



New Trends
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Peace as a Transversal Psychological Resource: Implications for Mental Health Prevention

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Abstract: Contemporary societies are increasingly exposed to collective stress generated by war, global insecurity, and prolonged crises, with significant consequences for mental health. In this context, the present paper conceptualizes peace as a transversal psychological resource and examines its relevance for mental health protection and prevention in situations of collective stress. Previous research in peace psychology, particularly the distinction between negative and positive peace, has emphasized the role of peace beyond the absence of conflict, highlighting its contribution to human development and psychological well-being. At the same time, studies in mental health have documented the indirect psychological effects of war-related stress, including heightened anxiety, vicarious trauma, and social polarization, even among populations not directly exposed to armed conflict. Adopting a conceptual and integrative psychological approach, this article draws on peace psychology, social and community psychology, and public mental health perspectives to analyze peace as a value operating across intrapersonal, interpersonal, and community levels. With illustrative reference to the psychological impact of the war in Ukraine on neighboring societies, the analysis suggests that peace functions as a protective psychological resource associated with emotional regulation, resilience, social cohesion, and reduced vulnerability to stress-related symptoms. At the group level, peace-oriented values support prosocial mobilization and community resilience while mitigating risks of polarization and collective

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insecurity. These findings highlight the importance of integrating peace-oriented principles into mental health prevention strategies, including group counseling, community-based interventions, and preventive public mental health policies.

Keywords: emotional regulation; community resilience; vicarious stress; prosocial behavior; social cohesion

1. Introduction

In recent decades, contemporary societies have been increasingly shaped by prolonged crises, global insecurity, and armed conflicts that extend their psychological impact far beyond the boundaries of direct exposure. War-related threats, economic instability, mass migration, and continuous media coverage of violence contribute to persistent forms of collective stress, affecting emotional well-being, social relations, and community functioning. These conditions have brought renewed attention to the need for psychological resources capable of supporting mental health at individual and societal levels, particularly in contexts characterized by uncertainty and perceived insecurity.

Within this landscape, peace is most often addressed as a political, diplomatic, or moral objective, while its psychological significance remains comparatively underexplored. Traditional approaches tend to conceptualize peace primarily as the absence of armed conflict or overt violence, overlooking its potential role as an internal and relational resource that supports emotional regulation, social cohesion, and resilience. From a psychological perspective, this narrow framing limits the understanding of peace as a construct that may operate across multiple levels of human functioning, including intrapersonal processes, interpersonal relationships, and collective dynamics.

Peace psychology has contributed to broadening this perspective by distinguishing between negative peace, defined as the absence of direct violence, and positive peace, understood as the presence of social conditions that foster well-being, justice, and human development. This distinction has opened the way for considering peace not merely as a macro-social condition, but also as a psychological state and value that can influence mental health outcomes. At the same time, research in social, community, and public mental health psychology has documented the indirect psychological effects of war and large-scale crises, such as heightened anxiety, vicarious stress, emotional exhaustion, and social polarization, even among populations not directly involved in armed conflict.

Against this background, the present article advances the conceptualization of peace as a transversal psychological resource. Transversal psychological resources are understood as values or capacities that cut across domains and levels of functioning, shaping emotional regulation, social interaction, and collective adaptation simultaneously. By adopting an integrative psychological approach, this paper seeks to examine how peace may function as such a resource, contributing to mental health protection and prevention in contexts of collective stress. Particular attention is given to the relevance of this framework for societies exposed to indirect war-related stress, where psychological vulnerability coexists with opportunities for prosocial mobilization and community resilience.

The aim of this article is therefore threefold: first, to reconceptualize peace within a psychological framework that emphasizes its transversal character; second, to explore its implications for mental health at intrapersonal, interpersonal, and community levels; and third, to discuss the relevance of peace-oriented perspectives for preventive strategies in public mental health. By reframing peace as a psychological resource rather than solely a political or moral ideal, the paper seeks to contribute to contemporary debates in peace psychology and to offer a conceptual foundation for future research and prevention-oriented interventions.

