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Where is the Magic in Counsellor Training? Thematic Analysis on the Self Reported Learning Experiences of CYHC Counselling interns

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Abstract

This project was completed in partnership between the Ministry of Children and Family Development (“MCFD”), The Chilliwack Youth Health Centre (“CYHC”), and The University of British Columbia School of Social Work (“UBC”). The CYHC Drop-In Counselling Program is a unique program in which youth aged 12 through 26 can receive on-demand, solution-focused counselling by counselling interns. Interns provide counselling and receive supervision from licensed counsellors and psychologists to aid in their learning. The service is well-utilized, with consistent demand from the service-using population. While research on the effectiveness of the program for service users has been completed previously, there is no research on the experience of the interns practicing at the CYHC. The evaluation of this program includes a literature review of effective group and internship learning strategies designed to inform thematic analysis and recommendations. The research itself was shaped by Social Learning Theory and Ecological Systems Theory. All participants were either counselling interns at the CYHC, regardless of internship duration or length, or interns providing supervision to those conducting counselling sessions with clients. A total of ten interviews with ten participants were recorded over a two-day period. Data was collected in semi-structured interviews utilizing the Critical Incident Method (CIM) as it allowed participants an opportunity to volunteer information on ‘critical incidents’ they felt was impacting their experiences as interns at the CYHC. All recordings were transcribed verbatim, coded using both descriptive and structural methodology, then analysed using thematic analysis technique (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In looking to the future, the content of these themes should be used to inform the development of the CYHC Drop-In Counselling Program or similar programs in other jurisdictions. However, there are limitations to the research associated with sampling bias, socially desirable behaviour, confidentiality, and lack of representation from all intern educational levels. The research yielded a number of recommendations: (a) having a greater orientation to the program to clarify previously uncovered areas, (b) continuing to offer the current model of supervision, and (c) continuing to offer both in-service and external educational opportunities.

Keywords: Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), Chilliwack Youth Health Centre (CYHC), interns, counselling, Enhanced Critical Incident Method



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Introduction

Youth Mental Health Care in BC

There are a number of provincial ministries that come together to provide youth mental health services in BC. There are services delivering hospital-based services such as the Ministry of Health, the Health Authorities and the Provincial Health Services Authority. MCFD also offers community mental health support services to children, youth, and families in British Columbia (BC) (Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, 2014).

In the Interim Report: *Youth and Mental Health In British Columbia*, the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia (2014) identifies a number of gaps in youth mental health care. One gap highlighted is that access to youth mental health services ends after a youth turns 19. This has created a gap, with youth and families complaining of difficulties when transitioning between youth and adult mental health services at age 19. Navigating a transition from youth services to adult services, especially in the middle of an initial assessment or treatment, creates further barriers to accessing appropriate and timely care. Gaps are also identified with respect to wait times for initial assessments with even longer wait times following the assessment for treatment. Literature suggests that the best outcomes for people who are experiencing mental health difficulties is early intervention (Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, 2014). Some people are waiting up to several months for mental health services. A further complication of this is that if there are several months between assessment and treatment, youth become less likely to engage in that care (Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, 2014).

Chilliwack Youth Health Centre

The Chilliwack Youth Health Centre (CYHC) is a low barrier, on demand counselling for diverse youth and young adults aged 12 to 26 funded primarily by MCFD in partnership with the Division of Family Practice and others to provide this service to the community (Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, 2014). It operates four drop-in locations for youth with counselling provided by interns at all levels of education including undergraduate, master's, and doctoral levels (Chilliwack Youth Health Centre, 2019).

Services like the CYHC exist to address these gaps in mental health care provided to youth and young adults in several ways. One of the ways they do this is by providing care throughout the transitional age between youth and young adults, offering service well beyond age 19. They also provide free, on-demand service with little wait time and offer multiple health care services at one place.

What is unique about the CYHC model that differentiates it from other models is that the counselling offered is run primarily by unpaid counsellors-in-training, also known as interns allowing this service to function with limited funding. There are currently 26 counselling trainees composed of baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral students who rotate between all sites (R. Lees, personal communication, October 3, 2019). No research has yet been conducted related to the experience of interns, and as they are the primary service providers, this necessitates research into what is working for the interns and what is required for effective counsellor training. The following questions have been used to guide this research: (1) What type of training, supervision, and peer to peer support helped or hindered the experience of counselling trainees placed at sites providing low barrier, on demand counselling for diverse youth and young adults aged 12 to 26, (2) How do trainees feel that their experience prepared them to practice professionally and provide counselling services to a diverse population, and (3) How can the current experiences of trainees contribute to future program development and training?

Study Aim

At its core, this research project seeks to gain insight into the experiences of the interns at the CYHC and utilize these experiences to make recommendations for improvement. On a macro scale, the need for a model like the CYHC speaks to the gaps that exist at the provincial level to address the needs of people, particularly youth, who are experiencing difficulties with their mental health and no access to appropriate or timely care. However, in order for a model such as this to have longevity, it relies heavily on interns being drawn to this program

for their practicums. The methodology section outlines how the student researchers engaged participants in this qualitative study and how it will utilize the enhanced critical incident technique in its approach to interviews. The hope was that understanding the experiences of the interns could lead to clear and achievable recommendations that are able to be used to sustain the program at CYHC as well as implement changes for growth and improvement.

