

Clinical Psychologists' Training/ Education

Thank you for participating in the *Clinical Psychologists' Training/ Education* online study. As you may recall, the objective of the study was to examine the extent to which professional psychologists are prepared and willing to address clients' sexual issues. This study built on our earlier research examining graduate students' sexuality education and training.

The Participants

Participants included 162 clinical (87%) and counselling (13%) psychologists who had completed all elements of their graduate program. All participants were trained in Canada (38.3%) or the United States (61.7%). Participants held a PhD (64.8%), PsyD (18.5%) EdD (0.6%) or MA (16%) degree; 84% had completed the licensing/registration process. On average participants had 12 years of work experience and worked in a variety of agencies such as general hospitals, psychiatric facilities, community mental health centres, private practices, and university counseling centres. The majority (65.4%) of participants were women. Participants ranged in age from 25 to 78 years with an average age of 45 years. Most participants (90.7%) were white and were raised in either Canada (39.5%) or the United States (56.8%).

The Findings

Participants completed a measure that assessed four aspects of the sexuality-focused education and training they had received during their graduate education (including practicum and internship): didactic training, observational experiences, direct therapy experiences, and independent study. They also completed measures of the type of feedback participants received from supervisors regarding their ability to address various sexual issues. They also completed a measure of their post-internship training. In addition, participants completed measures of their self-efficacy related to working with clients with sexual difficulties as well as their willingness to treat as opposed to refer these clients. Finally, they completed a measure of sexual conservatism, and comfort communicating with clients about sexual issues.

The results indicated that nearly all participants had received some form of education related to sexuality during their graduate training but that the breadth and depth of training was limited. Further, the education that they receive was imbalanced both with regard to the topic areas covered and the types of training methods used. Not surprisingly, given the lack of sex education and training, psychologists were found to have limited knowledge of issues related to healthy sexuality and poor sexual intervention self-efficacy, particularly related to their understanding and ability to utilize sex therapy techniques. Further, participants appeared to be reluctant to directly ask about and treat sexual issues and were only somewhat more willing to treat rather than refer clients with sexual issues.

A proposed model of the relationships between sex education, sexual intervention self-efficacy, and intervention behavior was supported. As predicted, psychologists who received more graduate education sought out more continuing education. More education and training was, in turn, associated with higher sexual intervention self-efficacy, which was associated with more intervention behaviors. Interestingly, self-efficacy regarding the ability to appear comfortable and to be unbiased when addressing sexual issues with clients was not related to the educational opportunities that psychologists had had, but rather to cognitive affective factors. Thus, this form of self-efficacy may be challenging to address through improved graduate education.

Two manuscripts based on this research have been published, and a third manuscript is under review. For more detailed information, check out:

Miller, S. A., & Byers, E. S. (2010). Psychologists' sexual education and training in graduate school. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science, 42*, 93-100.

Miller, S. A., & Byers, E. S. (2009). Psychologists' continuing education and training in sexuality. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy, 35*, 206-219.

Miller, S. A., & Byers, E. S. (2008). An exploratory examination of the sexual intervention self-efficacy of clinical psychology graduate students. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology, 2*, 137-144.

Thank You for Supporting Our Research

We hope that you enjoyed participating in this survey. We really appreciate the time you spent completing our survey. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Dr. Sandra Byers (byers@unb.ca; (506) 458-7697) at the Department of Psychology, University of New Brunswick.