



# Cross-Cultural Counselling Supervision in Ukraine

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## Abstract

Counsellor educators face complex challenges in the advancement of the counselling profession internationally. One way the counselling profession in Ukraine has been developed is through the use of cross-cultural engagement between local supervisees and U.S.-trained international supervisors. This qualitative study examined the phenomenon of the cross-cultural supervisory experiences of twelve participants involved in transnational distance supervision among Ukrainian supervisees, and their U.S.-trained, non-Ukrainian supervisors. Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit participants' descriptions of their supervisory experiences. Participants identified commitment to the supervisory relationship, the importance of felt supervisor support, shared resources to promote counsellor growth, and in-person meetings in the supervisee's context prior to the start of the supervisory relationship as the most important aspects of supervision. The researchers highlight implications and propose recommendations for counsellor educators and supervisors desiring to implement cross-cultural or transnational supervision in different cultural contexts.

**Keywords** Ukraine · Transnational · Cross-cultural supervision · Distance supervision · Qualitative

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## Introduction

Counselling as a profession is growing worldwide, including countries currently in the early stages of capability to provide necessary counsellor education (Hohenshil, 2010). Though there is wide variation in services and training internationally, a common theme in international professional counsellor development is the shortage of counsellor education that adheres to professional counselling standards, including clinical internship supervision (Alvarez & Lee, 2018). Essential to counsellor development, supervision enhances supervisee competence and ensures client welfare through professional monitoring of the services (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). The National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC, 2005a), identified standards for the practice of clinical supervision. Technological advances have enabled distance counsellor education and distance supervision. Thus, in addition to complex ethical dilemmas that apply in all supervision (Schultz et al., 2019), supervisors and supervisees who use distance formats employ specific ethical considerations. NBCC additionally addresses standards and policy for professional services that include supervision occurring within a distance format (2005b). Attention to distance formats as a recognized form of professional service validates the method and delivery format of supervision and acknowledges the increasing globalization of the counselling profession.

Supervision described in this study falls in line with the definition of transnational engagement by Smith and colleagues (2018) as a global professional activity that occurs across several countries versus exclusively within two individual countries. The program of focus uses the term cross-cultural to explain the supervisory relationship between supervisors and supervisees due to the university partnership and program in Ukraine (OpenDoors, 2020) For the purposes of this paper, cross-cultural supervision is defined as supervision that occurs between Ukrainian supervisees enrolled in a psychological counselling education program and a masters- or doctoral- supervisor of any different nationality that received their counsellor education in the United States (U.S.). Cross-cultural and transnational are used interchangeably throughout the article to address supervisory practices.

Independent of technology used, supervision that occurs between individuals from different countries creates inevitable legal, ethical, and cultural complexities that regulate and impact the supervisory relationship (Alvarez & Lee, 2018; Schultz et al., 2019, 2020). These differences affect the quality of the supervisor-supervisee relationship, influence clinical practice and counselling services, as well as impact counsellor identity formation and development. Cultural differences become especially pronounced in a supervisory relationship where supervisors and supervisees are in different countries. It is important, therefore, to better understand cultural dimensions affecting this type of supervision, including cultural discussions, role clarity, and value in the practice of multicultural sensitivity (Lee, 2018). Authors of recent international counselling and multicultural supervision literature acknowledge that more information is needed to understand what constitutes culturally competent international supervision (Ancis & Marshall, 2010;

Hohenshil et al., 2013). To date, there is scant literature on transnational supervisory experiences that explores cross-cultural supervision between individuals in different countries (Baraka et al., 2017; Schultz et al., 2019). This study focuses on the experiences of Ukrainian counsellors-in-training and non-Ukrainian supervisors during cross-cultural, distance clinical supervision.

### **Historical Context: Mental Health Services in Ukraine**

On August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1991 Ukrainian Parliament declared Ukraine an independent state from the Soviet Union (Magocsi, 2007). The collapse of the Soviet Union created considerable anxiety and stress as habitants were plunged into uncertainty as the role of state was reduced and many people fell into poverty with the economic crisis (Footman et al., 2013). Over the next decade, corruption and scandals in Ukraine continued, straining the political, economic, and social structures of the young country (Bromet et al., 2005). Similar to other former Soviet Union countries, in attempt to create more positive responses to psychology and create supports for its citizens, Ukraine's mental health service emerged with a focus on school counselling and educational psychology. Since the mid-90 s, Ukraine has had an educational psychologist in every school in the country (Currie et al., 2013). Universities and colleges increasingly offer training in mental health counselling in addition to traditional scientific psychobiology. Interest in behavior and cognitive modification therapies decreased and new schools that emphasize psychoanalytic, Jungian, transpersonal, Gestalt, humanistic, body-focused, art, and music therapy and others emerged. This movement suggests that such interest in nondirective, insight-oriented counselling methods in Ukraine reflects the societal shift away from what are perceived as therapeutic traditions associated with the Soviet era (Yakushko, 2005).