Theoretical Positioning

The theoretical underpinning of our research is founded on Social Learning Theory (SLT) as understood by Alberta Bandura. As a behaviourist theory, SLT posits that learning happens through observation and imitation, and is maintained by repetition (Orak et al., 2020). Given this, modeling and supervision are key to learning new skills, as well as providing students an opportunity to practise these new behaviours. In the context of this research on counselling internship experiences and related training, SLT holds great potential as a theoretical tool. A contemporary approach to SLT is also constructivist in nature, recognizing the role of the learner in taking in the information, interpreting it, organizing it, and reproducing it (Owen, Ferguson, & McMahon, 2019). The research on the counselling internship focussed heavily on this learner perspective and how the interns experienced the program and the training offered through said program. This is reflected in our research questions, which are designed to further explore the interns' positive and negative experiences as well as the interns' understanding of their practicum. Given that the CYHC program is training tomorrow's counsellors, it is essential that program development and research on their learning is responsive to not only their demonstrated skills, but also their understanding and construction of the training they're receiving.

Building on this behavioural and constructivist theoretical position is the Ecological Systems Theory ("EST"), which focuses on the position of the individual as acted upon by the different systems, social and otherwise, that impact their life. Central to this theory is that people, including the interns, do not develop in isolation. There is interaction feedback between the

individual and the micro, mezzo, and macro systems that surround them. They are all involved in the creation of each other, with changes on one level impacting another. This is important when considering students and their learning (Fearnley, 2020). For example, the interactions between professionals and students take place on the mezzo level. These interactions and relationships inform how the student sees and engages with macro level entities, such as institutions with which they are involved. These relationships also change how the student sees themselves and how they will interact with their practicum and other professionals going forward. Contemporary counselling and social work education also places emphasis on the intersectional nature of existence, and how all people live at the intersection between various domains of privilege and oppression (Greene & Flasch, 2019). Counselling interns are familiar with this and consider the positionality of both themselves and their client when conducting a counselling session. As such, the combination of our research questions (Appendix A) and data provided by the intern lends itself to interpretation through our SLT, EST, and behavioural constructivist understanding of the research.

Literature Review

Defining Counsellor Training

While the interns at CYHC are receiving direct supervision by MCFD sponsors and counsellors, the research highlights a number of other ways in which counsellors could receive training. In this review, counsellor training will include baccalaureate and graduate level coursework, professional development conferences, direct supervision, case studies, role playing, and tool-specific training (e.g., trauma informed practice). The broad scope allows for the integration of multiple training methodologies to be evaluated for their efficacy and how their inclusion could augment dominant training modalities.

Engagement

Essential to counsellor training is the establishment of what trainees engage with and how engagement with training can be fostered. Allan (2019) identifies evidence-based practices (EBP) as being essential for

trainee engagement, as fostering critical discussions of skills results in “an increased ability to engage in more nuanced discussions about EBPs” (p. 211). Mutual intimacy between trainees and supervisors has also been identified as a way of increasing engagement with training (Merrell-James, Douglass, & Shupp, 2019). Training conducted individually or in small-group sessions helped to improve trainee participation, especially when conducted over a series of sessions. Trainee engagement has also been fostered by simultaneous community engagement with the populations they are serving (Celinska & Swazo, 2016). In their study, students were required to volunteer in some capacity with the demographic they were responsible for working with, such as volunteering at a homeless shelter when training for counselling the homeless population. Their results showed that the student population that did so became more open to the experiences of the relevant population and engaged with the associated training more strongly.

Another way of generating engagement with training was through requiring students to reflect on what they are learning. Shuler and Keller-Dupree (2015) found that students taking courses on counselling that required them to reflect in writing on their experience had greater development of their counselling skills than those who had not. That same study found that reflecting on their learning contributed to trainees “ability to accept personal responsibility... and awareness of personal impact on others” (p. 159). Students began to see challenges in counselling sessions as something worth overcoming while also increasing their belief in their capacity to grow. A separate study found that students asked to reflect on what they had learned from their coursework helped students glean better insight on their positionality and how that would impact their practice (Love, Hale, & Sindlinger, 2019). Along with the importance of self-reflection, two articles recommend that using Feedback Informed Treatment, a tool used with clients, in counsellor training and education as an effective format for not only improving client outcomes but also the outcomes of counsellor training (Esmiol-Wilson et al, 2017; Yates et

al., 2016). Yates et al. (2016) further discussed the ways in which this model of feedback can be incorporated by promoting that “the counsellor-in-training can receive feedback from the client, site supervisor and academic department supervisor which has the potential to maximize student learning and growth” (p 27). The combination of feedback, critical evaluation, self-reflection, and relationship with supervisors has a marked effect on how students engaged with the training offered to them.