2. Literature Review

The psychological study of peace has developed at the intersection of social psychology, community psychology, and peace psychology, gradually moving beyond its initial association with political science and international relations. Early contributions in peace psychology emphasized the distinction between negative peace, defined as the absence of direct violence, and positive peace, understood as the presence of social conditions that promote human flourishing, justice, and well-being. This conceptual differentiation marked a critical shift by framing peace not only as a macro-social outcome, but also as a condition with profound psychological relevance.

Subsequent research has expanded this perspective by examining the psychological correlates of peace-related conditions, including emotional stability, trust, empathy, and social connectedness. Studies in social and community psychology suggest that peaceful environments are associated with lower levels of chronic stress, improved emotional regulation, and stronger interpersonal relationships. Conversely, contexts

characterized by persistent threat, insecurity, or structural violence tend to undermine psychological well-being, increasing vulnerability to anxiety, depressive symptoms, and social withdrawal. These findings support the view that peace can be conceptualized as a psychological resource that contributes to mental health beyond the mere absence of overt conflict.

At the individual level, peace has been discussed in relation to intrapersonal processes such as emotional regulation, self-coherence, and resilience. Psychological literature highlights the role of internal calm and affective balance in buffering stress responses and facilitating adaptive coping. Individuals who experience a sense of inner peace are more likely to display flexible emotional responses, reduced physiological arousal, and greater tolerance of uncertainty—factors that are particularly relevant in times of prolonged societal stress. This intrapersonal dimension positions peace alongside other protective psychological resources, such as resilience and self-regulation, that support mental health maintenance and recovery.

At the interpersonal and community levels, peace-related values have been linked to social cohesion, prosocial behavior, and collective efficacy. Research on community resilience indicates that shared values emphasizing cooperation, mutual support, and non-violent conflict resolution enhance a group's capacity to respond adaptively to collective adversity. In contexts of crisis, such as war or mass displacement, peace-oriented attitudes can foster solidarity and collective meaning-making, reducing feelings of helplessness and fragmentation. At the same time, the absence or erosion of such values may contribute to social polarization, intergroup tension, and the amplification of perceived threats.

Recent literature in public mental health has further underscored the importance of addressing psychological well-being at a population level, particularly in societies exposed to chronic stressors. Indirect exposure to war through media, migration flows, and geopolitical proximity has been associated with vicarious stress, emotional exhaustion, and heightened risk perception among populations not directly affected by violence. These findings challenge traditional clinical models focused exclusively on individual pathology and call for broader, prevention-oriented frameworks that integrate psychological, social, and community dimensions.

Within this context, the concept of transversal psychological resources offers a useful integrative lens. Transversal resources are understood as psychological values

or capacities that operate across multiple domains of functioning, simultaneously influencing intrapersonal regulation, interpersonal dynamics, and collective adaptation. While constructs such as resilience, empathy, and social cohesion have been widely discussed in this regard, peace has received comparatively limited attention as a transversal psychological resource. Existing literature tends to address peace either as an external social condition or as a moral aspiration, rather than as a dynamic psychological value with protective functions for mental health.

The present review highlights this gap by synthesizing contributions from peace psychology, social and community psychology, and public mental health research. By situating peace within a transversal psychological framework, the article builds on existing theoretical foundations while proposing a more integrative understanding of its role in mental health protection and prevention. This perspective provides the conceptual basis for examining how peace-oriented values may support psychological well-being and collective resilience in contexts of indirect or prolonged exposure to war-related stress.

3. Methodology – Theoretical and Conceptual Approach

The present article adopts a theoretical and conceptual methodological approach aimed at integrating existing psychological literature to advance an understanding of peace as a transversal psychological resource. Rather than employing an empirical research design, the study is grounded in a qualitative synthesis of established theoretical models and research findings drawn from peace psychology, social and community psychology, and public mental health. This approach is appropriate given the conceptual nature of the research objectives and the intention to clarify and refine a psychological construct with relevance across multiple levels of functioning.