A small but growing literature has examined the prevailing challenges to mental health care in Ukraine. Ukrainian families carry the psychological burden of enormous intergenerational stress, such as the great famine-genocide of the 1930s and other premature and often violent deaths, disappearances, and incarcerations during the Stalin era, the Nazi occupation, and the period after World War II (Bromet et al., 2005; Havenaar et al., 2016). The Chernobyl nuclear power plant incident in 1986 immensely added to the environmental pollution created by industrial plants. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2017a) indicated that Ukraine's mental health disorders are much higher than other countries. While rates have dropped since the year 2000, according to 2014 WHO data, Ukraine still ranked among the highest twenty-three countries in the world for suicide rates among adults ages 25 and older – 30.3% for males and 5.3% for females. These statistics were published prior to the beginning of the sudden annexation of Crimea and the Russian assault on eastern regions of Ukraine in the spring of 2014; a conflict that continues to date. The resulting turmoil has led to internal displacement within the country, and according to the United Nations (2016), in addition to the thousands of deaths and individuals wounded, close to 2 million residents of Ukraine were forced to flee their homes. In addition to ongoing unrest, the global pandemic and its required societal distancing and ever growing number of persons that tested positive for coronavirus in Ukraine adds to the already present burdens that Ukrainians historically carry, along with recognized and unidentified mental health problems.

## Psychological Counselling Profession and Education in Ukraine

Although rapidly emerging, the psychological counselling profession in Ukraine continues to face a number of profound challenges. The current professional counselling help in Ukraine is extremely limited. In Kyiv, the capital, available psychological treatment is rare, and up until recently services were almost non-existent throughout the rest of the country (Yakushko, 2016; Zaporozhets, 2017). Historically individuals with access to the limited counselling services had to be able to afford high fees because Ukraine, with its history of socialized free medicine, does not have a system of third-party payments for health or mental health (Smith, 2015; Yakushko, 2005). Additionally, there is limited literature regarding the impact and effectiveness of available mental health services in Ukraine.

Educational psychologists recognized by Ukrainian law routinely have internships appropriate for the training they receive, including assessments and often teaching. However, there is no supervised practicum or internship focused on clinical aspects of mental health counselling, as it is not part of the curriculum (Bowen, 2011). The overall psychologist training in Ukraine is more theoretical as clinical skills are often not included in course work. Rather, psychologists are trained appropriately according to Ukrainian law to serve in guidance counsellor-type roles, predominantly practice in schools and address student development and adjustment to their learning environments (Ferlic & Zaporozhets, 2019; Zaporozhets et al., 2015). Therefore, in order to be competent to provide effective therapeutic interventions for clients, psychologists often seek additional training in diagnosis, counselling skills, counselling approaches, and supervised clinical practicum or internship experiences during their psychological studies or after their graduation.

The infrastructure for counsellor education contextualized within a Ukrainian context began through a fully self-funded joint project created by professionals and volunteers at Regent University (Virginia Beach, Virginia) and Ukraine Evangelical Theological Seminary (Kyiv, Ukraine) and initially relied on professionals from other countries to assist in education and supervision (Kreimeyer et al., 2020; Zaporozhets, 2017). The psychological counsellor education program in this study differs from psychology programs in Ukraine as it was patterned after more traditional Western (e.g. U.S., Canada) approaches that teach counselling skills, group counselling skills, and incorporates the first clinically supervised internship where students implement and apply these skills. The psychological counselling program provides counselling students with distance supervision from licensed masters and doctoral-level supervisors trained in the U.S. These supervisors, in turn, receive supervision from licensed, experienced supervisors (Alford et al., 2014). This small, but growing, body of literature still confirms a gap in studies focused on the contextual development of psychological counselling and ongoing supervision in Ukraine.

### Ukraine Counselling Supervision Program

The Ukrainian psychological counselling program at the center of this study began in 2012. The curriculum of the four-year bachelor of psychological counselling

degree is similar to a masters-level counselling program in the U.S. and was recently added to the International Registry of Counsellor Education Programs registry (IRCEP, 2020). Ukrainian students enrolled in the program must complete 180 credit hours of course work, comprised of 22 credit hours of general studies such as research, statistics, and sociology; 66 credit hours of Biblical study, theology, and practical ministry courses; 72 credit hours of core counselling (e.g. skills, group, psychopathology, assessment, addictions, etc.); and 16 credit hours of practicum/internship, including 300-clock clinical hours with a minimum of 120 h of direct client contact.

Students participate in a combination of residential, module, and synchronous online courses each semester. A two-week residency occurs yearly in Ukraine, where U.S.-trained, doctoral-level counsellor educators contribute to instruction, while U.S.-masters-level counselling students meet with Ukrainian students for in-person instruction and collaborative learning in courses such as skills, theories, and group counselling. Additionally, residency focus is on relationship-building to establish connection prior to the start of the year-long online supervision for practicum/internship provided by U.S.-trained masters- or doctoral-level supervisors. Supervision starts with developing a learning contract between the supervisor and supervisee and includes practicum/internship expectations (including hours, client emergency reporting procedures, supervision description, objectives, etc.) and identified and agreed-upon supervisee learning goals. Learning contracts are reviewed at the half-way point in the year and are revised accordingly.