The Role of Supervision

While there is much that students can do to deepen their understanding of practice, the quality of supervision comes up repeatedly in the research as a contributing factor. Gazzola and Theriault (2007), note that “counsellors internalize, accumulate and continue to draw from early supervisory experiences that they consider meaningful throughout their counselling careers” (p. 190). Further, they discuss two key concepts in describing the experience of supervision among counsellors-in-training: broadening and narrowing. Broadening describes the characteristics that allow a trainee to experience positive growth within supervision and narrowing describes the characteristics that could hinder or negatively impact their experience. Gazzola and Theriault (2007) also identify the power innate within the supervisory role and discuss the ways that a supervisor can create a safe and respectful space in order to provide challenging feedback in a way that positive growth can take place. Costa and Dewaele (2019) found that supervision was important not only for reducing the potential harm to patients, but also to “identify constraining features which disable rather than enable open exploration... when working therapeutically across race, culture and language” (p.235). Supervision that involved challenging these barriers rather than just the content of sessions was found to promote growth in trainees and increase their confidence (p.236). This additional accountability was found to be essential in the development of counselling best practice (Asempapa, 2019). The same study found that this style of supervision also promoted greater self-efficacy and gave trainees a better understanding of their role as counsellor. The research also found that

ongoing supervision in the form of mentorship while employed as a counsellor was equally significant in improving counsellor outcomes. This research reinforces the outcomes found while exploring the role of engagement, that supervisors who challenge their students to think critically had better outcomes than those that did not. The research did demonstrate a difference in outcomes between individual and group supervisory techniques. One article specifically spoke to the greater value of having both individual and group supervision combined as opposed to one or the other (Ray & Altekruze, 2000).

Training Considerations

Given the diverse population with which counsellors work as well as their relevance to the CYHC, literature suggests that trainees would benefit from teaching related to culturally informed counselling and the evaluation of their unconscious biases. The research identified training experiences that can open trainees to alternative worldviews. Williams et al. (2013) identified training in ecological systems counselling to be an effective means of opening trainees' awareness to cultural supports that can be significant to the client. They also found that it is more effective when trainees are exposed to cultural competency training early-on in their career as it is correlated with trainee openness. In research by Selinska and Swazo (2006), both their research and literature review pointed to significant gains in culturally competent counselling skills when trainees are expected to complete any number of established multicultural counselling courses. Paynter and Estrada (2009) also found that immersive cultural experiences can be extremely useful in helping trainees to become culturally competent. It was shown that students benefitted from culturally competent supervisors who could assist with interpreting unknown cultural cues. As communication styles are culturally embedded, teaching trainees "the ability to accurately and appropriately send and receive ... nonverbal messages is an essential skill for effective cross-cultural counselling" (p. 218).

Professional Development

Research identifies a number of training methods and counselling interventions that are generally of use

to counselling trainees. Land (2018) identifies training in trauma-informed practice as essential for counselling trainees given their relative lack of experience and the degree to which patients can be re-traumatized by inappropriate interventions. Trauma-informed practice is also significant when teaching ecological systems theories to counsellors as care for "the needs of individuals, families, communities, organizations, and the broader society... are often overlooked and undertreated" (p.232). Role-playing as a teaching method has been shown to improve counsellor's ability to engage with learning (Shurts, Cashwell, Spurgeon, Degges-White, Barrio, & Kardatzke, 2006). They found that role-playing gave trainees an opportunity to evaluate each other in a way that promotes safety in learning. The research also found that role-playing correlated with a willingness to accept feedback and an increase in trainee's connection with their therapeutic community.

Counselling trainees also benefit from critically evaluating the role of gender in their evaluation of clients and viable solutions. Research by Trepal, Wester, and Shuler (2008) showed that trainees form impressions of clients very quickly and that these impressions often fall along gendered lines. This can lead counselling trainees to direct care toward inappropriate services and impede their ability to work with gender non-conforming clients and non-traditional families. In line with the other research, they highlight the significance of training counsellors on gender early-on in their studies. They also place emphasis on the role of self-reflection in developing awareness and alternative ways of counselling gender-diverse populations. This research is significant given the prevalence of children and youth in need of gender-affirming care and applies to the CYCH's evolving mandate.

Recommendations for Practice

There are a variety of themes that show up repeatedly in the research that should inform the training of counselling students. These themes can be broadly summarized as follows: (1) practices that foster engagement with the process should be incorporated when possible, (2) supervision should be supportive

while still challenging the trainee, (3) trainees must be encouraged to develop competency in working from a multicultural perspective, and (4) multiple educational techniques should be used to promote trainee openness to alternative ways of learning and knowing. The research also highlighted the significance of ongoing reflection and feedback as a reliable way to improve the practice of both trainees and established clinicians.

Methodology

All data collected was qualitative in nature and was collected using semi-structured, in-person interviews. Interviews were limited to interns or supervising interns of the CYHC, with our sample of all potential participants provided with an invitation to participate. Researchers were supported in contacting potential recruits by the employees of the CYHC program. The research project was conducted by two student researchers through the University of British Columbia's School of Social Work.

