Online + Face to Face Counselling

2013-2014 REPORT
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Introduction

Between 2008 and 2012, the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work (FIFSW) partnered with St. Michael’s College and Victoria College at the University of Toronto to develop, deliver and evaluate a four-year pilot counselling initiative for undergraduate university students. This initiative, entitled the Cyber Practicum, involved six MSW interns providing timely and accessible services to undergraduate students at St. Michael’s College and Victoria College. The service comprised traditional face-to-face counselling and cyber counselling (i.e., asynchronous email). The students were supervised by a social worker with over 20 years of experience who was seconded from the University of Toronto Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS).

The service was successful and considered valuable by the Registrars and Dons of St. Michael’s College and Victoria College. Aspects of the Cyber Practicum identified as particularly helpful included: a) shorter waiting periods to access service, b) less stigma associated with seeing a social worker, and 3) lack of judgment and feeling of acceptance by the MSW interns. In response, a partnership was created among the University of Toronto, Faculty of Arts and Science and its undergraduate Colleges, Health and Wellness, and the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, to collaborate in offering such a service with some modifications, initially for a three year period beginning in September 2012. This service was named Counseline.

We have completed year 2 of the Counseline partnership. Results of the Year one Counseline evaluation report indicated that the service was effective.

Counseline continued to be successful during 2013-2014. The trend from last year continued, with a great number of calls made to the service. Based on the volume and with some MSW students embedded in Colleges we determined it was important to have a field instructor who is available for the full 3 days of the practicum placement. For 2014-2015, the Provost agreed to provide the difference between what the 2013-2014 supervisors were paid (including the back-up supervisors), and what would be required to hire a full time clinician to supervise Counseline MSW students 3 days per week. An exciting opportunity for Counseline, benefits include offering continuity and ensuring that the MSW students feel connected to the wider University and the Colleges in which they are situated. This clinician/supervisor will be also available 2 days per week for the University of Toronto Transitional Year Program.
The partners shared provision of resources:

- The Faculty of Arts and Science and Health and Wellness shared in covering the costs of the primary and the back-up supervision (typically supplied by the agencies / organizations in which practicum placements occur).

- Health and Wellness provided central administration regarding electronic health records ensuring PHIPA standards and statistics (reporting of clients seen).

- FIFSW provided the secure IT infrastructure to allow confidential record-keeping and communication between MSW intern counsellors and undergraduate student clients utilizing cyber counselling. FIFSW arranged for 2 days of cyber counselling training in September 2013. An additional ‘booster’ training session was added mid-term.

- Each counselling location (FIFSW, New College, St. Michael’s College, and University College) provided one computer per MSW intern on site.

- Space for counselling sessions was provided as follows:
  
  - FIFSW provided offices for the primary supervisors, back-up supervisors and counselling sessions.
  - New College and St. Michael’s College each provided one office, and University College provided two offices for the counselling sessions.
Counseline

Counseline was offered on Wednesdays through Fridays from September 9, 2013 to April 25, 2014 (Winter break December 13, 2013 to January 6, 2014; reading week February 17 to February 21, 2014). This represented a three-week extension of the MSW Program (MSW students typically completed their practicum placements on April 4, 2014). The Counseline extension was first incorporated during the Cyber Practicum pilot based on feedback about the need for undergraduate students to continue participation in counseling through their exams.

Like other practicum settings, orientation and training was provided for MSW interns:

- Ongoing supervision: MSW interns received individual supervision one hour every other week and group supervision 1¼ hours weekly.
- Cyber counselling training (two days) at the beginning of practicum (offered by Lawrence Murphy, Founder and Director, Eastern Region, Worldwide Therapy Online Inc.). An additional ‘booster’ training session was offered mid-term.
- MSW interns received a package of articles addressing theories related to social work practice, and information on issues pertaining to university students.

