

**Research:** PhD

**Title:** “Strengthening the bridge between learning and earning: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Counsellor Placement”

**Researcher:** Beverly Cole, UWTSD, Swansea Metropolitan University

### **Abstract**

*Background:* Effective therapy is dependent upon the quality of counsellor training and this study arose from the paucity of research around a concept which, whilst central to counsellor training, has received scant attention – the counsellor placement. Strong historical links exist between the voluntary sector and counselling and most trainee counsellors volunteer within a ‘placement’ to accrue practice hours necessary for qualification. This research elucidates the counsellor placement concept, context and consequences.

*Aim:* The purpose of this research was to explore the perceptions of counsellor placement stakeholders and review an emerging practice model where course providers offer their trainees a placement parallel to their counselling course. These objectives transitioned into two research questions. Firstly, “What are the lived experiences of trainees, course providers, placement providers and supervisors involved in counsellor placements?” Secondly, “How is the establishment of a counsellor placement parallel to a university course perceived by those involved and what learning can be derived from their experience?”

*Methodology and methods:* An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis [IPA] approach generated data via questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Analysis revealed super-ordinate themes which enriched an otherwise narrow field of research.

*Findings:* Placements were positioned within counsellor training and their impact on future practitioners was considered. Participants described a continuum of inconsistent placement experiences and identified what constitutes a satisfactory placement. Contextually dependent, yet separate, factors between stakeholders were also evidenced. A counsellor placement alongside a university course was perceived as a valuable and viable model that benefits all involved, although this comes with cost and resource implications. Learning and challenges emanating from this placement model were articulated.

*Implications for practice:* Findings deepened understanding of the complexity of the counsellor placement in relation to training and employability. Resultantly, suggestions were made for strengthening the placement bridge between learning and earning.

*Keywords:* Counsellor Training/Practice; Counsellor Placements; Counsellor Volunteers; IPA

