Counselling Psychology Quarterly,
June 2007; 20(2): 123–134

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

RESEARCH REPORT

Tracking trends: A longitudinal look at internship placements in counselling psychology in the United States

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Abstract
Efforts to track trends in internship placements across time serve the field of counselling psychology in a number of ways. But this research is qualified by its reliance upon a single source of data: the Council of Counseling Psychology Training Program (CCPTP) annual survey. This paper provides a review of the concerns related to this over-reliance, and addresses these concerns by supplementing this data source with the comprehensive data collected by the Association of Psychology and Post-doctoral Internship Centers (APPIC). Findings provide a longitudinal look at the supply and demand issue concerning internship placements, track the nature of pre-doctoral internship placements across a 30-year period of time, and generally support the validity of the CCPTP data by documenting their close correspondence to recent APPIC data.

Keywords: *Internships, counselling psychology, counselling internships*

Introduction

The formal organization of the pre-doctoral internship in psychology dates back nearly a century (Boggs & Douce, 2000). Since that time the internship has gradually materialized into the critical didactic-experiential bridge that today is recognized as the ''capstone'' experience in professional training in the United States. The nature of the current internship has been shaped within the broader evolution of the discipline. As Holloway and Roehlke (1987) note, one milestone moment in this evolution can be traced to 1952 (American Psychological Association [APA], 1952); following the standards of the Division of Clinical Psychology, the primary purpose of the internship within counseling psychology was stipulated as the ''provision of extended practical

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ISSN 0951-5070 print/ISSN 1469-3674 online
DOI: 10.1080/09515070701275374

experience of gradually increasing complexity under close and competent supervision'' (APA, 1947, p. 540). Formal recognition of the internship has been followed by ongoing developments regarding its placement in the sequence of academic training, its content, and its duration. Today, after decades of discussion and development, the internship is commonly regarded as a one-year, full-time (or 2-year, half-time) ''experience occurring after completion of didactic course work and appropriate practica and before the granting of the doctorate degree'' (Holloway & Roehlke, 1987, p. 210). The vast majority of states now require an internship for licensure, as well (Stewart & Stewart, 1998). Because of its critical role in professional training, the internship has long been viewed as ''the linchpin between academic preparation and entry into professional employment as a counseling psychologist'' (Holloway & Roehlke, 1987, p. 210).

In addition to its vital role in the preparation of psychologists, the pre-doctoral internship also serves as a marker of the specialty's distinctiveness and as a harbinger of the professional roles and functions served by counseling psychologists following their graduation (Neimeyer, Bowman, & Stewart, 2001). Data documenting the nature of pre-doctoral internship placements in counseling psychology have appeared sporadically in the published literature. The most consistent source of these data has been the annual survey conducted by the Council of Counseling Psychology Training Programs (CCPTP) of its member institutions. Since its inception in 1974, CCPTP has conducted an annual survey that focuses on aspects of academic and professional training, including internship placements. Published summaries of these data have occurred periodically, but not consistently, in the literature. Most accounts provide cross-sectional reports of a single year's data, though there are notable exceptions that provide longitudinal perspectives across selected periods of time.

Banikiotes (1980) and Cameron, Galassi, Birk, and Waggener (1989), for example, published studies that jointly chronicled internship placements across a 15-year period of time. Banikiotes compared summary data from the 1973–1975 years with data obtained from the 1979 survey, whereas Cameron et al. (1989) extended this longitudinal look through the 1987 year. Taken together, they provide a window onto the early trends in internship placements within the field of counseling psychology.