The service was advertised through various means: word of mouth; flyers made available at all seven Arts and Science Undergraduate Colleges (e.g., student centre, Dons, Registrars); an announcement on the Health and Wellness website; emails to all seven Arts and Science Undergraduate College listservs; and presentations for College Representatives and College Dons were held at Victoria College and St. Michael’s College. Staff members at the University of Toronto Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS) were also informed of Counseline and referred students to the service.

Students in the Undergraduate Colleges who were interested in Counseline services were asked to phone and leave a message at the Counseline main number. A supervisor assigned each appropriate call to an MSW intern to arrange an initial meeting.

The most frequently reason reported by the undergraduate students for seeking counseling was to receive support for mood problems, followed by anxiety. Other reported reasons for seeking counseling included: the opportunity to discuss and address general life problems; emotional difficulties; academic difficulties; romantic relationship issues; stress; family problems; adjustment problems; addiction; trauma; eating disorders, and loneliness.
2013-2014 Program Statistics

- Six Year 2 MSW student interns
- Two primary supervisors (Dr. Deborah Levine and Colleen Amato) and three back-up supervisors (FIFSW PhD students)
- Dates: September 9, 2013 to April 25, 2014 (excluding Winter break and reading week)
- Females (121) and males (41) utilized the service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2013-2014</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of students who called Counseline</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of students assigned to MSW interns</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of students seen</td>
<td>162</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>From St. Michael’s College</td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>From Victoria College</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>From Innis College</td>
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<tr>
<td>From University College</td>
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<tr>
<td>From Trinity College</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From New College</td>
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<tr>
<td>From Woodsworth College</td>
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<tr>
<td># of face-to-face counselling clients</td>
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<tr>
<td># of registered cyber counselling clients</td>
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<tr>
<td># of clients actively engaged in cyber counselling</td>
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<tr>
<td># of total clinical visits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Face-to-face visits</td>
<td>668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyber visits – Asynchronous email</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cyber visits – Synchronous text chats</td>
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<td># of students who attended the following sessions:</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 sessions</td>
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<tr>
<td>3-5 sessions</td>
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<tr>
<td>6-10 sessions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10+ sessions</td>
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Research / Evaluation

In 2012, the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, Health and Wellness and the Faculty of Arts and Science put into effect a yearly evaluation to ensure quality service provision. FIFSW received ethics approval from the University of Toronto Health Science 1 Research Ethics Board for the evaluation of face-to-face and cyber counselling competencies and the effectiveness of the service, and has received yearly renewal. The investigators conducting the evaluation are Professor Faye Mishna and Professor Marion Bogo. The goals of the evaluation are to examine the effectiveness of Counseline and to explore the experiences and views of the undergraduate student clients and the MSW student interns. Confidentiality of undergraduate clients, MSW interns, supervisors, College Representatives and College Dons was ensured according to the ethics protocol. All identifying information and data are kept in a locked filing cabinet in the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work. If participants have questions about the research, they are encouraged to contact Joanne Daciuk, Research Manager at the Faculty, rather than Faye Mishna or Marion Bogo, to ensure their confidentiality.

In the 2013-2014 academic year, 121 of 162 students consented to participate in the research study. Five students subsequently withdrew leaving a total number of 116. These students completed a series of questionnaires and interviews.

Demographics

Undergraduate student participants ranged in age from 17 to 39 years with a mean age of 20 years. Of the 112 participants for whom demographic information was available, 87 were female and 25 were male. Students’ current year of enrollment in undergraduate studies ranged from Years 1 to 5: 23% of the students were enrolled in Year 1, 28% in Year 2, 20% in Year 3, 22% in Year 4, and 7% in Year 5.

Sixty-two percent of students were born in Canada, and 67% stated English was their primary language. Other primary languages included Cantonese, Chinese, Russian, Persian, Spanish, among many others. Forty percent of the students reported moving to Toronto to attend university. Fifty-one percent of the students were single. Thirty-eight percent of the participating students reported that they lived off campus with their parents, while 30% lived with a roommate, and 19% lived in residence.
Client Outcomes: Before and After Counseline

In addition to completing a Demographic Information form, participants completed the following questionnaires:

1. Questionnaire about their specific goals in therapy, and the extent to which they perceived those goals were met post-counselling.
2. Standardized pre- and post-questionnaire regarding their psychological symptoms and distress: The Symptom Checklist (SCL-90-R) (Derogatis, 1994).
4. Standardized pre- and post-questionnaire regarding their attachment style: Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998).