The methodological framework of this study is grounded in an integrative review strategy, selected for its capacity to accommodate the conceptual complexity of peace as a psychological construct operating across multiple levels of functioning. Unlike systematic reviews or meta-analyses, which prioritize quantitative aggregation and effect size estimation, the integrative review allows for the critical synthesis of theoretical models, empirical findings, and conceptual discussions drawn from diverse areas of psychological research. This approach is particularly suitable for examining constructs that are not confined to a single domain or

methodological tradition, such as peace, which intersects with emotional, relational, and collective dimensions of mental health.

The selection of sources followed relevance-based criteria, focusing on peer-reviewed journal articles, theoretical papers, and authoritative reports in psychology, social sciences, and public mental health. Priority was given to contemporary literature addressing indirect exposure to war, collective insecurity, and population-level psychological responses to prolonged crises. Rather than aiming for exhaustive coverage, the review emphasized conceptual convergence, identifying recurring patterns, shared mechanisms, and complementary perspectives across different strands of research. This strategy enabled the integration of insights from peace psychology, social and community psychology, and public mental health into a coherent conceptual framework.

Conceptual analysis constituted the core methodological procedure of the study. Key psychological constructs associated with peace were examined through a multi-level analytical lens, encompassing intrapersonal, interpersonal, and community-level processes. At the intrapersonal level, peace-related constructs were analyzed in relation to emotional regulation, stress appraisal, and affective balance, with particular attention to their role in mitigating vulnerability to anxiety and stress-related symptoms. At the interpersonal level, the analysis focused on prosocial behavior, empathy, and non-violent communication as mechanisms through which peace-oriented values shape relational dynamics and social support. At the community level, constructs such as social cohesion, collective efficacy, and resilience were examined as expressions of peace-related functioning in group contexts.

This multi-level perspective reflects the transversal framework guiding the study and allows for an integrated understanding of how peace operates simultaneously across domains. By systematically linking psychological mechanisms to levels of analysis, the conceptual approach highlights the pathways through which peace-related values may contribute to mental health protection and prevention in contexts of adversity. Rather than isolating constructs within disciplinary boundaries, the methodology emphasizes their interconnectedness and relevance for both individual well-being and collective adaptation.

To enhance contextual relevance, the analysis incorporates illustrative references to the psychological impact of the war in Ukraine on neighboring societies, including Romania, as a contemporary example of indirect and prolonged exposure to armed

conflict. These references are employed as contextual illustrations rather than empirical case studies, with the explicit aim of anchoring the theoretical discussion in real-world socio-psychological conditions. The war in Ukraine represents a salient context characterized by heightened collective insecurity, persistent media exposure to violence, population displacement, and sustained uncertainty, all of which are known to influence emotional regulation, stress perception, and social dynamics at a population level. By situating the conceptual analysis within this context, the article illustrates how peace-related psychological resources may become particularly salient under conditions of indirect war-related stress.

This form of contextualization enables the examination of peace as a psychological resource not in abstract or idealized settings, but within environments marked by chronic threat and collective anxiety. It also allows for the exploration of group-level responses, such as prosocial mobilization, community resilience, and polarization, which are central to understanding the psychological consequences of large-scale crises. Importantly, the use of contextual references does not seek to generalize empirical findings from a specific national case, but rather to demonstrate the applicability and relevance of the proposed conceptual framework across societies exposed to similar stressors.

Finally, the methodological approach emphasizes reflexivity and theoretical coherence as essential components of conceptual psychological research. Reflexivity is reflected in the explicit acknowledgment of the scope and limits of a non-empirical design, as well as in the careful differentiation between theoretical interpretation and empirical evidence. Theoretical coherence is ensured through the systematic alignment of constructs, levels of analysis, and psychological mechanisms discussed throughout the article. While conceptual research does not provide direct causal testing, it plays a critical role in theory development, hypothesis generation, and the formulation of prevention-oriented frameworks. By clarifying the methodological stance and analytical strategy, this section enhances transparency regarding the contribution of the study and establishes a solid foundation for the subsequent discussion of implications for mental health prevention and public policy.