These early efforts have been supported by more recent efforts to provide a comprehensive review across an extended period of time (Neimeyer et al., 2001). In conducting their review, Neimeyer et al. (2001) included all available internship data from the annual CCPTP surveys from 1973 through the 1998 internship placement year. Their review highlighted some intriguing trends, as well as some significant shortcomings, associated with research in this field. Regarding trends, it was clear that university counseling centers remained the largest and most stable context for the placement of counseling psychologists in the United States, supporting an average of 37% of the field's interns across the 26-year period encompassed by the study. Like counseling centers, Veterans Administration Medical Centers (VAMCs) supported substantial, and fairly consistent, levels of the field's interns (22%) over time. In contrast to these

settings, significant decrements were found in the number of interns placed in community mental health and private practice settings, and significant increments in hospital-based placements, as well. These changes have occurred in relation to broader forces at work within the institutional contexts that support doctoral training, (Blustein, Goodyear, Perry, & Cypers, 2005; Neimeyer, Saferstein, & Rice, 2005), as well as the profession and society (Goodyear et al., 2000).

In interpreting their findings, Neimeyer et al. (2001) called attention to the role of these data in reflecting the specialty's critical commitments to values that are central to its identity and key to its ongoing distinctiveness. As an example, the substantial role that university counseling centers play in the pre-doctoral training of counseling psychologists may reaffirm and strengthen commitments to multiculturalism, career counseling, and a developmental perspective, all prominent and enduring values within the specialty across time (Neimeyer & Diamond, 2001).

Problems

Despite the significant value associated with efforts to document the nature of internship placements across time, work in this field is qualified by a number of important limitations. Central to these limitations is the field's almost exclusive reliance on a single instrument, the CCPTP annual survey, as a source of data. Virtually all published research concerning internship placements in counseling psychology has utilized the CCPTP surveys as their exclusive data base (Alcorn & Nicholas, 1983; Banikiotes, 1977; Banikiotes, 1980; Cameron et al., 1989; Galassi & Moss, 1986; Gallessich & Olmstead, 1987; Neimeyer et al., 2001; Richardson & Massey, 1986). This means that any endemic limitations in the survey, or in its summary data, are carried throughout the published literature. The reliance on any single measure presents a wide range of significant limitations, and invites a variety of potential problems. For this reason, most methodologists share the position of Rosenthal and Rosnow (1991, p. 137) that, ''given the limitations of any particular strategy of inquiry, more than one approach to understanding is a logical necessity''.

In the absence of a second data source the field is left without the kind of methodological triangulation (Neimeyer & Resnikoff, 1982) that might apply essential correctives to endemic limitations of the CCPTP survey. These limitations include at least three domains of concern: (i) restrictions in scope that are related to the particular questions that are (and are not) asked on the survey, (ii) potential validity threats associated with the self-report nature of the instrument, and (iii) challenges posed by the widely variable response rate that the survey has generated across the years. Each of these presents potential qualifications or confounds that might be addressed by the utilization of a second data source.

Limitations in scope

Every instrument necessarily limits the range and scope of its questions, tailoring them to the primary foci of concern. In the case of the CCPTP survey, it is designed to survey a wide variety of outcomes related to academic training programs in counseling psychology. These outcomes range from perceived levels of administrative support, to faculty and student demographics, to aspects of student practicum, internship, and employment placements. The instrument has been modified across time to shorten it, as well to accommodate selected developments in the field (Neimeyer et al., 2001). The tension between the need to survey a greater range of topics on the one hand, and to limit the size and complexity of the instrument on the other, is an ongoing one. One consequence of this tension is that the survey does not fully address selected areas of potential value to the field (Moradi & Neimeyer, 2005). This is particularly clear in relation to the information gathered regarding pre-doctoral internship placements. The survey asks training directors to identify the various settings in which their interns are placed in a given year, but it does not solicit information central to developing a more complete understanding of key issues in the field, such as the issue of internship supply and demand.

The issue of supply and demand is a significant one for the field of psychology, and began surfacing in the mid-1990s. Since that time the process of internship matching has resulted in a surplus of applicants, leading some observers to liken it to a game of musical chairs; when the music stops, everyone scrambles for a chair, though some are left standing once all the chairs are filled. As Boggs and Douce (2000, p. 675) have noted, ''this new phenomenon has shaken the old order in which programs and students had always assumed more sites than potential interns''.

