

Division 19 – Ukraine Collaboration Initiative

Bruce Crow



This article provides a brief overview of the Division 19 - Ukraine Collaboration Initiative I am leading and involves several Division 19 members.

In February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine, escalating the static war in the eastern area of Ukraine initiated by Russia in 2014. Soon after the full-scale invasion, the National Psychological Association of Ukraine reached out to the APA Office of International Affairs (OIA) for help preparing to respond to the sudden, dramatic, and uncertain impacts of the new efforts by Russia to subjugate Ukraine through military force. In turn, the OIA contacted Division 19 requesting help in providing relevant resources. Within days, Division 19 members coordinated with subject matter experts to compile resource materials addressing psychological impacts of war, and provided consultation to help Ukrainian colleagues respond to the turmoil and disruption sweeping through the Ukrainian population. This work, in conjunction with the Center for Deployment Psychology (CDP), are reflected on the CDP webpage “Resources for Providers in Times of War” at <https://deploymentpsych.org/resources-for-providers-in-wartime>. These efforts were recognized with an APA Presidential Citation for the quick and thoughtful efforts of Division 19 members. In the following months, other Division 19 members engaged with Ukrainian counterparts to help coordinate webinars and conduct training on various topics related to war trauma.



Lt. Oleh Hukovskyy – Division 19 guest at APA 2023

In 2023, Division 19 committed to build on these initial actions and develop sustained collaboration to support Ukrainian military and civilian psychologists. At the 2023 APA convention in Washington, DC, Division 19 sponsored Lt. (Dr.) Oleh Hukovskyy, a Ukrainian military psychologist, to attend and share his experiences as a combat brigade psychologist with the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU).

During the convention, Division 19 facilitated several meetings between Lt. Hukovskyy and APA

leaders, and developed a general collaboration plan focused on translating professional materials, planning training and information sharing events, and consulting on military psychology matters. After the 2023 APA convention, a team of Division 19 members began meeting with Ukrainian military and civilian colleagues to further plan collaboration actions. In October 2023 I traveled to Kyiv, Ukraine for a one-week consultation visit in my role at that time as Division 19 president. That visit involved a series of invited lectures on military psychology topics and consultation meetings with Ukrainian mental health leaders and military leaders.



Invited lectures & consultation – Kyiv, Ukraine Oct 2023

Much of the consultation with military officials concerned U.S. and NATO approaches to battlefield psychological support and possible options to adapt Combat and Operational Stress Control doctrine to the Ukrainian military.

Following this visit, Division 19 members and Ukrainian counterparts continued meeting on a weekly basis to review more details of COSC doctrine and practices, and review U.S. military approaches for developing resilience. Also, during these meetings Division 19 members were learning about Ukraine’s capacity, structure, and manner of delivering mental health services. The Ukraine mental health system has several notable differences compared to European and U.S. health care systems. For example, there are relatively few doctoral level psychologists, and the majority of mental health providers hold a master’s degree. There is no psychology license, certification, or registration required by the government to provide clinical services and some clinical services such as formal diagnosing are only allowed by law to be performed by a psychiatrist. Many of the psychological stressors impacting the Ukrainian population are related to the war with Rus-



Mural art – TBI & PTSD rehab facility, Kyiv Ukraine

sia. There is an ever-present danger of Russian missile or drone strikes throughout the country and frequent air raid sirens that disrupt daily living. Electricity outages are common and at times there may only be about two hours of electricity per day for several days at a time. Ukraine is geographically about the size of Texas with a population of over 40 million prior to the full-scale invasion. Since February 2022, over five million Ukrainians have been displaced

within Ukraine as Internally Displaced Persons and another several million left Ukraine with many remaining externally displaced - mostly in Europe and the UK. These large-scale impacts on the population create a blurred distinction between military combat experience and experience of war by civilians. In contrast, although the U.S. military has been involved in combat operations for 46 of the nearly 80 years since the end of WWII, all operations have occurred outside the U.S. and the U.S. civilian population has not been confronted with direct experience of war. These factors present enormous challenges for psychologists and mental health providers to respond to those affected by war while sharing the experience of war at the same time. In early 2024, Division 19 facilitated mil-to-mil contact between the U.S. Army's 254th COSC detachment in Germany, and AFU military psychologists. These formal connections through the EUCOM Security Assistance Group-Ukraine (SAG-U) enhanced ongoing support that also included Norwegian and other NATO support actions to develop psychological readiness programs for the AFU.

In the April timeframe, the collaboration focus expanded to support broader efforts of our Ukrainian colleagues to address system-level solutions such as large-scale training in evidence-based treatments and exploring options to develop a national center for PTSD modeled after the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' NCPTSD. To support this expanded focus, I conducted a second consultation visit in June, traveling to Lviv, Kyiv, and Kharkiv - again providing lectures, conducting site visits, and meeting with civilian mental health leaders and government Deputy Ministers. The visit to Kharkiv, a mere 30 km (18 mi) from the border with Russia, included travel into the military restricted area under escort by Lt. Hukovskyy. This included a closer view of the small city of Iziium, the scene of heavy shelling and battle damage by the Russians before Ukraine successfully repelled the invaders and liberated the area.