Goals in Counselling

When they began counselling, the undergraduate student clients were asked to identify three key problems they wished to address through Counseline, and to indicate how optimistic they felt about resolving these problems through the therapy. Overall, clients were likely to report feeling “optimistic” that they could resolve the identified issues (on a scale ranging from “very pessimistic” to “very optimistic”). After therapy, participants were asked whether they met their counselling goals. The majority of clients reported that they either “somewhat” or completely met these goals (49% and 37% respectively).

When asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement that their academic outcomes (e.g., class attendance, grades, school engagement) had improved, 35% of clients agreed, and 37% provided a neutral response, neither agreeing nor disagreeing that their academic outcomes had improved. However, only 10% of the sample cited an academic issue on the questionnaire.

Psychological Symptoms and Distress

The Symptom Checklist (SCL-90-R) was used to assess the undergraduate student clients’ overall self-reported psychological symptoms before and after their involvement with Counseline. The SCL-90-R has been shown to have strong reliability (Cronbach’s alpha ranges from .77 to .90) and validity for the measurement of global psychological symptoms (Derogatis, 1994). The questionnaire subscales assess client status across a range of symptoms (e.g., depression, anxiety, psychoticism), and these scales provide a Global Severity Index (GSI) T-score, which
reflects the overall level of a client’s psychological problems. Higher T-scores reflect more reported psychological symptoms and distress than would be observed in a typical population of psychiatric outpatients. Findings from multivariate analyses of the pre- and post- counselling scores indicate that undergraduate student clients exhibited significantly less psychological symptoms and distress after Counseline (Figure 1). The impact of Counseline on the clients’ psychological symptoms was large in magnitude, as indicated by a standardized measure of effect size. In terms of individual symptom categories, from pre to post, clients exhibited significantly less symptoms on the Somatization, Obsessive-Compulsive, Interpersonal Sensitivity, Depression, Anxiety, Hostility, Phobic Anxiety, Paranoid Ideation and Psychoticism subscales. Thus, there was an average decline in client symptoms (or T-score) across all symptom categories post-counselling. In order to further determine whether a clinically reliable decrease in symptoms had occurred post-counselling, the Reliable Change Index (RCI, Jacobson & Traux, 1991) was used. Of the respondents (n=61), 31% showed clinically significant and reliable improvement, meaning that the decrease in pre- and post- scores of these respondents was significantly reliable and post-test scores fell within the normal range. Overall, this suggests that Counseline was effective in reducing many clients’ psychological symptoms.

Figure 1. Clients’ average psychological symptoms and distress, pre- and post- counselling
Social Functioning

The Social Adjustment Scale: Short (SAS-SR: Short) was used to assess clients’ overall social adjustment, defined as the adaptation to, and ability to obtain satisfaction from, one’s social roles. This was evaluated before and after involvement with Counseline. The SAS-SR has been shown to have strong reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = .80) and validity for the measurement of social adjustment (Weissman, 2007). This scale also provides a T-score that represents the overall average degree of social adjustment across various social role areas (e.g., work role, family unit, primary relationship). Higher T-scores reflect more significant social adjustment problems than would be observed in a typical non-clinical population. Preliminary findings from multivariate analyses of pre- and post- counselling scores indicate that undergraduate student clients exhibited significantly less problems with social adjustment after Counseline (Figure 2). Counseline’s impact on social adjustment was moderate in magnitude, as indicated by a standardized measure of effect size. On average, at baseline, social adjustment was in the “slightly atypical (borderline: possible significant problem)” range. Post-counselling, clients’ social adjustment improved significantly, with scores falling in the “Average (typical score: no concern)” range. To further determine whether a clinically reliable decrease in social adjustment T-scores had occurred post-counselling, the RCI was calculated. Of the respondents (n=60), 15 % showed clinically significant and reliable improvement, meaning that the decrease in pre- and post- scores of these respondents was significantly reliable and post-test scores fell within the normal range. This suggests that for a proportion of clients, Counseline was effective in improving social adjustment.