Sampling

A purposive, non-probability method of sampling was chosen for this research (Schutt, 2014). The population under study were the counselling interns or counselling supervision interns of the CYHC Drop-in Counselling Program. Researchers received approval from MCFD Ethics and the University of British Columbia Office of Research Ethics.

Recruitment

Recruitment was limited to those who met the qualifying criteria: (a) Counselling interns at the CYHC, regardless of internship duration or length, and (b) Interns providing supervision to those conducting counselling sessions with clients. The researchers provided Dr. Robert Lees, the program director, with an electronic copy of the invitation to participate. Dr. Lees then contacted eligible participants with an electronic copy of the invitation to participate via email. Those that did not meet the selection criteria were excluded from the study and did not receive a letter of invitation. The CYHC staff were informed of the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Participants who received the invitation to participate and were interested in being research participants were invited to initiate contact with student researcher Kassie

Maxwell via email or phone. Following this, they would be provided with the study information letter and given an opportunity to join the research study.

Unfortunately, the researchers only received response emails from two potential participants after initial contact. Following this, an additional invitation email was sent by Dr. Lees that resulted in zero respondents. It was decided upon the advice of Dr. Lees that researchers would attend the CYHC program in Chilliwack and sit-in on the counsellor waiting area. Researchers then met with potential participants to explain the research and to interview them privately if they were interested. It was at this point participants were given a copy of the consent form to review and sign before data collection began. Utilizing this approach, the researchers were able to interview a total of eight additional interns, bringing the sample size to ten. Participants were given until March 13, 2020 to request their data be expunged from the study, with no participants electing to do so.

Data Collection

Data was collected through in-person, semi structured interviews with the research participants designed to obtain information on the intern's experience of training they received and of the CYHC program in general. Being semi-structured, the researchers spoke with participants about whatever they brought up following each question and asking clarifying questions to aid in interpretation. Researchers utilized the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique ("CTI") approach which generally used to find out what helped, what hindered, and what was hoped for from each participant (Butterfield, Borgen, Maglio, & Amundson, 2009). As the interns are experts of their own experience, the qualitative data gathered will form the basis for improving the program to better meet the needs of future internship cohorts. The semi-structured nature of the interviews also gave the participants an opportunity to volunteer information that may not have been uncovered through exclusively answering the questions posed alone. No questions of a sensitive nature were included, and researchers determined there was little to no risk to the interviewees.

All interviews took place in person and were

digitally recorded using a Sony IC Digital Recorder. They were conducted at the CYHC, either in a private room or in a location of the subjects choosing. Interviews ranged from approximately 15 to 38 minutes in length and included 15 questions. Following these interviews, the digital recordings were transcribed verbatim by the student researchers and used as data for coding and thematic analysis. All participants and transcripts were anonymized and given an ID number, with all potentially identifying information expunged from the recordings during transcription.

Analysis

After data collection was complete, we engaged in a coding process that was both descriptive and structural. We did structure our interview such that the information provided related to a specific topic (training, supervision, etc.) would show up together through the coding process, helping us to categorize the data. From this we engaged in descriptive coding, where we drew on words or concepts that were repeated throughout the data and sorted data out into subheadings (Saldaña, 2013). We started this process by initially coded the same document so as to improve inter-rater reliability, then coded the remaining nine transcripts separately, placing relevant codes with the proper groups. Once coding was complete thematic analysis was used to interpret the data and discuss a number of themes that emerged (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results

Thematic Analysis

Of the 10 participants who were interviewed, they varied in their education, previous experience and length of time spent at CYHC. As a result, their responses were also varied, however, there were also many commonalities and clear themes that emerged. There were four main themes that identified from the data that we will be exploring in-depth. They are as follows: (1) breadth of training and practice opportunities, (2) positive learning environment, (3) multi-layered supervision, (4) scope of work: roles and responsibilities

Breadth of Training and Practice Opportunities. A common theme throughout was that participants were

satisfied and engaged with the learning opportunities, both taught and in practice. Participants spoke to the differences in the nature of education, such as the multi-day DBT course or the auditorium presentation. Participants felt that there was an ample amount and that the variety in content and length helped improve learning: “Groups, individual counselling, children, adults, adolescents, young adults... Different diagnosis, different goals, just a lot. Oh and a lot of training opportunities as well because he [supervisor] has outside service providers come and provide training throughout. Again, it just added to the breadth of training opportunity” (P8, research interview, February 19, 2020).

Participants commented on how the program was able to accommodate the different skills and counselling modalities with which they came. This helped contribute to their understanding of their skills as counsellors and the populations with which they were most comfortable counselling. Through the solution-focused approach, participants felt they were able to improve upon whatever approach they took or were educated in: “It's excellent. Really good knowledge base and they always sort of cater their responses to you and your modality, which is very cool because, you know, like any field there's so much information that it can be kind of hard to sift through. But these people are so knowledgeable, they already know [snapping fingers] instantly! ‘This article, use this!’. I don't have anything bad to say about that, really, really good” (P6, research interview, February 18, 2020).