4. Findings

The theoretical analysis developed in this article supports the understanding of peace not merely as a contextual condition, but as a meaningful psychological orientation

that shapes how individuals and communities relate to themselves, to others, and to uncertainty. From this perspective, peace emerges as a transversal psychological resource grounded in processes of meaning-making, emotional integration, and relational coherence, rather than as a static or externally imposed state.

From an intrapersonal perspective, peace can be interpreted as a form of psychological alignment that facilitates emotional integration and existential stability. Rather than implying the absence of negative affect, peace reflects an individual's capacity to tolerate ambiguity, regulate inner tension, and maintain coherence in the face of perceived threat. Within this framework, peace functions as an organizing principle of the psyche, supporting reflective awareness and adaptive stress appraisal. This internal orientation appears to reduce susceptibility to anxiety-driven reactivity by allowing individuals to remain psychologically anchored even under conditions of prolonged uncertainty and collective insecurity.

Within the sphere of interpersonal relations, peace-oriented functioning manifests as an ethical-relational stance that prioritizes recognition, empathy, and non-adversarial engagement with others. The findings suggest that peace, understood psychologically, shapes the quality of relational encounters by fostering openness, trust, and prosocial responsiveness. In contexts of societal strain, such relational orientations act as buffers against interpersonal alienation and defensive hostility, supporting the maintenance of social bonds that are essential for emotional containment and mutual regulation.

At the level of collective experience, peace acquires a shared psychological meaning, reflected in communal narratives, values, and practices that sustain social cohesion. Communities in which peace-oriented values are psychologically salient demonstrate a greater capacity to transform collective anxiety into cooperative action and shared purpose. From a philosophical-psychological standpoint, peace at this level functions as a symbolic resource that enables communities to integrate threat without fragmenting, preserving a sense of continuity and collective identity. The absence of such shared meaning structures, by contrast, appears to increase vulnerability to polarization, fear-based narratives, and social disintegration.

Across all levels of analysis, the findings highlight the transversal nature of peace as a psychological resource that simultaneously informs emotional regulation, relational ethics, and collective adaptation. Peace is thus not positioned as a passive consequence of favorable circumstances, but as an active psychological orientation that can be cultivated and sustained even in adverse contexts. This integrative

understanding situates peace alongside other foundational psychological resources—such as resilience and self-regulation—while emphasizing its distinctive role in organizing meaning and coherence across levels of experience.

Taken together, these conceptual findings suggest that peace occupies a central place within a psychologically informed understanding of mental health. By framing peace as a resource rooted in psychological integration and relational meaning, the present analysis offers a foundation for approaches to mental health promotion and prevention that address not only symptoms and behaviors, but also the deeper orientations through which individuals and societies relate to stress, conflict, and vulnerability.

5. Discussion

The present conceptual synthesis invites a shift in how peace is situated within psychological discourse: from a distant political endpoint to a psychologically active orientation—one that shapes appraisal, regulation, and relational stance under conditions of collective uncertainty. This shift matters because contemporary mental health burdens are increasingly driven not only by individual stressors, but by sustained exposure to macro-level insecurity—war proximity, displacement, and the everyday presence of threat in public narratives. In such contexts, the psychological question becomes less about whether conflict is “present” and more about how persons and communities preserve coherence, meaning, and social bonds when conflict is nearby, chronic, or symbolically omnipresent.