The importance of this issue and its centrality to the field is reflected in the National Conference on Supply and Demand. Convened in 1997, and co-sponsored by APPIC and APA, the conference provided a context for focused discussion on the issue and its range of possible causes and consequences. But, as Boggs and Douce (2000) observed, until the advent of the national matching system in 1999, ''there was no single source from which to determine how many internship applicants there were'', (p. 676) so the scope of the shortfall has only recently become clearer. Unfortunately, the CCPTP survey does not directly address key issues pertaining to supply and demand. From its inception, it has asked training directors to identify only the setting in which students are placed. Items were added in 1994 asking training directors to indicate the number of students who were not successfully matched, but those data do not appear in the annual summary reports and have yet to be analyzed or published. So one purpose of the present study is to utilize a second data base to supplement the CCPTP survey with data that directly addresses critical features of the now-enduring internship shortfall.

Limitations related to self-report

The importance of utilizing a second source of data is underscored by considerations regarding the self-report nature of the CCPTP survey. The CCPTP survey asks training directors of academic programs to provide a substantial amount of information regarding a wide range of topics. Some of the questions assess perceptions (e.g., perceived levels of administrative support), some require estimations (e.g., average student stipend), and others involve more descriptive accounting of program statistics (e.g., student demograhics). Regarding the internship data, there are many factors that support the probable validity of the training directors' reports. For example, the surveys are completed in the spring term, within a month or two of the placements themselves, which minimizes the impact of problems related to memory recall or reconstruction. In addition, with a few exceptions, identifying the nature of the various internship settings requires relatively little interpretation. And further, training directors are well practiced in relation to collecting and reporting program data because these data are routinely utilized to support graduate recruitment, accreditation, and general administrative accountability. All of these factors auger favorably regarding the probable validity of the internship data obtained from the CCPTP reports.

Counterbalancing these considerations, however, are a number of forces and factors that could affect the validity of the CCPTP reports. Self-report measures have long been associated with a number of potentially confounding effects, for example, ranging from social desirability and a variety of other demand characteristics, to response biases, evaluation apprehension, and memory recall effects, among others (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991). In the case of the CCPTP survey, none of these potential effects has received attention in the published literature, leaving open questions regarding their possible influence on the instrument and the interpretations based on its findings. Confidence in the CCPTP survey would be enhanced substantially by the availability of an independent data source that would support its central findings. Without such a source, the introduction or operation of potential confounds remains a legitimate concern.

Limitations related to responses

Both the number of institutions that are surveyed and the response rates from those institutions have been widely variable across time. Inconsistency in the number of institutions surveyed is related to three factors. The first is the fact that the number of institutional members of CCPTP has grown across time (from 53 to 76 programs), so reports include additional programs as institutional membership in CCPTP has grown. A second source of inconsistency is related to the complementary process of institutional discontinuation or termination. As Blustein et al. (2005) document, nearly one-third of all APA-accredited

counseling psychology programs that have ever been formed have been discontinued, introducing another source of instability into the membership that is surveyed annually. Beyond this, the CCPTP survey has periodically included non-member programs in its samples, as well (Neimeyer et al., 2001). Taken collectively, these changes introduce substantial variability in the different programs that respond to the survey each year. This, in turn, challenges the ability to make longitudinal interpretations based on the data. Changes across time could either be faithful reflections of genuine trends in internship placements, or they could be the simple result of sampling different programs in different years.

Evidence that amplifies this concern can be found in the survey's annual response rates, which have varied from a low of 52% (in 1979) to a high of 91% (in 1983); the average response rate from 1973–1998 was 72% (Neimeyer et al., 2001). The response rate to the 2002 CCPTP survey represented an all-time low (45%), prompting the Executive Board of CCPTP to commission a second survey for that year to replace the earlier data that was presumed to be an unrepresentative or insufficient sample (CCPTP Website, 2003). As a consequence of these variable response rates, apparent fluctuations in internship placements across time may simply be due to the inclusion of different programs in different survey years.