When discussing practice opportunities, participants stated that the clients, their background, and their presenting concerns were so varied that there wasn't one particular approach that could be taken to meet all of their needs. This also meant that participants had opportunities to practice with a diverse population they may not have had much experience within the past, providing them with more chances to improve their skills. The necessity of having different skill sets coupled with the positive learning environment pushed the participants to take initiative and responsibility for their own learning: “... you get to hear and learn about other modalities and other

things that people are doing and sort of mentally incorporate that into your own style” (P6, research interview, February 18, 2020).

Given the variety in service user demographics, some participants felt that they may have benefitted from additional training opportunities when it comes to working with different demographics that they had not had experience within the past, such as Aboriginal populations or the LGBT community. Participants brought their strengths, but acknowledged that they had weaknesses in other areas they wish education was present to address: “one of my classes had a presentation about HIV positive people, which I didn’t know I didn’t know very much about until I had the presentation, I was like ‘Wow okay, I knew very little about this’” (P5, research interview, February 18, 2020).

Positive Learning Environment. In the interviews, many participants spoke about the environment in which they learned and practiced at the CYHC and how it improved their overall experience. All 10 participants reported feeling supported by all involved in the CYCH, including staff and peers: “... When someone comes in the room with an issue or feeling like they’re underperforming or whatever or weren’t sure, I remember in the early days everyone would just like pick them up like crazy. Like everyone would feel so much better in having conversations with one another. And everyone’s like, very open with one another with their concerns, with their own performance, or questions they might have” (P7, research interview, February 19, 2020). These relationships were generally seen to be supportive to their learning and encouraged the participants to ask questions and engage with their learning. Given the difference in length the participants had spent in the program and previous education, the freedom to ask questions helped newer participants feel more comfortable and capable. The comfort with asking questions and availability of staff also had the effect of improving the ability of participants to solve problems as they arose; “I can always ask anyone anything at any time, more or less. Or someone, there’s always someone there to ask questions, even

if they’re stupid. So I don’t feel like I’m in over my head, which is nice.” (P3, research interview, February 18, 2020).

Many participants cited the extensive learning and education opportunities provided to them as a reason they felt supported by the CYHC. This aspect of the program helped to create an environment where learning was as important as practicing skills. Participants welcomed the volume and content of the learning provided, reporting that these enhanced their overall learning and counselling skills. Participants were aware of the positive reputation of the CYCH and its internship program in the community and had positive impressions of the program prior to applying as one participant identified, “...I was looking for a practicum placement, and she said ‘oh! This place is so great and wonderful’ so she was telling me about it and gave me [Name] contact information” (P5, research interview, February 18, 2020).

Those that did not have prior knowledge or engagement with the program reported feeling wanted by the program and felt welcomed in their initial and subsequent interactions with the program and staff. While the environment was considered generally conducive to learning, a few areas came up that participants felt did not aid in their learning or their experience with the program, mostly related to workflow and expectations. Participants felt that there was competition between interns to complete their hours that took their mind off of learning. Participants were also confused by the differences in hours between different practicums: “One of the things we have to get on our own is make sure we’ve fulfilled requirements for licencing. And my school could not care less if I do that or not. And the practicum, I mean individual people care I guess, but it’s all up to me... So that means... you might have to get hours outside of practicum” (P4, research interview, February 18, 2020).

There was also the challenge associated with the clients waiting for specific counsellors despite the drop-in nature of the program and clients not fully understanding this expectation of the program.

Participants reported feeling stressed about this and were distracted by the knowledge that clients were waiting: “And it's not always bad, it's just maybe one youth chooses to wait or come back in an hour or like when that counsellor's available, but I think that I mean, they say it's drop-in but sometimes it doesn't feel like drop-in.” (P1, research interview, February 18, 2020).

Multi-Layered Supervision. Participants felt that the 10-minute supervisory meeting near the end of each counselling session provided them with the expertise they needed to support their client and apply their skills to the clients' situation. They also appreciated that different clinicians would be there and that they could receive feedback from more than one clinician at a time. One participant spoke about how this form of supervision helped interns feel secure working with clients who may be in crisis: “Like that last 15 minutes, sitting and presenting the case to the counselor, that's very helpful because you don't wait to the end of the week to talk about the cases, it's just really in the moment. And then all the information is very clear to [the intern], and then [the client] can get new feedback and support from your counselor right away” (P7, February 18, 2020).

Participants felt that this complemented the supervision they received from their personal mentors in one on one supervision as well. Interns recognized the need to have immediate supervision in the bullpen but felt glad that they had an opportunity to think over their experiences of the week and share it more in-depth with another professional. At the same time, interns were glad they did not have to remember all issues from their week before seeing their mentor and appreciated the immediacy of the supervision in the bullpen. Individual mentors were seen as the cornerstone of intern development as the long-term nature of the relationship allowed interns to focus on areas of practice for a longer period of time with someone they trust: “So that is more like my reflection of the day, or my, I feel like, struggles or the parts that I'm not very sure about how people do, that's kind of like the topics that I talk with my mentor by the end of the week” (P3, research interview, February 18, 2020).

