

# THE INFLUENCE OF PRACTICUM OR INTERNSHIP PSYCHOLOGY TRAINING ON STUDENTS' PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING: A LITERATURE REVIEW



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## Introduction

- Psychology, as a helping field, emphasizes altruism. This can be observed in how the American Psychological Association (APA) provides a push towards volunteering. An example of this is written in the Code of Ethics, namely in two separate and distinct charges towards social involvement, like volunteering (APA, 2010).
- Within psychology graduate programs, *most* "volunteer activity" is generally provided as a currency in a practicum or internship as clinical training. In this model, "free" labor is traded for course credit, relevant work experience, or other self-promoting motivating factors. Additionally, clinical training is a core component of a scientist-practitioner and practitioner-scholar models, often requiring a specific number of hours per week for multiple years (Beehr et al., 2010; Wilson, 2000).
- During their clinical training experiences, trainees are tasked with simultaneously bearing the burden of academic and clinical rigor requirements, while maintaining adequate work-life balance. Students must approach these challenges while managing their wellbeing, and often without appropriate structure and support from their training institution (Bamonti et al., 2014; Colman et al., 2016; Zahniser et al. 2017).
- Despite the extensive wealth of research on volunteering and the positive effects on multiple individual identities, plus the ample literature exploring student experiences in graduate training programs in psychology, there is a lack of empirical evidence regarding the impact of volunteering activities related to graduate clinical training (i.e., practicum and internship) on the psychological well-being of graduate students.
- This poster presents a summary of the current literature regarding the influence of graduate psychology clinical and internship experiences (as currency exchange volunteering) on students' psychological well-being, specifically in the areas of stress management, coping strategies, and prevention of impairment or burnout.
- This poster presents ideas for future consideration for graduate training programs, as well as potential areas of future research.

## Methods

- A literature search was conducted in Academic Search Premier, CINAHL, and APA PsychINFO. Several keywords/phrases used to search the databases include "psychological well-being," "practicum," "internship," "clinical training," "graduate psychology," "psychology programs," and "volunteering," as well as combinations of the keywords.
- The inclusion criteria consisted of empirically evidenced articles and systematic literature reviews. International studies were used to further inform cultural perceptions towards clinical training. All articles were in English.
- The research journals and databases were searched from the last 25 years. The search yielded many hundreds of results. The articles were reviewed and narrowed down for appropriateness and relevance to the study topic, based on empirical evidence and the purpose of this literature review.
- In this review, psychological well-being was defined as a process of self-actualization through six separate domains: self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, purpose in life, personal growth, and autonomy (Ryff & associated, 1989; 2008). Additionally, Greenfield and Marks (2004) refer to well-being as one's productive occupation with life, finding meaning, and experiences for growth. Additionally, it is a focus on the minimization of negative affect and the maximization of life satisfaction (Greenfield & Marks, 2004), plus enhancing positive affect, social support, and self-reflection (Black & Living, 2004), therefore concepts of stress management, coping strategies and prevention of impairment and burnout were considered.

## Results

- After applying selection criteria to over 600 articles, 73 articles were identified to be most relevant to this literature review. They were examined, summarized, and consolidated into a comprehensive literature review.
- Of the 73 articles chosen, 21% of the articles focused on students' stress within psychology graduate programs; 19% focused on impairment or burnout related to experiences within the clinical training; 19% focused on self-care as a both coping and prevention of impairment strategies (see Graph 1 for more information).
- The studies were predominantly Quantitative.