Figure 2. Clients’ average social adjustment, pre- and post- counselling
Attachment Style

Attachment style (attachment anxiety and/or attachment avoidance) was assessed before and after counselling, using the *Experiences in Close Relationships Scale*. The SAS-SR has been shown to have excellent reliability (Cronbach’s alpha ranges from .92 to .95) and validity for the measurement of attachment style (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Wei et al., 2007). Higher scores on the *Attachment Anxiety* dimension and/or the *Attachment Avoidance* dimension of this scale are indicative of the presence of more anxious-avoidant traits, or a greater tendency to display an insecure attachment style in adult relationships (Wei et al., 2007). This measure is a 7 point Likert scale that is more ordinal in nature but was analyzed as a scale variable (total score is 7, where higher scores indicate more anxious-avoidant). Results indicate that undergraduate student clients’ attachment style did not significantly change after involvement with *Counseline*. At pre-treatment, clients’ mean rating fell within the normal range, at 3.80, which remained stable following treatment (mean rating at 3.62). These findings are consistent with other studies demonstrating the relative stability of attachment style across the lifespan (see Fraley, 2002 for a review).

Clients’ Experiences of Counseline

Fifty-five consenting undergraduate student clients participated in a post-counselling interview to explore in depth their experiences of face-to-face and cyber counselling. Interview transcripts were analyzed using NVivo (qualitative statistical software program) and predominant themes were identified. Preliminary findings from these interviews revealed student perspectives with respect to: 1) program benefits; 2) counsellor characteristics and competencies required for effective outcomes; 3) achievement of their counselling goals; and 4) cyber counselling experiences.

Benefits and Limitations of Counseline

Students reported that *Counseline* gave them the opportunity to express their problems and concerns to a neutral, objective individual; to make use of various techniques, tools and resources to address their problems; and to make positive behavioral and emotional changes.

A number of undergraduate student clients also expressed that a strong advantage of *Counseline* was the ease of access to their counsellors through email when needed, regardless of whether they were involved in face-to-face and/or cyber counselling.
For example, one participant described how she felt supported by the accessibility of her counsellor by email in between sessions:

“She was also available to speak with me through email throughout the week or whenever I wasn’t seeing her. A few times, I did have to email her and she was quick to respond. She was always very helpful and friendly and just made me feel like I could talk to her if I needed to, even when I wasn’t directly meeting with her.”

Another student found comfort in having email access to her counsellor:

“...it is good to have that access there, because sometimes you’re not able to be in person and knowing that you have somebody to talk to the rest of the week is kind of comforting. Even if you don’t use it, just knowing that it’s there and that you can email them if you have to was comforting, for me at least.”

This finding that clients who participate in either face-to-face or cyber counselling may desire or pursue cyber contact with their counsellors between sessions, is consistent with a growing phenomenon in traditional face-to-face counselling (Mishna, Bogo, Root, Sawyer, & Khoury-kassabri, 2012; Mishna, Bogo, Root, & Fantus, 2014).

A limitation of the Counseline service that was cited by the undergraduate student clients was that the service is not suitable for clients with long-term counselling needs or who are struggling with very complex problems. In a small number of cases, this expressed limitation resulted in client perceptions that counselling termination was too “abrupt”.

Counsellor Characteristics and Competencies

Most undergraduate student clients identified several characteristics and competencies they believed were important in facilitating an effective therapeutic experience for them through Counseline. The most common competency described by participants was the counsellor’s ability to develop an effective therapeutic relationship or alliance with clients. From the clients’ perspectives, counsellors achieved this by: displaying a caring, empathic and non-judgmental attitude; being supportive of the client; demonstrating strong listening skills and understanding the client’s needs.
As an example, a participant described how his counsellor created a safe environment for self-expression:

“He was polite and also very warm and nice and you felt like you could talk to him more. That’s one thing that stood out as opposed to other experiences with therapists that I’ve had. He was, like I said, warm and we had a relationship where I would be able to tell him more things than I would tell other therapists because I felt like he wouldn’t judge me about it…he was a big part of a support system.”

