

EDITORIALS

Editorial: Prioritising Consistent Research Training in Counselling and Psychotherapy Courses

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Keywords: research training, research literacy, research methodology, research project, accredited Australian counselling courses, counsellor training, PACJA, PACJA Editorial, Psychotherapy and Counselling Journal of Australia, PACFA

<https://doi.org/10.59158/001c.127377>

Psychotherapy and Counselling Journal of Australia

Vol. 12, Issue 2, 2024

With one focus area of the draft national standards dedicated to counsellors and psychotherapists undertaking research, an article on the research preparation offered by 90 accredited Australian training courses aptly recommends clearer and more consistent guidelines (Beel & Purvis, 2024). Exposure to research methodology and production would ensure that graduates are equipped with a minimum standard of research literacy which is essential for evidence-informed practice, professional identity, and the credibility of the profession. Volume 12 (2) of the *Psychotherapy and Counselling Journal of Australia* (PACJA) also includes two reviews on under-researched topics: a systematic literature review on the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on adult mental health (Al Barak, 2024) and a scoping review on the impacts of self-harm scars on psychosocial functioning, quality of life, and recovery in people with histories of self harm (Linington, 2024). Two Practice Reflections showcase evidence- and theory-informed practitioner wisdom; one outlining eight steps to softening corrosive self-criticism (Pearson & Wilson, 2024), the other on developing an autobiographical narrative with older clients to enhance ego integration (Roser, 2024). Two final articles highlight the variation of therapeutic practices available in Australia. Firstly, “Gudu-Guduwa: Healing Disconnection Through Incorporating Bush and Animal-Assisted Therapies Into Therapeutic Practice: A First Nations Reflection” (Stawiarski, 2024) explores Indigenous approaches to bush therapy and equine-assisted therapy as well as connection with ancestral Country and healing when connection to Country is severed. Secondly, an art-based autoethnography study used a mixed methods research design to measure improvements in an international tertiary student’s distress (Lai & Andrews, 2024).

Public consultation on the draft national standards for counsellors and psychotherapists closed on December 13, 2024. Focus Area 3.1.4 of the draft national standards is devoted entirely to the importance of counsellors and psychotherapists undertaking research (Allen & Clarke Consulting, 2024);

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thus, an article on the research training currently offered by 90 accredited counselling and psychotherapy programs in Australia is both timely and important. According to Beel and Purvis (2024) in “Research Preparation in Australian Accredited Counsellor Education: A Brief Report”, more than 53% of college courses and 37% of university courses do not offer counselling (and/or psychotherapy) students subjects with titles that indicate they are research-based. Failure to expose students to research methodology and the experience of conducting a research project reduces their opportunities to enter PhD studies. In turn, this curtails the availability of PhD-qualified, counselling-trained faculty critical for developing counsellor identity (Emerson, 2010; Mascari & Webber, 2013). Beel and Purvis (2024) recommend “more specific guidance about research in the training standards ... to establish a clear baseline of research literacy that all graduating students should possess” (para. 26). Specifying a requirement for research literacy at the foundational career stage would certainly improve Focus Area 3.1.4 of the draft national standards given the need for counselling and psychotherapy practice to be evidence-informed (Dunphy et al., n.d.)

Volume 12 (2) of the *Psychotherapy and Counselling Journal of Australia* (PACJA) contains two reviews on topics that have received surprisingly little research attention. Firstly, the systematic literature review investigating “The Impact of COVID-19 Lockdowns on Adult Mental Health” (Al Barak, 2024) found that COVID-19 lockdowns in Australia and internationally increased insomnia, loneliness, depression, anxiety, and stress in adults aged 18 years and over. These symptoms were common in younger adults and more prevalent in women than men. The author urges counsellors and psychotherapists to be aware of the psychological costs of isolation restrictions, especially among vulnerable groups. Secondly, “Impacts of Self-Harm Scars on Psychosocial Functioning, Quality of Life, and Recovery in People With Histories of Self Harm: A Scoping Review” (Linington, 2024) determined that stigma and shame were among a majority of negative experiences for people who have non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) scars. A compassionate, person-centred approach is recommended when working with these individuals.

Two Practice Reflections in this issue highlight evidence- and theory-informed practitioner wisdom. “Guiding Clients Towards Self-Kindness and Acceptance: Wrestling With the Inner Critic” (Pearson & Wilson, 2024) outlines eight therapeutic steps to softening habitual self-criticism. Becoming familiar with the self-critical inner voice, processing difficult emotions, recognising triggers, externalising the self-critical process, and exploring blocks to self-compassion (an antidote to the inner critic) contribute to this eight-step individualised pathway in therapy. Another Practice Reflection, “Working Meaningfully With Older Adults in Psychotherapy: Memory, Autobiography, Self, and the Conversational Model” (Roser, 2024), examines how to work with older clients to compose an autobiographical narrative witnessed by an empathic other, which can lead to ego integration, the

final stage of Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1959). Using the case study of Samuel, a divorcee in his 70s, Roser (2024) illustrates how employing the Conversational Model of psychotherapy can help uncover and enhance the autobiographical self, not only of the client but also intergenerationally. Roser reflects that as the population ages, therapists will increasingly need to understand the unique developmental challenges of older adults.

Two other articles showcase the broad range of therapeutic practices utilised in Australia. "Gudu-Guduwa: Healing Disconnection Through Incorporating Bush and Animal-Assisted Therapies Into Therapeutic Practice: A First Nations Reflection" (Stawiarski, 2024) reflects on the author's experiences as an Aboriginal woman and therapist. Indigenous approaches to bush therapy and equine-assisted therapy "honour our family and community networks, reciprocal ways of being, and relationship, and ... include some form of connection to Country" (para. 58). Taking a decolonised stance, Stawiarski (2024) also explores connection with ancestral Country, healing on Country that is not one's own, and healing when connection to Country is severed, as for Stolen Generations survivors (Healing Foundation, n.d., para 15). "The Efficacy of Artwork as a Self-Care Technique to Address Distress in an International Student Studying in Australia" (Lai & Andrews, 2024) considers an art-based autoethnography study designed to alleviate an international tertiary student's distress. Using a mixed methods research design, Lai and Andrews (2024) found that the participant researcher's distress declined and reflections on the process of drawing improved over an eight-week period. They conclude that engaging in "expressive art could enable individuals to reflect on their emotions and experiences, remind themselves of a positive mindset, and cultivate self-love, which could help them manage distress" (para. 45).

As always, heartfelt thanks go to the members of the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA), the PACFA research committee, and the PACJA editorial board, along with the numerous peer reviewers, copyeditors, and Scholastica staff who worked tirelessly on this issue.



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