Prospects

The CCPTP annual survey provides a valuable and enduring record of key features of academic training in counseling psychology. At the same time, the field's reliance on this single instrument invites a range of possible vulnerabilities that could qualify its value or validity. The utilization of a second, independent data source would provide important protections against many of these vulnerabilities, and this data source is now available. The implementation of the computer-based APPIC matching program (i.e., "APPIC Match") in 1999 resulted in a much more precise understanding of the internship processes and outcomes (Keilin, Thorn, Rodolfa, Constantine, & Kaslow, 2000). The computerized nature of the APPIC Match, along with the requirement that internship programs and applicants register in order to participate, results in a comprehensive picture of the internship selection process each year. Although some internships, programs, and individuals elect not to participate in the APPIC Match, the Match data nonetheless provide a comprehensive and independent source of information in relation to all participating constituencies. These data can be used to complement or corroborate, the longstanding CCPTP survey data.

Importantly, this source of data provides three critical correctives to the database derived from the CCPTP survey. On the first count, it represents a direct-report form of measurement, effectively eliminating sources of potential error associated with self-report methods (e.g., social desirability, interpretive judgments, memory, etc). The APPIC data identify the exact placement interns

receive, without relying on the subsequent report of the academic training directors. Second, the APPIC database provides a greater range of information regarding internship placements. In addition to information concerning the settings of the placements, for example, it also provides information regarding the number of unmatched students each year, and the percentages of students who are matched to their first, second, or third choices, and so on. And finally, by virtue of being comprehensive, the APPIC data sets circumvents many of the problems associated with differential response rates across time, essentially assuring a 100% response rate each year. This provides an ideal opportunity for assessing the validity of the CCPTP reports by comparing recent CCPTP sample summaries with the comprehensive APPIC placement data and inspecting them for their degree of convergence or divergence.

The primary goal of the present study, then, was to utilize the APPIC data to supplement and corroborate the CCPTP data concerning internship placements. These data are utilized to address two key issues in the field at this time. First, the APPIC data are utilized to develop a clearer look at the issue of internship supply and demand across the 5-year period in which APPIC has conducted the match (from 1999–2003). And second, comprehensive data from the 2003 APPIC match will be compared with the most recent CCPTP data, and placed within the broader context of a 30-year review of the CCPTP placement data. Substantial variation between the two data sources would throw into high relief the limitations and potential confounds associated with the CCPTP data source. But substantial correspondence between the CCPTP data and the APPIC data would provide important support for the utility and validity of the CCPTP data, enhancing confidence regarding the longstanding interpretations based on them.

Issue 1: A longitudinal look at supply and demand

An overall perspective on the relationship between supply and demand in predoctoral internships in psychology reveals some interesting features. Table I presents a summary of the total number of registered internship applicants from all specialty areas (clinical, counseling, and school) combined, together with the number of available internships in each of the years that the APPIC Match

Table I. Summary of internship applicants and positions in the APPIC Match: 1999–2003.

Match year	Registered number	Applicants change[1]	Registered number	Positions change[1]	Surplus of applicants
1999	2923		2631		292
2000	2957	+34	2713	+82	244
2001	2947	−10	2763	+50	184
2002	2842	−105	2752	−11	90
2003	2963	+121	2718	−34	245

[1]Change from prior year.

has been conducted (i.e., 1999–2003). An examination of Table I reveals several important trends. First, the overall supply and demand picture appeared to steadily improve from 1999–2002, but suffered a significant setback in 2003. Second, the number of internship positions rose between 1999 and 2001, then declined slightly in 2002 and 2003. The decline in positions in later years may have been due, at least in part, to the severe budget difficulties faced by federal, state, and local governments in the United States during this period, resulting in funding cuts and closing of mental health agencies and a loss of internship positions.