Ongoing supervision during the academic year includes self-report case discussion, case presentations, and video or audio recording reviews. Supervisees transcribe their recorded counselling sessions and review them during supervision with the assistance of a language interpreter. Supervisors conduct initial, mid-term, and final evaluations of the supervisees in areas of counselling skills, counsellor dispositions (such as motivation and openness to feedback), and professional behaviors (attendance, treatment planning). Students review the evaluations with supervisors and use the feedback to develop learning contracts with agreed-upon goals for the next year of clinical supervision. Remaining core counselling courses in the program occur through synchronous and asynchronous online classes taught by U.S.-trained Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian counsellor educators and doctoral students. Course instruction and supervision occurs in Ukrainian or sometimes the Russian language, through the use of an interpreter. All texts are in Ukrainian and submitted coursework and grading is done through the students' primary language. Additionally, supervision contracts, client informed consent, clinical session notes and treatment plans, as well as other internship documentation are managed in both languages.

The psychological counselling profession in Ukraine has made significant advancements in the last decade (Kreimeyer et al., 2020; Yakushko, 2005; Zaporozhets, 2017). Recent legislative initiatives in Ukraine have sought to define psychological counsellor and psychologist identities and address training in a collaborative format between Christian and secular Ukrainian institutes. Trained professional counsellor educators in Ukraine continue to advocate for the recognition of the profession, and discussions with governmental personnel are ongoing (O. Zaporozhets, personal communication, Sept. 25, 2020). Further exploration of and collaboration in creating ethical guidelines,

standards, and professional regulations specifically relevant to Ukraine will assist to develop a literature base on psychological counsellor identity development and the continued growth of psychological counselling as a profession in Ukraine (Alford et al., 2014).

This qualitative study is a response to the lack of research in the professional literature on supervisory experiences between individuals in different countries. The purpose of this study was to explore the transnational supervision experiences of Ukrainian counselling students and non-Ukrainian, U.S.-trained supervisors. Desired outcomes of this study were to develop guidelines for the continued success of the program under study and provide recommendations for leaders seeking to develop similar counselling supervision programs internationally.

## Methods

### Research Design

This study represents part of a dissertation project on cross-cultural experiences of Ukrainian counseling students and their non-Ukrainian supervisors (Baraka et al., 2017). We crafted a phenomenological research study design using semi-structured interviews that allowed for a starting point and guide for data collection (Hays & Singh, 2012). Worthen and McNeill (1996) provided a foundational pattern of using phenomenology, a study approach that emphasizes a focus on understanding how the world appears to participants, in supervision research. We defined the phenomenon under study as transnational supervision experiences of Ukrainian supervisee and non-Ukrainian supervisor perspectives. As the manner in which one experiences supervision is a question of personal meaning, we believed that phenomenological method was well suited for this type of inquiry.

### Participants and Procedures

Participants were Ukrainian counselling students that received supervision from U.S.-trained supervisors in a cross-cultural supervision project started in 2012. Researchers used purposeful sampling to recruit participants and extended invitations through the program director's student and supervisor roster. Everyone who met the following criteria was invited: engaged in at least a year of one-and-a-half hours of distance-supervision via a secure video conferencing platform and met weekly for approximately eleven months in the calendar year. All Ukrainian counselling students had supervision via language interpretation at some point, as most of the supervisors were not Ukrainian or Russian speakers, and thus, supervisors and supervisees relied on an interpreter for communication between them.

Prior to the study, all eligible individuals received an invitation letter describing the study and expectations, a summary of both benefits and risks of participation, the IRB-approved informed consent, and a brief demographic questionnaire. To ensure accurate communication, all materials were originally written in English

**Table 1** Participant Demographics

Role	Gender/Age Range	Education Level	Place of Residence	Language(s)
Supervisee	Female; 30s	Masters	Ukraine; rural	Russian
Supervisee	Female; 30s	Bachelors	Ukraine; city	Ukrainian/Russian
Supervisee	Female; 30s	Bachelors	Ukraine; rural	Russian
Supervisee	Female; 30s	Bachelors	Ukraine; rural	Russian
Supervisee	Female; 40s	Masters	Ukraine rural	Ukrainian
Supervisee	Male; 40s	Masters	Ukraine; rural	Russian/Ukrainian
Supervisor	Male; 30s	Doctoral	United States	English
Supervisor	Female; 30s	Doctoral	Asia	English
Supervisor	Female; 40s	Masters	United States	English
Supervisor	Female; 30s	Doctoral	Europe	Russian/English
Supervisor	Female; 40s	Doctoral	Europe	English
Supervisor	Female; 20s	Masters	United States	English

and translated into both Ukrainian and Russian, the two primary languages spoken by Ukrainian counselling student participants. Thirteen invitations were sent, and twelve ( $n = 12$ ) individuals agreed to participate in the study, representing 6 supervisees and 6 supervisors. Please see Table 1 for participant demographics.

