.04, SD = 9.39) than students (M = 32.62, SD = 12.06), $t_{(777.47)}$ = -7.08, p < .01, Cohen's d = 0.50.

Table 1

Sociodemographic Characteristics and Group Comparisons

Characteristic	Students	Practitioners	χ^2	Cramér's V
	n (%)	n (%)		
Gender			6.27*	.09
Male	56 (13.1)	27 (7.6)		
Female	371 (86.9)	329 (92.4)		
Current residence			18.96**	.16
Ukraine	395 (92.5)	293 (82.3)		
Abroad [a]	32 (7.5)	63 (17.7)		
Academic degree [b]				
None	379 (88.8)	0 (0)	612.00***	.88
Bachelor	36 (8.4)	105 (29.5)	58.30***	.27
Master	15 (3.5)	262 (73.6)	417.00***	.73
Doctoral Degree	0 (0)	44 (12.4)	55.90***	.27

Note. N = 783. For gender and current residence, χ^2 tests are omnibus tests for mutually exclusive categories. Academic degree was a multiple-response variable; therefore, each degree category was analyzed separately as a binary indicator (selected vs. not selected). Percentages for academic degree sum to more than 100%. Cramér's V is reported as the effect size.
[a] War-forced migration.
[b] Completed academic degrees in Psychology.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Perceived EBPP Knowledge

Both groups rated their EBPP knowledge at a moderate level (students: M = 4.14, SD = 1.61, Mdn = 5; practitioners: M = 5.12, SD = 1.30, Mdn = 5). However, practicing psychologists reported significantly higher perceived EBPP knowledge than students, Welch's t(780.22) = -9.42, p < .001, Cohen's d = 0.66.

Satisfaction with University EBPP Education

Both groups reported moderate levels of satisfaction (students: M = 4.54, SD = 1.67, Mdn = 4; practitioners: M = 4.00, SD = 1.71, Mdn = 4; range: 1–7). In contrast to the preceding finding, practicing

psychologists reported significantly lower satisfaction with university EBPP education than students, Welch's $t(df) = 4.50$, $p < .01$, Cohen's $d = 0.32$.

Attitudes Toward the EBPP

Confirmatory factor analysis supported the three-factor structure of the EBPP attitude scales (ML estimator; correlated factors; (CFI = .996, TLI = .989, RMSEA = .046, 95% CI [.020, .074] SRMR = .010). Descriptive statistics and group comparisons for the individual items and scale scores are presented in Table 2. Overall, both groups expressed highly favorable attitudes toward EBPP. (item means = 5.87–6.65, medians = 6–7; possible range: 1–7). Practicing psychologists assigned greater importance than students to practice-derived evidence, including both personal professional experience and collegial learning. By contrast, students attributed greater importance to client-related factors, particularly personal preferences.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Group Comparisons for Attitudes Toward EBPP

Variables	Students *M* (*SD*)	Practitioners *M* (*SD*)	*t*	*d*
Items				
Updating knowledge from research on method possibilities and limits	6.37 (0.96)	6.45 (0.85)	-1.19	-0.09
Updating knowledge from research on specific issues and client presentations	6.51 (0.86)	6.55 (0.74)	-0.65	-0.05
Analysis of own practical experience	6.45 (1.00)	6.65 (0.74)	-3.29**	-0.22
Analysis of colleagues' practical experience	6.15 (1.03)	6.34 (0.85)	-2.83**	-0.20
Consideration of clients' sociocultural characteristics	6.27 (0.94)	6.19 (0.98)	1.16	0.08
Consideration of clients' personal preferences	6.15 (1.03)	5.87 (1.14)	3.53**	0.26
Scales				
Considering the best available research scale	12.90 (1.67)	13.00 (1.44)	-1.02	-0.06
Considering the practical experience scale	12.60 (1.84)	13.00 (1.46)	-3.35**	-0.24
Considering clients' sociocultural specifics and preferences scale	12.40 (1.78)	12.06 (1.92)	2.67**	0.18

Note. Students: $n = 427$. Practitioners: $n = 356$. Higher scores indicate greater endorsement of the corresponding EBPP element.
**$p < .01$.

Discussion

The present study examined self-reported EBPP knowledge and attitudes toward its core elements among practicing psychologists and psychology students in wartime Ukraine, where the need for evidence-informed mental health care is particularly acute (Dumchev & Klymchuk, 2024; Suvalo & Borovets, 2024). Both groups expressed highly positive attitudes toward all three EBPP elements. This pattern is broadly consistent with prior literature indicating that attitudes constitute an important factor in implementation (Fishman et al., 2021), and may indicate a favorable disposition toward EBPP among Ukrainian psychology students and practitioners, although attitudes alone do not establish

implementation in practice. Practicing psychologists, however, placed greater emphasis than students on evidence derived from professional experience, including both their own practice and collegial learning. This finding aligns with the broader trend toward elevating practice-based evidence within EBPP (Boswell & Schwartzman, 2024). This finding is also consistent with the Plan of Events for 2024–2026 under the Conception for the Development of the Mental Health Care System in Ukraine to 2030 issued by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, which for the first time mandates clinical supervision for mental health professionals, including psychologists (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2024).