Some participants also spoke to the supportive relationships they had with their peers and how that impacted their service provision. Support with counselling skills usually occurred informally, with interns talking about shared clients in the bullpen and helping each other with their approaches. These relationships were useful and helped the interns navigate the expectations of the program when they were unsure. While not officially a part of the supervision offered by the CYHC, it became a regular feature of the intern experience: “... by the end of the session, a couple of peers will talk about a case, we understand we may not be able to see the same client, but I look at it as a learning opportunity. It's kinda like case based, and 'This is what I did' and my peers will say 'oh, interesting'. Maybe there's some parts that I overlooked. And then we can still talk about it” (P3, research interview, February 18, 2020).

Scope of Work: Roles and Responsibilities. All participants understood their role to be counselling with youth in a drop-in counselling setting. However, they all had different interpretations of what this looked like, in terms of the freedom and flexibility they are given within that. Some participants felt that this was a hindrance in a way as they identified the lack of a clarity something that caused them confusion and stress. While on the other hand, others identified the freedom to take initiative and have some control over their own learning was part of what drew them to this experience and have found it incredibly valuable.

Further, there were a number of participants who discussed the challenges of continuity of care with the youth they serve. While some felt this was valuable, they also struggled to balance this continuity of care within the context of the drop-in model. Some reported that this has led to issues such as clients having to wait a long time to see the specific counsellor they want to see. “From the beginning, there's been this shared understanding that if the counsellor's available when the youth comes back next week, and there will be returning youth, and they kind of become regulars, that they always try to match them up with the same counsellor if they're available. But that sets up a false expectation that now that

youth is like almost a pseudo client to that counsellor and when that counsellor isn't available or maybe they have a couple of youth they see regularly and those two youth come at the same time, there becomes conflict as well" (P2, research interview, February 18, 2020).

Lastly, among many participants, there was an acknowledgement of the different levels of education and practice experience on the team of interns. When asked whether they felt the training they received prepared them to work with the population they serve at the CYHC, a number of the interns reported that it was due to knowledge and skills they already had which allowed them to feel prepared for this while others expressed a more significant learning curve due to lack of practical experience or knowledge. While many participants drew attention to this issue of many different education and experience levels which can significantly change the learning needs of each intern, one participant thought it might be helpful for those that do not have any previous practical experience and are not getting it through their programs to have a counselling skills 101 type course available to them.

Discussion

The Social Learning theory and Ecological Systems theory were used to inform our analysis of the data and will be used to further discuss the four themes. We also look to the literature review to aid in our discussion and analysis of the four themes identified in the research.

Much of the literature reviewed did have relevance for this study's results. One area that was very clear with this link was in what we learned about best practices in supervision models. Both in the literature reviewed and in the research findings, supervision was an important piece in counselling training. This is further supported by the theoretical lens of social learning theory as it is often supervisors who are looked to for modelling and mimicking in the social learning process (Orak et al., 2020). Some of the literature points to the efficacy of a supervision model that includes both individual supervision and group supervision as opposed to one form over the other (Ray & Altekruze, 2000). This benefit of having both on demand supervision in an immediate way as well as

ongoing weekly scheduled one to one supervision was very clearly expressed in participants responses.

What was found among the participants was such varied responses to what sort of training, supervision and experiences they felt was most relevant or important to them in preparing them to work with youth. The literature review touches on and highlights some of the areas that were discussed by participants, however, there were differences in what was found in the literature and in the results. For example, the literature focuses on the importance of trauma and multicultural education, whereas the participants focused less on this and more on practical skills needed to support the youth. While the participants appreciated the training they received that prepared them for diverse youth, many felt they already had the attitudes, experiences and education needed to work with a diverse population.

Although this research focuses on the interns' experience, it is important to remember that their experience is directly related to the experience of the client. How the intern is prepared, trained, and supervised directly impact the level of care that the clients receive. What we heard from many participants is that there is a mix of skill and knowledge and there is not one standard for when people arrive to practicum. The literature does identify certain areas that need to be highlight in training for counsellors to be responsible to clients, such as multicultural training, trauma, etc. However, the differences we see between the literature and the participants' responses are contextual in nature. Due to the specific context of the CYHC program and unique circumstances that exist around this type of counselling training where the interns are essentially in a role where they are providing a service, not just there as a learner this may be where we are seeing some gaps in the literature. There does not appear to be any literature existing on this type of service model that the CYHC employs. Without any literature on this specifically, interpreting this through an ecological systems lens was helpful in understanding the way that all of these systems are impacting one another, including understanding that the unique nature of the program will greatly impact the experience of the interns.

Limitations

The researchers identified a number of limitations that had the potential to impact the internal and external validity of the research. The limitations include a lack of representation from all intern levels, possible sampling bias, and social desirability.