5.1. Peace as an Organizing Psychological Orientation

Conceptually, peace can be understood as an organizing orientation rather than a mere affective state. Psychologically, this framing aligns peace with mechanisms that stabilize the self under uncertainty: reflective awareness, affective integration, and flexible stress appraisal. Philosophically, it resonates with the idea that well-being depends not on the elimination of distress, but on the capacity to hold tension without fragmentation—remaining anchored while the environment remains unstable. In this sense, peace is not equivalent to comfort; it is closer to an internal mode of non-escalation, in which threat is recognized without dominating perception. This is consistent with prevention-oriented mental health models that emphasize protective processes across individual, social, and structural

determinants. World Health Organization explicitly frames mental health promotion and prevention as addressing determinants at multiple levels, which coheres with a transversal understanding of peace as a resource that operates beyond the intrapsychic sphere.

5.2. Indirect War Exposure, Vicarious Stress, and the Psychological “Nearby War”

A second implication concerns the psychological reality of indirect exposure. Even without direct combat involvement, repeated contact with war-related information—through proximity, social networks, or media—can activate vicarious stress responses and anxiety-related symptoms. Recent psychometric work on media-related vicarious traumatization underscores that mediated exposure can be meaningfully related to anxiety and future-oriented worry, particularly among young adults. This supports a psychologically grounded reading of “nearby war” as a condition that recruits attentional systems, threat monitoring, and emotion regulation demands over time.

Importantly, context-specific evidence also suggests that the war in Ukraine has been psychologically consequential for civilians in neighboring regions, including Romania, with mechanisms such as trauma centrality and daily stressors implicated in anxiety experiences. While the present article does not claim empirical generalization, such findings strengthen the plausibility of conceptualizing peace as a protective resource precisely where the boundary between “direct” and “indirect” exposure becomes psychologically porous.

5.3. Transversal Peace and the Moral–Relational Fabric of Communities

At the interpersonal and communal levels, the framework clarifies why peace cannot be reduced to a private feeling. Psychologically, peace-related functioning appears as a relational ethic: recognition, empathy, and non-adversarial engagement that support co-regulation and social support. Philosophically, it expresses a stance toward the Other—an orientation that resists dehumanization, even when fear narratives intensify. Under collective insecurity, such orientations can either consolidate social cohesion or, when eroded, give way to polarization and defensive hostility. Here, “peace” is best treated as a value-in-action: it becomes real through

communication norms, prosocial mobilization, and communal meaning-making, not only through declarations or institutional arrangements.

5.4. Prevention Implications: From Concept to Psychologically Credible Action

A key contribution of this article is to position peace within prevention logic without sliding into slogan-based advocacy. The prevention implication is not that peace is a universal remedy, but that peace-oriented mechanisms—emotion regulation, prosocial responding, cohesion-building—are psychologically tractable targets for intervention. This aligns with public mental health frameworks that emphasize community resilience, cross-cutting psychosocial support, and integration of mental health considerations into broader emergency and public health responses.

In practical terms, this suggests a tiered prevention perspective:

- a. intrapersonal support that strengthens regulation and reduces escalation under uncertainty;
- b. interpersonal approaches that cultivate non-violent communication and relational trust; and
- c. community-level interventions that reinforce cohesion and collective efficacy. Notably, these targets are psychologically grounded and do not require consensus on political narratives to be useful—an important point when polarization itself is part of the mental health risk landscape.

5.5. Limitations and Boundaries of the Present Argument

Several limitations should be stated explicitly. First, the paper advances a conceptual model; it does not test causal pathways. Second, “peace” remains semantically broad, and the risk of conceptual diffusion is real unless future work specifies operational indicators (e.g., peace-oriented appraisal styles, relational norms, or community cohesion markers). Third, contextual illustration (Ukraine war-related stress in neighboring societies) supports plausibility but does not substitute for cross-cultural comparative evidence. These limitations are not defects so much as signposts: they clarify what the framework is meant to do—organize mechanisms, generate hypotheses, and guide prevention thinking—while defining what it cannot claim.

