

## **Research Project 2**

### **Working title:**

Counselling changes lives: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the impact of counsellor training on trainees.

### **Recruitment Criteria:**

Participants will be current counselling students at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David or will have qualified from this university over the last two years.

### **Recruitment Strategy:**

Information explaining the participant criteria and research will be advertised via a recruitment announcement posted on the university's Moodle platform.

Relevant information and contact details of the researcher will also be disseminated via professional and academic networks.

### **Timeline:**

**Ethical approval:** Approved 15<sup>TH</sup> January 2026.

**Participant Recruitment:** March 2026.

**Data collection and analysis:** April/May/June 2026. 6-8 semi-structured, qualitative interviews.

**Article:** Submitted July 2026. BACP Counselling and Psychotherapy Research (CPR) or the European Journal of Qualitative Research in Psychotherapy.

### **Research Outline:**

The 2.12 million UK individuals who contacted mental health services last year verified an 11.5% increase in people seeking support (NHS Mental Health Activity Tracker, 2025), and in drawing attention to an annual survey into the state of the nation's mental health (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy [BACP], 2025a), Morrison (2025), also notes a deterioration in public mental health and advocates the importance of equitable access to high-quality, mental health support.

Within this landscape, the BACP strapline, 'Counselling changes lives' (BACP, 2025b), is instantly recognisable, and sends a clear, well-evidenced (Aldana-Parra, Olaya- Vega & Fewtrell, 2025; Collins, Broglia & Barkham, 2025; Sarier, et.al., 2025) message to current/prospective clients, mental health professionals and the general public. Alongside this, however, sits a particular cohort for whom contact with counselling can be life-changing, as counsellor trainees often experience profound life changes as the result of their training. When training to be a counsellor, the increased reflexivity, heightened self-awareness, and resultant experiences can impact a trainee's self-worth, self-esteem, values/beliefs, and relationships with 'self' and significant others. The impact of such transitions was described graphically over thirty years ago through metaphor, "The changes in me rocked many boats, some perilously near to capsize" (Connor, 1994, p.225; Cole, 2018, p.60), yet despite the possibility of such intense personal consequences, these experiences are under-researched.

Today's trainees are tomorrow's counsellors, and this study therefore explores the lived experience of counsellor trainees through an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2022).

The research is timely, as firstly, it aligns with the 'Commission on the future of counselling and psychotherapy' (BACP, 2025c), which brings together voices and insights from those with the relevant lived experience to consider improvements to the nation's mental health (Hope, 2025). Secondly, a collaboration between six professional bodies, SCoPEd (Scope of Practice and Education for Counselling and Psychotherapy), in providing a steer for professional development and career progression through agreed training and practice requirements (SCoPEd Framework, 2025), calls for all approved qualifications to map to the SCoPEd framework by early 2028. This is therefore an appropriate time to explore counsellor training experiences.

This research has implications for the profession, and the training of psychotherapists, as it will add to the scarce body of knowledge about how students might be better prepared and supported for potential self/life changes initiated by training. Suggestions for the design and content of future counsellor training programmes will, in time, improve client outcomes.

## References:

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British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. (2025a). *BACP Mindometer: Annual survey into the state of the nation's mental health*.

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Cole, J. (2018). *The role of training and supervision in supporting student counsellors on placement* (Unpublished master's dissertation).

Collins, C., Broglia, E., & Barkham, M. (2025). Evaluating the evidence base for university counselling services and their effectiveness using CORE measures: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *School of Psychology, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom*.

Connor, M. (1994). *Training the counsellor: An integrative model*. Routledge.

Hope, P. (2025). BACP commission for the future of counselling and psychotherapy. British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.

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NHS Mental Health Tracker, England. (2025). *NHS mental health activity tracker: Annual survey (June 2025)*.

Sarier, C., Walsh, S., Bowers, S., O'Connor, M., Mohamed, A., Keller, H., Ford, K. L., Galvin, R., & Griffin, A. (2025). Effectiveness of interventions to improve malnutrition among older adults living with frailty who are discharged from the acute setting: A systematic review. *Nutrients*, 17(19), 3181.

SCoPEd Partnership. (2025). *A shared framework for the scope of practice and education for counselling and psychotherapy with adults* (January 2022, amended 2025).

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2022). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method, and research* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications

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