### Data Collection

We constructed an interview protocol based on research questions that pertained to participants' experience of supervision. Sample research questions are presented in Appendix A. Professional peers familiar with qualitative research and transnational supervision reviewed questions and provided recommendations. After review, we grouped the selected research questions into two sets based on participant's status of supervisor or supervisee and focused on four key areas: (a) observed cultural differences in supervision; (b) perceived cultural differences, (c) perceptions of counsellor identity development, and (d) interactions in supervision.

The primary researcher conducted semi-structured interviews lasting between 60–90 min with each participant. See Appendix B for sample interview questions. All interviews were held in English and one professional interpreter translated interviews with Ukrainian supervisees. The interpreter's language proficiency, familiarity with the program, and knowledge of technical language used in supervision made the interpreter an appropriate choice for this role. Researchers utilized a concurrent videoconferencing software, VSee, a non-web-based secure online communication software program with increased safety parameters such as required login with password and encryption during conference transmission (VSee, 2017). The primary researcher transcribed the audio recorded interviews into a typed document. Researchers removed any identifying participant data and stored the files in a double password protected folder on the primary researcher's computer.

Prior to analysis, two professional interpreters familiar with the phenomena, study terms, and able to communicate effectively in Ukrainian, Russian, and English

reviewed de-identified transcripts and audio recording excerpts. These language checks were to ensure accurate, clear, and natural translation, in line with recommended translation standards (Barnwell, 1986; MacLean et al., 2004). To ensure dependable translation of participants' descriptions of their experiences, an independent masters-level, bilingual counsellor in the U.S. back-translated portions of the transcripts and provided a final review of two separate interview transcript sections per translation guidelines (Barnwell, 1986; WHO, 2017b). No further checks were conducted, as the back-translation process deemed the translation accurate. The primary researcher sent transcripts and initial findings to participants for review and incorporated participant feedback and edits into each transcript.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness refers to accurate reflection of participants' voices and perspectives (Given, 2008). In this study, trustworthiness attributes included credibility, translation accuracy, confirmability, transferability, and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In an effort to secure trustworthiness, the primary researcher utilized consensus coding, member checking, and external auditing for translation checking and thematic review. Research reflexivity includes the process of researcher self-examination and potential influence on the research process (Creswell, 2013). In an effort to control for bias and undue influence, the primary researcher identified her a priori assumptions about what she expected to discover in the data collection process. The primary researcher is a U.S.-born, White female, fully licensed counsellor who participated as a supervisor in the Ukraine project but not as a supervisor for any participant. Her a priori assumption was that supervision experiences were overall positive and that participants would convey the supervisory relationship as the primary reason supervision worked. Additionally, the primary researcher implemented ongoing bracketing of her pre-existing expectations, beliefs, and potential bias and used reflexive journaling throughout the research process.

### **Data Analysis**

The primary researcher initially transcribed each interview into a Word document. Following translation checks, the primary researcher conducted content analysis and coded each updated transcript through an inductive approach. The researcher identified repeated phrases and patterns in each transcript and coded them using a highlighting process. Coding included horizontalization, which involved noting significant meaning units (e.g. words, phrases) across transcripts and holding them with equal importance (Creswell, 2013). Next, the researcher categorized meaning units related to the phenomena and identified themes from the data related to the guiding research questions.

To ensure fidelity in coding, we followed Creswell's (2013) recommendation to use at least two of the following strategies to determine accuracy and credibility of participants' experience: bracketing, prolonged engagement, rich, thick descriptions,



reflexive journaling, member checking, and independent auditors. We enlisted two outside independent auditors with doctoral degrees in the counselling field, trained in phenomenological research, and familiar with the study phenomena to examine initial codes and relevant themes. Additionally, auditors and the second researcher reviewed efforts to control bias and validate the integrity of the identified themes. The first two researchers met regularly throughout the process and again after coding the entire set of interview transcripts. We discussed the findings to ensure that each code had sufficient support based on textural descriptions (Hays & Singh, 2012). The primary researcher engaged in reflexive journaling, examined and reexamined the emerging themes, and we engaged in dialogue until an agreement was reached.

## Results

From analysis of the 12 participant interviews, researchers identified five themes from the data regarding supervisory interactions in transnational, distance supervision among Ukrainian counselling students and their U.S.-trained supervisors: (a) sense of teamwork and commitment to the supervisory relationship, (b) supervisor behaviors helped foster feelings of support among supervisees, (c) supervisor resource sharing promoted supervisee growth, (d) case conceptualization use increased collaborative learning, and (e) in-person meetings prior to starting distance supervision was viewed as beneficial to the supervisory relationship. Quotes presented in this article were transcribed from participants' actual speech.

### Sense of Teamwork and Commitment to the Supervisory Relationship

All supervisors ( $N=6$ ) and half of the supervisees ( $N=3$ ) reported program commitment as a positive element that contributed to the overall quality of the supervisory relationship. Participants indicated that this commitment helped bring supervisor, supervisee, and language interpreter together as a team working towards shared goals. One supervisee expressed appreciation towards the level of interaction and support provided by her supervisor and described supervision as a “team-based, team-oriented approach. We were all one great team; the supervisor, interpreter, and supervisees... we were really motivated, and the teamwork made me more open and more eager to learn and grow.”