However, this favorable attitudinal profile was not matched by equally high levels of perceived EBPP knowledge or satisfaction with university training. Both groups rated their EBPP knowledge at a moderate level, consistent with their moderate satisfaction with university EBPP training. Students reported significantly higher satisfaction with university EBPP education than did practicing psychologists, whereas practicing psychologists rated their current EBPP knowledge higher than did students. One possible interpretation is that practitioners, having accumulated experience beyond university, may be better positioned to recognize limitations in their formal training while also perceiving gains in knowledge acquired through practice. If so, this pattern may point to persistent gaps in EBPP coverage of within psychology training in Ukraine, although this interpretation must remain tentative given the cross-sectional and self-report nature of the data. This reading is consistent with pre-war evidence identifying training needs and barriers related to evidence-based mental health care in Ukraine (Hook et al., 2021) and with broader evidence that EBPP training can improve knowledge and attitudes, particularly when delivered in more intensive formats (Frank et al., 2020; Lim et al., 2012). Prior research further indicates that Ukraine-based psychologists and mental health workers have been operating under substantial psychological strain during the war, manifesting in elevated stress, exhaustion, compassion fatigue, and reduced well-being (Kang et al., 2024; Leshem et al., 2025; Pinchuk et al., 2022), which may further complicate training and professional development in this context. At the same time, evidence from wartime Ukraine suggests that relevant professional training can be associated with greater confidence in practice (Velykodna et al., 2023). Taken together, these findings underscore the need to strengthen both university-level EBPP instruction and continuing professional education.

The mental health conditions and educational disruptions affecting psychology students in wartime Ukraine also merit consideration. Repeated cross-sectional evidence indicates that emotional and physiological war-related responses among university students did not attenuate over time and were intensified among those with relatives in the armed forces (Kurapov et al., 2024). The present study did not assess participants' mental health status, which may constitute an important contextual factor when interpreting self-reported EBPP knowledge, training satisfaction, and attitudes in the wartime context.

EBPP training in psychology depends substantially on supervised practice and experiential learning (Barrett et al., 2020), and more intensive training approaches appear to facilitate implementation more effectively (Frank et al., 2020). However, many Ukrainian students were compelled to pursue their education exclusively online, a modality associated with elevated anxiety and reduced motivation (Cherepiekhina et al., 2023). Collectively, these contextual disruptions qualify the interpretation of the present findings and condition the feasibility of EBPP training in wartime Ukraine.

Limitations

Several limitations of the present study should be acknowledged. First, reliance on self-report measures, including a purpose-developed questionnaire, limited the assessment to participants' perceived knowledge, which may have been influenced by individual factors including as self-esteem, mental health status, and professional motivation, among others. Second, the cross-sectional design permitted group comparison but precludes causal inference regarding the relationships among the assessed variables. Third, because wartime conditions prevented access to precise population-level data on psychologists and psychology students in Ukraine, the representativeness of the sample could not be established. Fourth, the developed scale for EBPP attitude assessment has limited psychometric robustness, as each EBPP attitude factor includes only two items. Finally, assessment of participants' mental health status would have enriched interpretation of self-reported knowledge, educational satisfaction, and attitudes toward EBPP—outcomes potentially sensitive to war-related psychological distress.

Conclusion

The present study provides evidence on self-reported EBPP knowledge and attitudes among practicing psychologists and psychology students in wartime Ukraine. Overall, both groups expressed highly favorable attitudes toward the core elements of EBPP, but these attitudes were accompanied by only moderate perceived knowledge and moderate satisfaction with university EBPP training. Group differences suggested complementary developmental needs: students appeared more oriented toward client-specific considerations, whereas practicing psychologists placed greater emphasis on professional experience and collegial learning. Practitioners also reported higher perceived EBPP knowledge but lower satisfaction with university training, a pattern that may reflect knowledge consolidation through professional experience and perceived limitations in formal preparation.

These findings have implications for three areas. At the curricular level, university psychology programs should strengthen EBPP content by integrating research literacy, client-centered decision-making, supervised practice, and experiential learning. At the professional-development level, continuing education should support the translation of EBPP principles into routine psychological practice. At the research level, future studies should examine EBPP knowledge and implementation longitudinally, include indicators of actual EBPP competence and behavior, and assess mental health and war-exposure variables that may shape self-perceived knowledge, training satisfaction, and attitudes in wartime contexts.

Acknowledgements and Authorship

Acknowledgements: The authors did not indicate any acknowledgments.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no competing interest, loyalty, or dual commitment that may affect their objectivity or influence their study.

Funding sources: Not applicable.

CREdiT authorship contribution statement: **MV:** Conceptualization; Methodology; Project Administration; Validation; Writing – Original Draft; Writing – Review & Editing. **GL:** Conceptualization; Methodology; Project Administration; Writing – Original Draft. **LK:** Conceptualization; Methodology; Writing – Original Draft. **VD:** Methodology; Formal Analysis; Visualization. **IK**: Investigation; Writing – Original Draft. **TP:** Investigation; Resources; Supervision; Administration.

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