Iziium, Ukraine – June 2024

The June visit was very helpful to gain better insight into Ukraine's mental health system and ongoing efforts to reform mental health care delivery that had already begun before Russia's full-scale invasion. Although Ukraine gained independence in 1991 following collapse of the Soviet Union, there is a strong societal stigma toward mental health and mental health providers who were often viewed as agents of the state in Soviet times. This dynamic has colored efforts to reach out to a population traumatized by war but which harbors strong mistrust for those seeking to provide psychological support.



Unexpectedly, a briefing to the Deputy Minister of Defense during the visit about the Division 19-Ukraine collaboration resulted in a request to return in July to participate in the First International Congress on Military Medical Care and Mental Health sponsored by the MOD. This led to the third consultation visit in late July in order to provide a lecture and participate a day long planning meeting to improve

psychological support for the Ukrainian military. Also during the July visit, was a chance to visit again the Military Institute at the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv that included meeting with the military psychology faculty. This was the second time meeting with leaders at the Military Institute which has the mission to train AFU military psychologists. The role of military psychologists is very different than that of U.S. counterparts since Ukrainian military psychologists typically do not have clinical training and are often viewed as having a role for addressing issues of morale and discipline rather than mental health care.

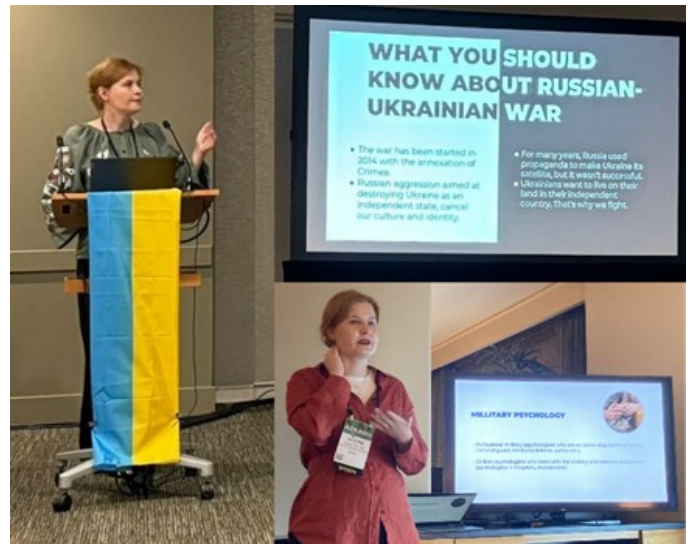
As a continuation of the strong support Division 19 has provided to Ukrainian colleagues, Division 19 sponsored the president of the National Psychological Association of Ukraine, Dr. Valeriia Palii to attend the 2024 APA convention in Seattle, WA. Dr. Palii was the featured speaker



Ukraine National University Military Institute – July 2024

for a Division 19 panel to address psychological impacts of war on the Ukrainian population and presented a presentation exclusively for Division 19 members in the Division 19 hospitality suite. During her visit to APA, Dr. Palii met several Division 19 members and attended the Division 19 EXCOM meeting out of interest in her role as the NPA president. She was also kept busy meeting with several international counterparts and APA leaders to build on other support initiatives benefiting Ukrainian psychologists. Among the several areas of collaboration with the NPA includes a newer initiative to develop their military psychology section, an effort we look forward to supporting in any way we can.

I would like to express my deep appreciation to the Division 19 members who have been actively involved in several aspects of this collaboration initiative which I did not review in detail here, but who have been extremely important to the project: Amy Adler, Bill Brim, Carl Castro, Katy Dondanville, Tim Hoyt, Scott Johnston, Sonya Norman, Christine Puls, and Eric Surface. I would also like to acknowledge two of our Ukrainian colleagues who have become Division 19 members in the course of our collaboration initiative: Oleh Hukovskyy and Marta Pyvovaren-



Dr. Valeriia Palii – Division 19 guest APA 2024

ko. Oleh and Marta have been pivotal in coordinating meetings, supporting in-country visits, and expanding network connections – thank you Oleh and Marta! And finally, I would like to give visibility to the contingent of Ukrainian colleagues who have provided so much insight into conditions in Ukraine and have welcomed Division 19’s efforts to support them: Olena Bidovanets, Oleg Burlachuk, Lt Oleh Hukovskyy, Valeriia Palii, Maj Andriy Karachevskyy, Volodymyr Korostiy, Maj Gen Vladyslav Klochkov, Marta Pyvovarenko, Iryna Frankova, Orest Suvalo Oxana Bayer, Oleg Chaban, Victor Dosenko, Rodion Hryhoryan, Vitaliy Kharechko, and Olga Guzhva.

As we go forward, Division 19 intends to build on current collaboration actions to address priorities as defined by our Ukrainian colleagues. If you would like to participate in this initiative, you may contact me at Div19.Ukraine@militarypsych.org.