Supervisors shared personal and professional reasons for their commitment and perceived these to be positive contributors to the supervisory relationship. One supervisor expressed the weight of the responsibility to help develop competent counsellors in Ukraine. Additionally, supervisors observed supervisees as eager to learn and put their counselling skills to practice. One supervisor emphasized the commitment to the growth of the counselling profession in Ukraine as motivation and noted the commitment must be intentional. The supervisor expressed,

there is an understanding that we provide supervision to teach, but also so counsellors will learn how to supervise. It will be important for us to eventu-

ally leave and allow Ukrainian counselling professionals to develop something stronger than when we started working here.

The commitment expressed by supervisors and supervisees created a foundation for the remainder of the themes to be observed within the supervisory relationship.

### **Supervisor Behaviors Help Foster Feelings of Support Among Supervisees**

All supervisees ( $N=6$ ) expressed that they felt supported by their supervisors throughout supervision. Supervisee participants identified behaviors such as providing reassurance, stability, availability, and boundary modeling during the early stages of supervision as supportive. One participant provided a short metaphor, noting that supervision helped her “feel the ground beneath my feet. I felt like I can stand on my feet. Supervision is ninety percent of my success as a counsellor.” Additionally, half of the supervisee participants ( $N=3$ ) identified supervisor behaviors such as encouragement, empowerment, and trust in the supervisee as helpful to foster openness and trust within the relationship. One participant described the intersection of supports, pointing out, “all of my supervisors had definite boundaries. From the beginning, we understood that supervisors were supportive, but were not friends or babysitters, but a guide, someone guiding you.” While supervisee participants described their supervisor’s support in different ways, all affirmed interactions in supervision as helpful to their development.

Supervisors reported intentionality to support supervisees personally, allowing time before clinical discussion to check in with the supervisee, through modeling curiosity, and highlighting supervisee strengths during supervision. One supervisor shared an approach to discussing a client’s case with her supervisees and noted, “I had two [supervisees] that would bring up some ways they were stuck. I would reference and kind of back up and look at the supervisee’s process and ask the question, what do they know?” The supervisor continued to explain that she would directly ask the supervisee “how did you know to do that?” After a supervisee would describe a decision, the supervisor tried to raise awareness of the actions the supervisee was taking, allowing it to be a space to help the supervisee grow to trust their own clinical instincts.

### **Supervisor Resource Sharing Promoted Supervisee Growth**

Five of the six Ukrainian supervisees expressed appreciation for resources supervisors shared. Nearly all supervisees identified at least one website, book, article on helpful topics such as: trauma, counselling military individuals or family members, diagnosis, and substance abuse. Supervisees also shared document templates (e.g. intake, treatment plan, observation checklist). One participant shared that supervisors were active in sharing resources and “if they did not know something, they would promise to find it in the literature or somewhere and would always provide me with books or links.” In a country where professional counselling resources

are not easily accessible, one supervisee spoke of the overall influence of sharing resources in the program and stated, “all supervisors got their education where counselling is well established: techniques, theoretical approaches. Having supervisors come in and practice skills with us, and sharing resources was very helpful and an investment in our practice.” Participants suggested that an important contribution in transnational supervision is supervisors sharing culturally relevant and applicable resources including articles, assessment tools, and interventions that allowed counsellors to adapt and use in their own contexts.

### **Case Conceptualization Use Increased Collaborative Learning**

Nearly all participants, supervisors and supervisees, identified case conceptualization as a useful element in supervision to promote counsellor growth and increase learning. Interestingly, a few supervisees and supervisors discussed the supervisor’s style of discussing cases as different from initial expectations; that the supervisor was an expert and would provide direct answers to all questions the supervisee brought to the session. Supervisor participants expressed awareness of supervisee initial expectations of direct answers and Due to the traditional education format in Ukraine outside of this program, supervisees may not have been used to sharing thoughts or observations with persons in authority, such as supervisors (Yakushko, 2005). Supervisees and supervisors both indicated that the start of supervision there was tension regarding the function of supervision. One supervisor explained, “at the beginning my supervisee basically said, “I come with my questions and you as the expert tell me the answers. Don’t help me figure it out. Okay?” Another supervisor confirmed a similar initial expectation from their supervisee and noted that case conceptualization – the practice of dialogue about the supervisee’s client and their work together – provide supervisees the opportunity to identify the skills they used with the client, the views on the client’s problem, and the therapeutic direction.

One supervisor described case conceptualization as a way to model and engage in personal and reflective supervisory interactions. The supervisor noted case conceptualization allowed more culturally relevant information to emerge about the client and the supervisee’s world view and space to draw from the supervisee’s strengths as they discussed clinical work. Another supervisor reported how relationships changed from initial sessions where the supervisee anticipated the supervisor would give answers as described earlier, but over time appeared more comfortable in using supervision as a way to work through their questions with the supervisor. Several supervisors described person-focused dialogue (e.g. inquiry about the supervisee’s week, family, important life events) prior to the start of clinical case discussion provided supervisees opportunity to adjust expectations about the role of and interactions with their supervisors. Supervisors noted they were intentional to take time initially to attempt to convey supervision as a non-punitive relationship. Nearly all participants described the supervisory relationship growing into more than a session of supervisee question-asking and supervisor answer-giving. Participants shared that supervision required the supervisee to process through gentle challenge and explanation of approaches used with their clients.