Due to the nature of our recruitment process, we did not have participants from all three intern levels. The lack of data from some of the demographics that do their internship at CYHC makes generalizing the experience of interns to the general population of counselling interns at the CYHC difficult, especially in the areas of training and education. While student researchers initially reached out electronically to all potential participants, researchers ultimately decided to attend the CYHC program located beside the Chilliwack Senior Secondary School given its size and availability of interns. It was here that researchers were able to meet with all ten participants. While some interns move between sites, this is not the case for all of them. Given that there are now four sites across the CYHC program, our data is biased towards the experience of interns practicing beside the Chilliwack Senior Secondary School and may not reflect the experience of interns at other sites.

Some issues arose during data collection when attending the CYHC program at Chilliwack Senior Secondary School. While researchers initially understood that a room could be made available for interviewing, the number of counsellors and clients meant that the program's need for counselling space exceeded our own. As such, researchers had difficulty finding a quiet, private space for interviews. This resulted in some participants being interviewed in the atrium of the building. While participants stated they were okay with this and acknowledged it made confidentiality difficult, if not impossible to ensure, they may not have felt comfortable declining the interview and their answers may not have reflected their authentic feelings on the program. As such, the inclusion of this data may impact the internal validity and generalizability of the research project.

Another issue that occurred in data collection was the involvement of the research project sponsor in recruiting participants. The sponsor was actively

involved in encouraging interns to participate in the research project when researchers were on-site. This may have made participants feel uncomfortable declining to be participants and the data provided may not accurately reflect their experience as interns. Given the involvement of the sponsor, the data provided by some participants may reflect a social desirability bias, answering research questions in a way that may be viewed favourably by the researchers or reflect positively on program personnel. To address these challenges, informed consent was discussed at length with all participants. Participants were aware that any participation was voluntary including where and when the meeting would occur. Those recruited in person were given the opportunity to schedule an alternative time and location to participate in the event that they were disquieted by the inability of the researchers to ensure confidentiality in their participation. Regardless of these efforts to mitigate the concern, social desirability remains a significant limitation to the validity of the research results.

Recommendations and Future Directions

Recommendations

After thematic analysis of the data, there were three domains where suggestions for improvement were most frequently made. They are as follows:

Recommendation 1: The program should have a larger orientation to ensure clarity in programming and program/role expectations. Many participants reported being confused about different clerical and practical aspects of the program and felt that an orientation could serve as a source of clarity. A number of participants stated that they were confused as to the relationship between the CYHC and the CYMH. Some were unsure as to whether or not they shared clients or counselling interns. Another was unsure if they were different programs reporting, "a training that would be helpful is learning more about the actual organization of CYHC and the differences between that and CYMH. For the longest time I thought they were the same thing" (P1, research interview, February 18, 2020).

Related to this is confusion around hours, clients, and the organization of the CYHC. As stated above, there were times when clients would be waiting for a

specific intern to be free, sometimes for over an hour. here was confusion as to whether or not the program was drop-in, if meetings were scheduled, and if there were different expectations between the CYHC and CYMH with regards to this standard.

As reported above, participants expressed stress around meeting their hours for their practicum and for registration. They also felt that there were times when interns were competing for hours and by extension counselling space. As the hours required by each school are different, interns with more required hours would have difficulty taking enough clients and were motivated to compete for additional space. They also were unsure of any formal process of extending the internship if they needed additional hours to register or complete their practicum. Going forward, participants would benefit from a discussion around the role of workplace experience hours, their role in the practicum, and their role in the inters' career: "I think that having more rooms would be nice, that we're not vying for rooms... But it can be kind of tough at certain times of the year when there's not a lot of clients or youth coming in. People are like, "yeah, I need these hours badly", and they're struggling for rooms" (P6, research interview, February 18, 2020).

There were also a number of comments related to being unclear as to the structure of the program leadership. Participants felt very supported but were not always sure whether or not a supervisory comment made by an employee of the CYHC or CYMH was a suggestion or a request. Furthermore, if it was a request, participants wanted to know whether or not the requesting clinician was their direct supervisor who could direct them. This was made more difficult if there were different instructions given between clinicians: "And then sometimes I'll also be told suggestions like "oh, maybe you should do this with a person" ... or sometimes its less of a suggestion, more like a "you should be doing these things". And sometimes I get confused between the two. Like does this fit with my style, and am I supposed to be doing this" (P5, research interview, February 18, 2020).

Recommendation 2: The program should continue the multi-layered supervision. The supervision model

at the CYMH was considered by participants to be one of the most important aspects of the program and all expressed hope that it would continue as such. Participants felt that the 10-minute supervisory meeting near the end of each counselling session provided them with the expertise they needed to support their client and apply their skills to their situation. They also appreciated that different clinicians would be there and that they could receive feedback from more than one clinician at a time. One participant spoke about how this form of supervision helped interns feel secure working with clients who may be in crisis: "Just in case if I feel like I'm... and we're encouraged to be able to leave whenever, if we feel like, 'Oh my goodness, I have no idea what I'm dealing with!' or whatever. Which, I mean, or have questions about something or need o know what to do next, or if there's some sort of crisis" (P5, research interview, February 18, 2020).