Other counsellor characteristics and competencies identified by the undergraduate student clients included: having adequate knowledge of therapeutic techniques (e.g., cognitive behavioral therapy [CBT]), the ability to connect clients with resources that could help them address their problems, and the capacity to adopt a less structured approach to counselling if necessary (e.g., can use non-directed conversation).

Achievement of Counselling Goals

Most of the undergraduate student clients expressed having achieved their primary counselling goals. Specifically, students explained that they were able to identify the underlying source of their difficulties and make effective use of specific techniques (e.g., CBT tools and strategies). Many students noted that they experienced a reduction of psychological symptoms by making observable behavioral and affective changes (e.g., reduced substance use, improved mood).

For instance, one student client described how the achievement of her counselling goals resulted in observable changes:

“People who don’t know that I was going to counselling have really noticed a change in me over the past couple of months and I think that’s a very obvious indicator as well. Some people who know me but don’t know that I was going to it can see the change. I feel a change…so I think that’s definitely a good sign.”

When describing their counselling goals, many clients made statements such as: “I just feel happy with my life right now so...my first goal was met”; “I noticed a huge improvement in myself”; “it just worked”, and “I definitely feel like what I entered the program for was fulfilled.”
Client Perspectives about Cyber Counselling

Although the majority of clients participated in face-to-face counselling, in the 2013-2014 year, 22 clients registered for cyber counseling and 16 students actively engaged in cyber counseling. There were a total of 29 cyber exchanges and 2 live chat sessions. Undergraduate student clients identified some general advantages and limitations of cyber counselling.

Primary advantages of cyber counselling identified by undergraduate student clients included finding cyber counselling: 1) more easily accessible; 2) convenient for addressing problems “in-the-moment”, when immediate attention was needed; and 3) providing continuity between regular face-to-face sessions or through cyber contact with the counsellor during winter break. For example, one client described a critical moment in her process of therapeutic self-discovery when she needed immediate contact with her counsellor, to avoid hindering positive change by waiting for a face-to-face counselling session:

“I sent her an email after an appointment, where I had a lot of thoughts and I wasn’t able to actually say them, it didn’t come out. I came home and I typed this big long email and I sent it to her... I felt it was sort of a breakthrough moment type of thing. I felt the need to get it a) out and b) to her while it was still in words. While I was still thinking the thoughts and feelings...actually type it out and make it authentic as opposed to coming in [to a face-to-face session] and being like oh, I felt some stuff at the time.”

Another client described how the accessibility of cyber counselling solidified her desire to solely seek out counselling that occurs in the context of cyber interaction in the future:

“Client: It’s very accessible...”
Interviewer: “What do think would have happened if cyber counselling wasn’t an option?”
Client: “Oh, if it wasn’t? I probably wouldn’t do it anymore. I wouldn’t see any more counselling or psychologists anymore...[cyber counselling] was the best way, the best forum.”

A common limitation cited by undergraduate student client participants was that cyber communication felt impersonal, or “disconnected”. Others shared that they feared that cyber counselling could lead to a misinterpretation in communication, particularly in the absence of visual cues such as body language, voice tone and facial expressions.
**MSW Interns’ Experiences of Counseline**

All six MSW interns participated in a follow-up interview to discuss their practicum experiences. Based on these interviews, two key themes were identified: 1) subjective definitions of and development of clinical competency, and 2) perspectives about cyber counselling.