A third interesting trend involves the number of registered applicants, which remained fairly constant over these years. However, a sharp decline in the number of applicants occurred in 2002, only to return to previous levels in 2003. One explanation for this one-year decline is that the 2002 Match occurred shortly after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, and thus some applicants may have decided to postpone their internship until the following year (O. Yakushko, personal communication, 21 August 2002).

Thus, it appears that the supply and demand picture has changed only slightly from 1999 to 2003. While the number of applicants has appeared to remain relatively stable, the increase in internship positions from 1999–2001 has not been sustained in subsequent years.

In addition to this overall perspective on the supply and demand issue, a closer look at differences among the specialties is also possible. A separate inspection of internship applicants from clinical, counseling, and school psychology programs underscores the gap between supply and demand in all three specialties. In clinical psychology, the percentage of internship applicants that were successfully matched in 1999 (83.4%) was consistent with the percentage matched in 2003 (82%). For counseling psychology applicants, these percentages were 80% and 82.5%, and for school psychology they were 82.8% in 1999 and 82.7% in 2003. These figures highlight the striking correspondence among the three specialties, and underscore the fact that the supply and demand issue is equally applicable to all three areas of professional psychology.

These data provide the most current and comprehensive look into the shortfall of internship placements in the applied specialties of psychology over a 5-year period of time. With an average non-placement rate of approximately 17%, they also serve as a backdrop against which the successful placement of the field's other 83% of intern matches can be judged. For example, in 2003 intern applicants who were successfully matched to an internship were generally matched to one of their top internship choices. Across all three areas of specialization (clinical, counseling, and school), 53% matched to the site they ranked first, and another 21% matched to the site they ranked second. This means that nearly three-quarters of the successfully matched applicants matched to one of their top two choices. This match rate was similar for clinical, counseling, and school psychology. These data provide important information that augments the data available from the CCPTP surveys, although the two data sets can be compared in other key respects, as well.

Table II. Percentage of counseling psychology internship placements in different settings across time.

Year	University counseling center	Community mental health center	Veterans administration hospital	Other hospital
1973–1975	43.0	20.0	22.0	13.0
1979	33.0	30.0	10.0	13.0
1981	38.7	17.6	22.6	10.8
1982	33.0	19.0	24.9	5.1
1983	37.4	19.2	27.6	0.9
1984	41.0	18.6	25.4	3.3
1985	27.9	17.6	28.5	17.2
1986	30.0	16.0	24.0	21.0
1987	36.0	16.0	27.0	15.0
1988	36.0	16.0	25.0	17.0
1989	36.0	16.0	27.0	16.0
1990	38.0	15.0	22.0	21.0
1991	37.0	15.0	20.0	21.0
1992	32.0	9.0	16.0	14.0
1993	34.0	16.0	15.0	27.0
1994	39.0	13.0	23.0	22.0
1995	37.0	15.0	18.0	26.0
1996	38.0	15.0	22.0	18.5
1997	44.0	6.0	24.0	20.0
1998	44.0	7.0	21.0	23.0
1999	44.0	6.0	21.0	16.0
2000	48.0	7.0	20.0	17.0
2001	51.0	9.0	17.0	17.0
2003	44.0	6.0	19.0	19.0
Mean	38.42	14.37	22.32	16.41

Note: Data from 1973–2002 are derived from the CCPTP Annual Survey while the data from 2003 are drawn from the comprehensive APPIC internship match data set. Row entries do not sum to 100% because some interns completed training in settings that were not represented by the four primary internship categories (e.g., military, schools, business).