## **In-Person Meetings Prior to Distance Supervision Benefit the Supervisory Relationship**

More than half of the participants identified the importance of meeting in person prior to starting distance supervision. Supervisors and supervisees typically travel to Kyiv for two weeks of classes during the same time each year, and at the end of the course work, most supervisory relationships are announced. During this time together, the supervisory triads (supervisors, supervisees, and interpreters) meet and discuss together the upcoming year of supervision. Little clinical work happens during in-person meetings. Most of the in-person meetings include conversations about scheduling and time zones, contact information, and logistics to set up ongoing supervision meetings and beginning introduction.

Supervisee and supervisor feedback regarding this time was generally positive, as it is the only time an in-person meeting occurs and participants in this study confirm the meeting's importance. One supervisor described the in-person interaction as "crucial" to establishing the distance supervisory relationship. The participant expressed that the in-person interactions provided the foundation for the ongoing distance work, noting that shared meals and conversations over coffee and tea provided valuable opportunities for connection. Another supervisor shared, "the in-person meetings are important because there is only so much we can get through online communication." The participant observed further that supervisees "can't see our whole-body language" and while language differences still require interpreting, the in-person meeting can give both the supervisee and interpreter a sense of the supervisor's personality and mannerisms and vice-versa. Although all supervisors considered distance supervision a unique and effective supervisory experience, they believed that meeting supervisee and interpreter in-person helped to create a foundation for supervision conducted via an online meeting platform.

## **Discussion**

In this study, we sought to explore Ukrainian psychological counselling student supervisee and non-Ukrainian supervisor experiences in transnational supervision. Additionally, we wanted to understand elements that contribute to effective cross-cultural supervisory relationships and counsellor identity development in Ukraine. The themes of commitment to the supervisory relationship, the importance of felt supervisor support, shared resources that promote counsellor growth, case conceptualization use as a platform for dialogue, and the importance of in-person meeting prior to online supervision can be a blueprint to facilitate training for transnational supervision. Study findings are consistent with Cicco's (2014) work that outlined factors to help form strong supervisory relationships within the online classroom environment, including trust in the process, respect for supervisors' and colleagues' evaluations, engagement in self-reflection, and openness to constructive feedback.

Transnational supervision, as described in this study, differs from supervision in settings where counselling is already established as a profession. International work to develop the counselling profession in new contexts takes time and is not

for the faint of heart. Transnational supervision brings challenges and opportunities to supervisees and supervisors ranging from technological issues to ethical dilemmas and cultural perceptions (Schultz et al., 2019). A sense of teamwork and commitment to the supervisory relationship including supervisor, supervisee, and interpreter contributed greatly to Ukrainian counsellors-in-training's motivation and perseverance during their supervised clinical work. Findings are in line with Hanks and Hill's (2015) study on the use of language interpretation in the counselling and supervision process. Their study emphasized and validated the interpreter's role to facilitate the relationship and ensure the supervisor understands cultural and communication nuances. Thus, supervisor commitment and a sense of teamwork among the supervisory triad (supervisor, supervisee, and interpreter) help assist supervisees in professional development by providing motivation to continue to pursue professional growth when few mentors exist in their local context (Hanks & Hill, 2015).

Participants indicated that support demonstrated by their supervisors was rewarding and validating in line with Lee's (2018) research that a positive supervisory relationship will make a transformative impact on a supervisee's professional growth. Although this study did not focus primarily on the relationship between supervisor and supervisee, participants described the importance of trust in the supervision process. Trust in the supervision process, particularly in a distance format, can be built through frequent and consistent communication, regularly scheduled and structured sessions, early descriptions of the purpose of supervision, and the roles and responsibilities of each member of the supervisory triad. Supervisees in this study described feelings of acceptance, support, respect, and encouragement and a shared sense of teamwork among all three triad members.

Supervisors in international counsellor training programs can intentionally focus on the supervisory relationship through activity, such as email communication, sharing resources with supervisees outside of the scheduled supervision time. When translation is necessary for email communication, supervisors and supervisees should use translation programs, such as Google Translate or Bing, in written communication. Supervisors and supervisees should be reminded to use clear and concise, simple language in all email communication, as machine translation assistance often leaves the recipient to fully decipher the message.

Sangganjanavanich and Black (2009) discovered in a study on international counsellors-in-training in the U.S. that honest, healthy, and useful relationships were a necessary part of the counsellor training process. Participant responses in this study align with Sangganjanavanich and Black's findings and other previous research that a collaborative and productive supervisory relationship encompasses warmth, acceptance, flexibility, open-mindedness, unconditional acceptance, providing constructive feedback, and trust, and serves as a critical component to enhance the supervisor's professional counsellor identity development. Thus, supervisors working in international counsellor training programs providing transnational supervision should seek to convey acceptance, support, respect, and encouragement in a manner received by their supervisees while working to develop clinical skills. This may mean that supervisors approach supervision with more intentionality to provide rationale behind questions they ask or give insight into the interventions used in supervision. While supervisees in transnational supervision may be initially reluctant to a non-directive

approach, findings from this study indicate that supervisees can grow to practice and appreciate the learned skill.