**Interns’ Definitions and Development of Clinical Competency**

Most of the MSW interns had minimal (0 to 5 years) counselling experience prior to Counseline. All of the interns expressed being able to work hard on their clinical skills through this practicum, as they met with a number of undergraduate student clients and therefore had many clinical hours. Each intern believed that through their involvement in Counseline they gained exposure to a variety of clients with a broad spectrum of presenting problems ranging from academic and relationship issues to depression, anxiety, substance abuse, grief and loss.

The MSW interns all stated that their work in Counseline helped them to further develop social work competence. The interns’ definitions of competence varied, but included indicators such as: being non-judgmental, being an effective listener, and developing skills in the application of different clinical techniques (e.g., client-centered approaches, CBT). The interns stated that developing competency occurs through direct experience and client exposure.

For example, one intern summarized competency in social work as follows:

“What does it mean to be a good social worker? What are the personal characteristics that you have? Competency is like are you warm, are you engaging, you are a good listener. These are interpersonal/personal competencies and then there’s the can you do your job? Do you know resources to connect people to? Do you know the different presenting problems? What’s a good take-away tool you can give a client?”

Most of the MSW interns believed they would benefit from more specialized counselling training (e.g., trauma focused therapy, CBT), as well as additional clinical supervision (both group and individual) in the context of Counseline.
Interns’ Perspectives about Cyber Counselling

None of the six MSW interns had cyber counselling experience prior to participating in Counseline. All but one of the interns found the cyber training they received to be very helpful, and believed that including cyber practices into counselling would be an effective way to connect with their clients (one intern was “skeptical” about the use of cyber counselling). Some interns believed that they would likely incorporate cyber counselling into their future professional practice, beyond the current practicum. Other interns stated that cyber counselling competence could potentially represent a marketable skill for them in the job market in the future.

One intern described her overall cyber practicum experience by stating:

“I guess my biggest feedback is that I do like this practicum. I think there is great potential for it. It’s a great opportunity. You do get to see a variety of clients ...you learn and grow professionally, tremendously.”
**Preliminary Evaluation of MSW Intern Cyber Counselling Competence: The Cyber Counseling Objective Structured Clinical Examination (COSCE)**

The Cyber Counseling Objective Structured Clinical Examination (COSCE) is a tool used to assess the competence of trainees and professionals in cyber counselling (Fang, Bogo, Mishna, Murphy, Gibson, Griffiths, & Regehr, 2013). The COSCE consists of a practice performance rating scale and two standardized clinical scenarios. The performance rating scale has 18 items, 13 of which assess general elements in counselling, while the other 5 items evaluate specific non-verbal elements of communication in text-based cyber counselling. Expert raters independently rate the trainee’s or professional’s performance on the standardized clinical scenarios on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 indicates a low-level of competence and 5 indicates a high-level of competence. The final COSCE score is the average of the total performance rating scores from the standardized scenarios evaluated. The COSCE was administered twice during the Year 2 *Counseline* practicum, first in September 2013 (T1), when MSW interns began their practicum, and again in April 2014 (T2), when MSW interns were near completion of their practicum. Of the six interns, four consented to have their COSCE scores analyzed for research purposes.

Results showed that from T1 to T2, interns demonstrated an improvement in such areas as demonstrating ethical/legal knowledge, using emotional bracketing and using non-lexical verbalizations. Improvement was not demonstrated in other areas such as maintaining focus of the interview and managing termination. It is important to note however, that these results are only preliminary and insufficient to draw any reliable conclusions at this time. As such, we plan to continue the COSCE analysis in 2014-2015, with more MSWs included to allow for a more meaningful analysis.
Perspectives of Counseline Supervisors and Back-up Support Staff

The two MSW intern supervisors and one back-up supervisor participated in a follow-up interview to explore in-depth their experiences of the cyber practicum.

MSW Supervisor Perspectives about Cyber Counselling

The supervisors all stated having made efforts to encourage the interns to incorporate cyber practices. Supervisors felt that some students were more open than others to doing so. They wondered if this may be related to interns’ age and degree of openness to a new method of counselling, a question that should be systematically explored. The supervisors’ perspectives were that the interns who succeeded at incorporating cyber counselling were those who appeared more confident and more willing to take risks, as well as those who were very well organized, which aided them in creating the emails in which they wrote to clients. The supervisors believed that when an intern gained skills in cyber counselling, this became an effective medium for communicating with the client. Overall, supervisors found that the combination of cyber and face-to-face counselling was an effective, complementary approach.