5.6. Directions for Future Research

Future research would benefit from (1) operationalizing peace as a transversal resource with measurable indicators across levels; (2) testing whether peace-oriented mechanisms buffer the relationship between indirect war exposure and anxiety-related outcomes; and (3) examining boundary conditions—when peace orientation is protective versus when it may be undermined by chronic threat, moral injury, or entrenched polarization. Methodologically, mixed designs combining psychometrics, longitudinal assessment, and community-level indicators would be particularly suited to the multi-level nature of the construct.

6. Practical Recommendations

Building on the conceptual insights outlined above, the following recommendations focus on the translation of peace-oriented psychological principles into preventive and practice-relevant contexts. Rather than reiterating theoretical arguments, this section emphasizes how such principles may be operationalized within mental health services and community-based initiatives in societies experiencing sustained uncertainty or indirect exposure to conflict. Preventive efforts should prioritize psychologically feasible targets, such as strengthening adaptive coping under uncertainty, supporting reflective processing, and reducing escalation in emotional and relational responses. These objectives can be addressed through counseling, psychoeducational formats, and low-intensity preventive interventions designed to enhance psychological flexibility without imposing prescriptive emotional norms.

At relational and community levels, applications should concentrate on reinforcing everyday practices that sustain functional social interaction and collective stability. Interventions in group, educational, or organizational settings may incorporate communication strategies that facilitate mutual understanding and reduce adversarial dynamics, particularly in environments marked by heightened tension or polarization. Community-based initiatives that encourage participation, shared responsibility, and coordinated support can contribute to maintaining social continuity and trust, thereby limiting the psychological impact of diffuse insecurity. Such approaches are most effective when framed in inclusive and culturally responsive terms, avoiding moralizing narratives while addressing shared psychosocial needs.

From a public mental health standpoint, these recommendations underscore the value of integrating peace-oriented psychological principles into prevention-focused planning and service design. Emotional regulation capacities, prosocial engagement, and cohesion-supportive practices may be treated as cross-cutting protective elements within broader mental health promotion strategies. Ethical and professional considerations remain central: interventions should be context-sensitive, attentive to diversity, and aligned with established evidence-based standards. Conceived as a complementary psychological resource rather than a comprehensive solution, peace-oriented approaches can support mental health prevention efforts in complex and evolving social environments.

7. Conclusion

This article has advanced a conceptual contribution to contemporary psychological discourse by positioning peace within a transversal framework relevant to mental health prevention and promotion. Without reducing peace to a political condition or moral aspiration, the analysis has demonstrated its analytical value as a psychological resource capable of informing how individuals, relationships, and communities navigate prolonged uncertainty and collective stress. By situating peace within established psychological domains—such as emotional regulation, relational functioning, and collective adaptation—the paper offers a theoretically grounded perspective that extends existing approaches in peace psychology and public mental health.

A central contribution of this work lies in its integrative orientation. By bridging intrapersonal, interpersonal, and community levels of analysis, the article highlights the importance of conceptual tools that cut across traditionally separated domains of psychological inquiry. This transversal perspective responds to current challenges in mental health, where distress is increasingly shaped by diffuse, indirect, and chronic stressors rather than discrete traumatic events. In this context, the conceptualization of peace as a psychologically operative resource provides a coherent lens for understanding protective processes that are not confined to individual pathology but embedded in relational and social systems.

From an academic standpoint, the study contributes to theory development by clarifying the psychological relevance of peace and by delineating its potential role within prevention-oriented frameworks. While the analysis does not claim empirical

validation, it establishes a structured conceptual foundation that may guide future research, including the operationalization of peace-related constructs and the empirical examination of their associations with mental health outcomes. In doing so, it underscores the continued importance of conceptual scholarship in advancing psychologically informed responses to complex societal conditions.

In conclusion, the present article argues for the inclusion of peace as a legitimate and analytically useful construct within psychological research and practice concerned with mental health prevention. By articulating its transversal character and practical relevance, the paper seeks to contribute to an evolving body of work that addresses mental health not only as an individual concern, but as a phenomenon shaped by broader relational and societal contexts.

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