Participants identified tangible ways the supervisor fostered the relationship through shared resources that promoted counsellor growth, in line with the Discrimination Model of Supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). In any setting, supervisors are more informed of, and connected to resources than their supervisees. However, what makes transnational supervision unique is that supervisors can, and should, provide supervisees access to resources, such as shared websites, articles, documents, videos, outside of the supervisee's local context. Often supervisors have resources in their primary language, and collaboration between supervisee and supervisor can create space for supervisees to adapt resources to their context or decide to cultivate something entirely different. Supervisors in international programs should attempt to seek resources in the supervisee's primary languages and look for non-copyrighted translated resources to share. This modeling of resource gathering can assist supervisees to take and apply the skill for themselves in the future.

In practical terms, participant responses indicate that an in-person meeting prior to supervision is a vital component of establishing effective transnational supervisory relationships. Supervision in a distance format that requires language interpretation, as in the case of participants in this study, does not have the benefit of building the supervisory relationship in a shared language. While language differences can lead supervisees to feel isolated and forgotten if communication is not consistent, or if the interpreter does not show up, supervisors traveling to meet initially in-person with supervisees in their home contexts can provide connection that can carry the relationship when communication is difficult. Since most of the supervision occurred in distance format throughout the year, it is possible that participants did not consider this in-person meeting part of the supervisory process. However, participants who did note its significance raised key points as supervisors were better able to picture their supervisee's clients' contexts and cultural milieu including social, familial, structural, socioeconomic, and political struggles.

## **Implications and Recommendations for Counsellor Educators and Supervisors**

Findings from this study indicate unique considerations for supervision when supervisor and supervisee are in or from different countries, cultural milieu, or do not speak a shared language. One of the more difficult considerations when seeking to create a supervision program in a country where the counselling profession is non-existent or in its early stages, is choosing the path to take towards program development. We suggest the following recommendations for counsellor educators and supervisors considering or already conducting transnational supervision.

Potential supervisors in transnational supervision settings or programs should be screened to gauge commitment to the project, their multicultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, flexibility, and teachability; all requirements of working in a cross-cultural program with multiple moving pieces. Supervisors that desire to participate in

transnational supervision that contributes to profession development must be aware that the pioneering work involved in the work takes time. Additionally, it is important that all members of the supervisory relationship; supervisor, supervisee, and interpreter show up on-line for supervision, provide ample time to convey when supervision must be cancelled, and take responsibility from all sides to build and maintain an effective working supervisory relationship. As Hanks and Hill (2015) indicated, using an interpreter for supervision as a third member has implications on the supervisory relationship.

In the early stages, supervisors that seek to collaborate with professionals from outside countries or utilize resources from another country, or countries, should strive to cultivate felt support by the supervisor by engaging the supervisee in cultural exploration and how it impacts the counseling relationship. Lee (2018) identified cultural identity discussion as important to establish a beneficial working supervisory relationship. Practical steps to get supervision off to a good start could include supervisor and supervisee training on how to work through language differences, even if English is the supervisory medium. Supervisors should be culturally sensitive; mindful of the role of authority in the supervisee's context and consider how it may carry into the supervisory relationship (Hanks & Hill, 2015). The supervisor's responsibility is to seek to foster a culturally responsive and reflective relationship that can help supervisor identify supervisee expectation or potential confusion or frustration during the early stages of supervision when the supervisor's interventions or interactions might not align with the supervisee's cultural expectations.

A method of supervision in transnational supervision that contains and implements a developmental approach and awareness of common cultural norms and practices into the supervisory relationship can also convey support, in line with what Schultz and colleagues (2019) identified in their study on navigating ethical dilemmas in transnational supervision. As participants in this study reflected, a supervisor approach of curiosity rather than direct answer-giving can assist in the navigation of differing cultural constructs. A culturally respectful, curious supervisor posture can create space for collaborative case conceptualization with a supervisee. There is a delicate acknowledgement that supervision in community-oriented societies must be collaborative. It is important for supervisors in community-oriented cultures, such as Ukraine, more accustomed to strong leadership and central authority, to initially include more directive (e.g. providing brief psychoeducation, or presenting an agenda for the time together) than non-directive (e.g. unstructured sessions, Socratic questioning, reflection) techniques in supervision, as they may prove to be more culturally congruent and contribute to creating a safe space. This does not mean supervisors should avoid non-directive techniques, but per findings in this study, supervisors could wisely anticipate supervisee resistance with more non-directive approaches, at least in the beginning stages. Additionally, psychoeducational approaches in supervision and counselling instruction may be more beneficial in community-oriented societies, in contrast to normalizing individual counselling as the primary form of treatment common to more individualistic societies. Using psychoeducational approaches, supervisors can offer helpful information without requiring significant supervisee self-disclosure.