In terms of other recommendations, interns felt that clients suffered when counsellors had to wait their turn for supervision in the bullpen. Interns felt that asking a client to wait an additional ten minutes for their counsellor to return could damage rapport or their willingness to come back for further sessions. That being said, interns were thankful to have an additional supervisor to prevent this from happening: "Maybe that sometimes you have to wait. They do supervision one at a time, but even then, if there's more than one supervisor there and they're both helping somebody, one will break off and help you. Because youth are waiting for us, right? So that can be kind of challenging sometimes" (P6, research interview, February 18, 2020).

Recommendation 3: The program should continue to place an emphasis on education and offer diverse education sessions with the addition of a basic counselling skills competency training. Interns felt that they benefited from the emphasis the program placed on education and the education services offered by the CYHC. All interns reported appreciation for the training was offered weekly during the in-services on Tuesday. These sessions were perceived as being worth attending and a source of schooling on

practical elements of counselling not necessarily covered in their classes. They were seen as a way of including domain-specific voices (mental health, additions, LGBTQ issues, etc.) to their counselling education that they would not get in school. This variety was seen as a strength of the program, as expressed by one participant who said "... then also we have a weekly theme that you know, a different presenter comes here to present different topics... I found it really helpful" (P3, research interview, February 18, 2020).

Interns were equally happy to take part in the more intensive sessions, such as the all-day conference with Scott Miller. These sessions served as a way of complimenting the regular in-services by keeping the educational experiences and learning environments novel. These intensive sessions were perceived as being more relevant to their counselling careers as they provided in-demand skills, such as DBT, or increased participants' ability to teach others, as in the HCEP program. Training sessions that were indicated to be particularly helpful to participants were the DBT training and the Safety and Risk Assessment training. There were some suggestions as to how to improve the educational component of the CYHC internship. As interns come to the program with different experiences and education, not all educational sessions are new material for all the interns and balancing needs can be hard, however, some of the suggestions provided by participants based on what they would like to see included training on more in demand therapy training such as Emotion Focused Therapy, as well as an intro level counselling skills training, specifically for those interns who may not be coming into the program with these skills already.

Future Considerations

Although extant research supports a multi-layered approach to supervision, there is a uniqueness in the model of supervision delivered at CYHC with its commitment to individual supervision and mentorship along with supervision in a group where their peers can watch and learn from this as well within the 'bull pen'. There may be some validity in further research into this unique approach to supervision given the value placed on it from all participants in the study.

This study adds to the growing body of literature on what makes counselling internships successful for the intern, their program, and the service users they work with. Interns were engaged with and benefitted from supervision at every level and credited this supervision with their success as counsellors. They also benefitted from the continuation of education from the classroom to the field placement and felt this created a positive learning environment in which interns could try new things and learn from mistakes. Further research in this field should explore the sustainability of programs utilizing student interns as service providers and the feasibility of running similar programs in other jurisdictions. There is strong macro-level interaction between Government Services and the Interns, with questions around the ethics of relying on unpaid counselling interns as service providers remaining unexplored in the research. Additional research is needed to establish the experience of the intern-as-counsellor rather than the role of intern-as-student as explored in this research.

Conclusion

The role of student interns in the CYHC is complicated. As both student and service provider, they have complex educational and practical needs that need to be addressed in order to ensure the absorption and synthesis of new material and that their clients receive the care they need. Through interviews with CYHC interns with various levels of experience and educational attainment, the student researchers explored and developed four main themes that informed their intern experience. The intern experience was perceived as generally positive and interns spoke highly of the training and supervision they received. They reported feeling prepared for their professional careers by the program and appreciated the support of CYHC staff in becoming practitioners. The wide array of counseling skills taught, and opportunities given to put them into practice with supervision were seen as the main reasons behind intern satisfaction. Interns felt that supervisors were knowledgeable and available to help them develop their own counselling style. They also spoke on their hopes for changes in the future as well as speaking on aspects they hope remain unchanged, as they wished

much of the program would continue on as is. We hope these results give the CYHC and MCFD useful information as to the state of their program and the experience of the interns under their tutelage, as well provide actionable suggestions to improve upon an already well-received and highly successful program.

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Appendix A

Data Collection Instrument: Interview Questions

Questions:

- What is your educational background?
- What drew you to completing an internship at CYHC?
- What do you understand your position as an intern at CYHC to mean? What does your internship look like?
- What training by the CYHC has been most helpful to you?
- Has there been any training that you felt was not helpful?
- What additional training opportunities do you feel would benefit you and your colleagues?
- How do you feel about the supervision you are receiving at the CYHC?
- What has been most helpful to you in supervision?
- Are there any parts of supervision that you do not find helpful?
- What does peer to peer support look like among you and your colleagues?
- What is helpful about this support?
- Is there anything that is not helpful about this support?
- What is your understanding of the population you serve?
- How do you feel you have been trained in the skills you need to work with that population?
- Do you have any other recommendations for the counselling internship through CYHC?
- Upon the completion of research would you like to be provided a final report through email?