Issue 2: A longitudinal look at internship placements

Data from the annual CCPTP surveys are now available across a 30-year period of time, extending from 1973–1974 through 2002–2003. Data that appear here were derived from the annual CCPTP survey for the years of 1973 through 2001, whereas the 2003 data were drawn from the APPIC Match. Response rates to the CCPTP survey data ranged from a low of 52% to a high of 91% (average response rate = 72%), whereas the APPIC data for 2003 reflect comprehensive placement data from participants within the Match (i.e., 100%). Data from the CCPTP survey in the 2002 year were intentionally omitted due to the unusually low response rate associated with that survey, and the CCPTP Board's decision to commission a second survey to replace the data for that year.

Table II provides evidence that generally supports the consistency of the CCPTP survey data with the comprehensive internship placement data from the APPIC. It is noteworthy that the percentage of intern placements in counseling centers, community mental health centers, Veteran's Administration Medical

Centers, and Other Hospital settings has remained fairly consistent, and that the CCPTP data conform quite closely to the comprehensive APPIC data in this regard. Considering recent placement data from 2000 forward, for example, the consistency between the CCPTP and APPIC data is generally striking. Counseling centers accounted for 48% of the placements in 2000, 51% in 2001, and 44% in 2003. Community mental health centers accounted for 7% in 2000, 9% in 2001 and 6% in 2003. Likewise, Veteran's Administration Medical Centers showed general consistency across time, supporting 20% of the field's interns in 2000, 17% in 2001, and 19% in 2003. And finally, Other hospital placements were similarly consistent, with 17% of the specialty's interns being placed in that context in 2000, 17% in 2001, and 19% in 2003. In each of these instances, the data derived from the CCPTP samples conform closely to the comprehensive data provided by APPIC for the 2003 year.

Given that this is the first report that situates the APPIC data within the context of the longstanding CCPTP survey data, three things are noteworthy. Most importantly, the data show overall consistency with one another, enhancing the potential confidence that can be placed in the longstanding CCPTP survey data; across the board, notwithstanding the concerns related to self-report and response rates, the CCPTP data are generally quite consistent with the comprehensive and direct-report data provided by APPIC. Second, direct longitudinal comparisons between the CCPTP and APPIC data have not yet been conducted, though such analyses could enhance further the confidence placed in the CCPTP survey data. Future research may be directed towards this comparison as the APPIC data set develops across time. And third, with the availability of the APPIC data, future researchers could have access to an ongoing, comprehensive data set that would support critical, within-subjects analyses that the CCPTP data has not provided. This kind of analysis would provide an approach that would be much more sensitive to detecting trends in the nature of internship placements across time.

In conclusion, this paper has provided an internship update, calling attention to the field's potential vulnerabilities in relation to its historical reliance on a single source of data regarding the nature of its internship placements. By supplementing the CCPTP data with data available through APPIC, two key issues were addressed. The first concerns the supply and demand issue, providing a longitudinal look at the data across the first five years (1999–2003) in which APPIC has conducted computerized internship placement procedures. Future reports that continue to track the gap between the number of available interns and the number of available internship positions might contribute to the ongoing understanding of what now appears to be a persistent concern in the field of professional training. The second issue concerns the interpretability of the field's internship placement data within counseling psychology. The juxtaposition of the most recent, comprehensive APPIC data to the longstanding CCPTP data provides general support for the validity of interpretations based on the CCPTP data. Taken together, they provide the most comprehensive review of internship placements within the field of counseling psychology, spanning a 30-year period

of time. This longitudinal perspective illustrates the enduring role played by university counseling centers, Veterans Administration Medical Centers, other hospital settings, and community mental health centers in the pre-doctoral training of counseling psychologists. These contexts provide a diversity of internship training that articulates with strong expressions of the specialty's longstanding and developing professional identifications (Larson, 1992; Neimeyer & Diamond, 2001; Neimeyer et al., 2001, 2005).

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank APPIC for providing access to the data from the APPIC Match. Data provided by APPIC were disguised in order to protect the anonymity of the Match participants.

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