As supervisors seek to establish a strong working relationship with supervisees, travel to the supervisee's context greatly benefits the supervisory relationship. Supervisors able to meet in-person with their supervisee in their own context can communicate more comfortably through an interpreter, observe cultural milieu and the socioeconomic environment, and learn about available clinical resources prior to the start of supervision. Though supervisors in transnational supervision will never be cultural insiders, visits to the supervisee's learning headquarters, counselling environment, and learning about the cultural milieu of their supervisee's context is essential, best done through an on-site visit. During this visit, supervisors should receive training from local professionals that includes the determined ethics codes that will guide the supervisor and supervisee, common ethical dilemmas (Schultz et al., 2019), emergency procedures and legal expectations, and historical and cultural elements including recent natural disasters, traumatic events, and existing systems and structures of oppression and that may impact supervision. Supervision essentially is a continuation of an initial relational connection carried into an online meeting format. Transnational supervision in a program like the one in this study would likely be less effective without an in-person meeting between supervisors and supervisees.

Ultimately, professionals leading any counsellor education program in a country where counselling is not yet recognized as a profession must work towards an entirely local program. Professional identity formation may be a challenging and unclear process in the early stages and require research into already-established local helping roles and professions, psychology and health-related education pathways that may correspond with the counselling curriculum, and legal parameters that define the scope of practice. However, the goal of a counsellor education program in new contexts should not be to export Western counselling or U.S. counselling frameworks into another country. Thus, it is important to establish a counsellor education and transnational supervision program in a way that the number of initial outside supports, such as supervisors or instructors, decrease over time as local professionals step into the roles of teacher and supervisor. In addition to oversight of counselling work, supervisors can assist in this task by sharing and discussing counsellor resources in a way that allows supervisees to recognize how to adapt and develop local, indigenous materials that are anchored to the specific culture and its citizens' needs. If the goal of international counsellor education programs is to develop local counsellors, it is pertinent that the knowledge and skills are passed on so that a local and unique identity emerges from within the context and is passed on to future counsellors.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

Despite efforts to optimize the research design, the study does have limitations. We recognize the sample size is small. The study included nearly all participants that met criteria and we deemed the content saturated when thematic repetition was achieved within the participant pool (Bowen, 2008). Although we determined additional participants or interviews would not lead to further information, the sampling



process speaks to the fact that there are minimal persons familiar with the phenomena. Whereas it is consistent with phenomenological research, and findings are generalizable to transnational supervision in Ukraine, this research lacks generalizability as the study is not necessarily representative of supervision experiences in other countries. While the study results can inform, results should be considered and implemented with caution. Although we used member checks to further enhance credibility (Creswell, 2013), few participants provided feedback on the transcripts and identified themes. Thus, components of participants' experiences might still be missing. A substantial literature review on Ukrainian research might provide additional insights as to the cultural milieu and counselling education efforts in the country that this research did not explore. Finally, given the limitations of working through cultural differences and the intricacies of working with a language interpreter as a means of communication, further research conducted in participants' primary language might highlight other salient issues.

Future research could address the effective training modalities for international counsellor education and supervision and include qualitative and quantitative research. Another investigation on this program could develop an indigenous model of supervision in Ukraine based on the experiences of participants and cultural elements described in this study through grounded theory research. In addition, research to develop more culturally sensitive approaches to supervision within more community-oriented societies would greatly contribute to the international supervision literature.

## Conclusion

In this qualitative study, we explored the experiences of twelve participants in transnational distance supervision. Ukrainian counselling student supervisees and non-Ukrainian supervisors identified a sense of teamwork and commitment to the supervisory relationship as a necessary part of the counsellor development process. Supervisors in transnational supervision settings need to ensure a quality of supervision that includes the supervisee felt supported in culturally sensitive and adaptive ways. Supervisors in transnational supervisory relationships can practically show support and foster counsellor growth through shared resources. Using client case conceptualization as a format for identifying client cultural considerations and practice can increase cultural insights and promote supervisee confidence. Importantly, meeting in-person prior to starting a supervisory relationship is a necessary part of counsellor development as distance supervision essentially continues the relationship into an online meeting format.

## Appendix 1: Sample Research Questions

1. How do Ukrainian supervisees perceive cultural differences between them and their non-Ukrainian supervisors?

2. How do non-Ukrainian supervisors perceive differences between Ukrainian and U.S.-based counseling services?
3. What do Ukrainian supervisees of non-Ukrainian supervisors perceive to have been useful in their interactions with their supervisors?
4. What do Ukrainian supervisees of non-Ukrainian supervisors perceive to be problematic in their interactions with their supervisors?

## Appendix 2: Sample Interview Questions for Supervisees

- What is your experience of cross-cultural supervision? Please describe it as fully as you can.
- Did any challenges arise regarding clinical practice differences? Were those challenges addressed? How? Were they resolved?
- What was the most difficult for you in this supervision program?
- What was especially useful in your interactions with your supervisor(s)?
- What areas could be improved? How would you improve things?
- Is there anything else that you feel would be important for me to know in addition to what you have already shared?

### Declarations

**Conflict of Interest** The authors declared that they have no conflict of interest.

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