Clinical Supervision in a Cyber Counselling Context

Supervisors indicated that they tried to make themselves available to interns when difficult issues arose, or when the interns had any concerns. The supervisors considered supervision critical to the practicum and to the interns’ learning. Given the complexity of client problems, the supervisors believed that the interns required more supervision in the cyber context (e.g., supervision that was specific to cyber interactions with clients). One supervisor noted: “It would have been nice if I had given a supervision session in cyber.” The supervisors also stated that it would be important for them as supervisors to further develop their own competency in cyber counselling in order to be able to more effectively support interns. For example, one supervisor stated: “I think the person in the supervisory position would want to develop a little bit more competency. I certainly didn’t feel like an expert supervisor for the cyber counselling.”

Overall, the supervisors indicated that Counseline provided a valuable social work practicum setting for MSW interns seeking strong clinical experiences.
Faculty of Arts and Science Colleges Staff Perspectives of Counseline

The Dons, Registrars, Deans, and other key staff (Don Trainers and Principals) from the Faculty of Arts and Science Undergraduate Colleges were asked to participate in an in-person interview as key informants, regarding their perspectives on this collaborative practicum.

Undergraduate College Dons provided feedback suggesting that they consider Counseline a good alternative for referring students, especially those students who are experiencing issues that are not of an emergency nature. Most of the Dons stated that they referred undergraduate students to Counseline.

Other key staff in the undergraduate colleges suggested increasing Counseline visibility, for example through a dedicated program website. College staff also suggested offering alternative response modes to initial referral inquiries made by undergraduate students, specifically offering undergraduate students the opportunity to initially contact Counseline through email as well as telephone in order to decrease instances of missed referrals due to poor telephone communication. Most college staff stated that they would benefit from increased contact with Counseline staff throughout the year in order to further enhance collaboration and in turn bolster student referrals to what many described as a “valuable” service.

Conclusion

In concordance with the Year 1 Counseline evaluation results (see Mishna, Bhole & Iwenofu, 2013), results of the Year 2 evaluation research (which comprised administering pre- and post-counselling questionnaires and conducting individual interviews) indicate that the service continues to be effective.

Both Year 1 and Year 2 evaluations indicate that after involvement with Counseline, clients on average exhibited significantly less psychological symptoms and distress, less social adjustment problems, and believed they met their counselling goals. In both years, clients’ attachment styles did not change over the course of counselling, which is consistent with other research findings that support the stability of attachment style across the lifespan (Fraley, 2002).
Individual qualitative interviews conducted with undergraduate student clients, MSW interns, intern supervisors (and back-up supervisors), Undergraduate College Dons and other key college staff represented a critical source of program process evaluation in Year 2. Interview findings suggest that Counseline’s effectiveness was attributable in part to the following factors:

- **From the perspective of undergraduate student clients**
  - opportunity to express problems and concerns to a neutral, objective individual;
  - use of techniques, tools and resources to address their problems;
  - observable positive behavioral and affective changes;
  - easy access to counsellors through email between sessions, when needed.

- **From the perspective of MSW interns**
  - opportunity to further develop clinical social work competence
  - effective cyber counselling training

- **From the perspective of supervisors/back-up supervisor:**
  - MSW interns’ exposure to diverse clinical experiences
  - potential for combination of cyber and face-to-face counselling modalities for individual client (i.e., complementary approaches)

- **From the perspective of Undergraduate College Dons and key college staff:**
  - effective alternate referral option, especially for less acute presenting problems.

We identified ways to further enhance the effectiveness of the Counseline service:

- **Offer additional clinical supervision to MSW interns specific to cyber counselling interactions with clients.**

- **Increase the frequency of Counseline staff contact with college staff to enhance collaboration**
References