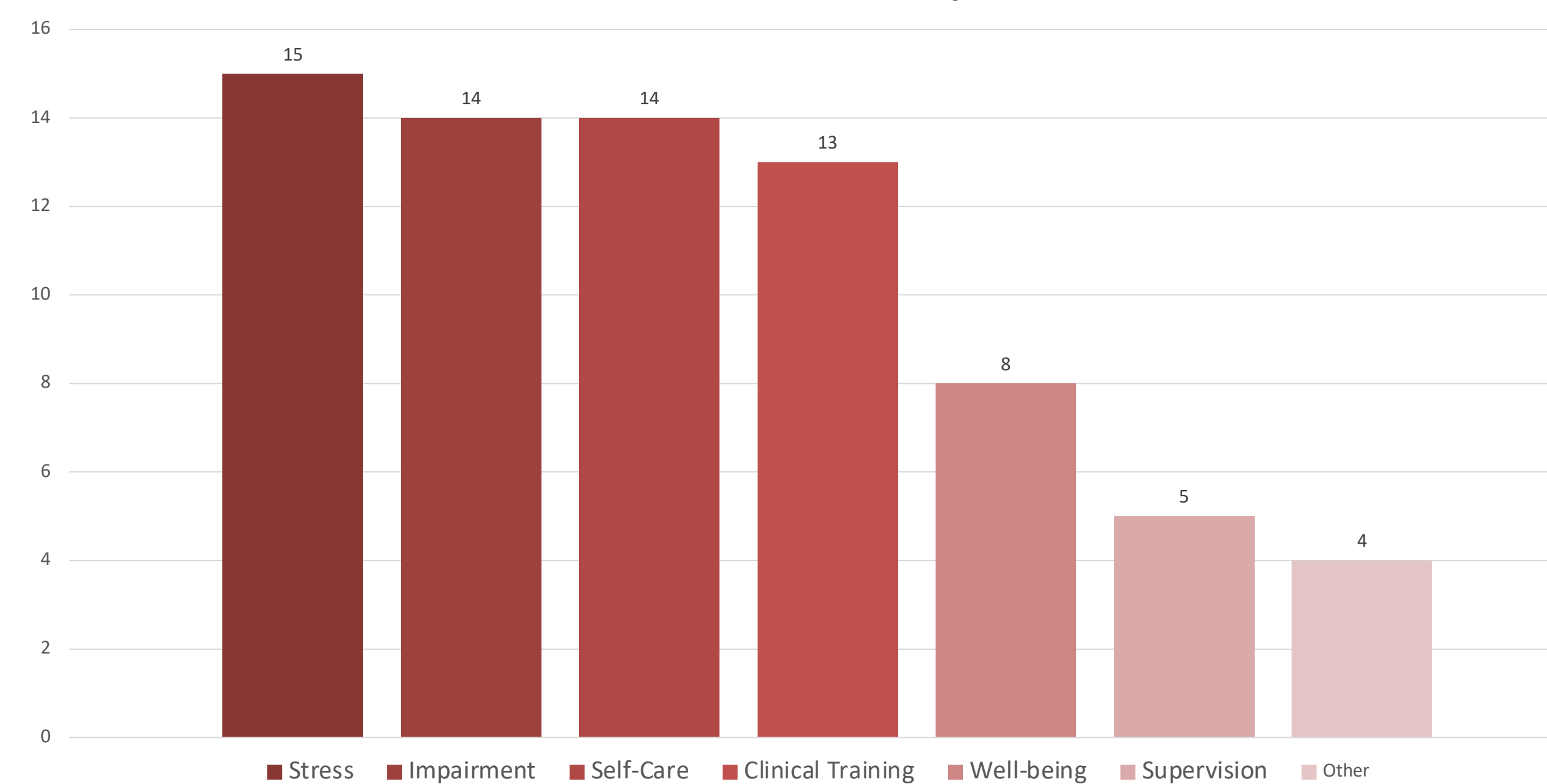
## Main Themes and Discussion

- There is a lack of research examining the impact of clinical training on psychology graduate students' wellbeing. Much of the literature available identifies the rigor and stress of the graduate programs in their entirety, instead of a narrowed focus on only the influence of clinical training on students' experiences.
- The majority of the articles discussed that graduate students in clinical training experience a complexity of demands. In addition to balancing their multiple academic, clinical training, and personal responsibilities, they must also adjust to developing relationships with faculty, supervisors, and mentors, while learning to appropriately advocate for themselves. Many authors have examined the causes and consequences of such a strenuous burden on graduate psychology students, both as a result of institutional practices and personal traits or habits (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012; McKinzie et al., 2006).
- The literature review revealed trainees commonly faced either personal or professional challenges after the onset of clinical training affecting optimal functioning or competency. Social and professional support are indicated as protective factors, although high workloads and decreased engagement can exacerbate both perceived stress and accessing appropriate intervention (Kaufman, 2006; Rosenberg et al., 2005).
- Most of the articles demonstrated that the following are important strategies for increasing well-being during graduate training programs: social support, peer mentorship, spiritual resources, regular physical activity, mindfulness, personal psychotherapy, regular breaks away from academic and clinical responsibilities, and seeking medical care where appropriate.
- Coping strategies and the prevention of impairment or burnout share features often attributed to self-care. Based on the reviewed literature, self-care is a critical component for avoiding burnout and impairment in clinical training, and continued practice of self-care is a protective factor for practicing psychologists (Schwebel & Coster, 1998; Smith & Moss, 2009). However, despite many researchers urging graduate universities to incorporate self-care as an essential part of curriculum, no standard has been set or agreed upon for implementation (Bamonti et al., 2014; Coleman et al., 2016; Munsey, 2006).
- Many articles demonstrated that role of the supervisor in clinical training is critical and can impact trainees' professional development, integration within complex systems, and quality of care they provide to their clients (Devine & Hunter, 2017; Ives & Rowley, 2005; Ramos-Sánchez, et al., 2002).
- Overall, the literature suggests that clinical training, combined with other graduate training program requirements, can have negative influences on the students' psychological well-being.
- One limitation of this paper is that it is not a systematic literature review, but a qualitative summary of the evidence regarding the topic of study. Additionally, there is a shortage of research focused only on psychology clinical training, which made it impossible to truly understand the influence of graduate psychology clinical training on students' psychological well-being.

## Conclusion and Future Directions

- This literature review demonstrated that there is a lack of research focused on the influence of clinical training experiences on psychology graduate students' psychological wellbeing.
- Based on the findings of this literature review, it is evident that graduate training institutions should incorporate self-care opportunities into every step of the training, specially through students' clinical experiences. In incorporating self-care, it will be important to utilize evidence-based practices, recommendations from both students and practitioners, and it should be implemented in similar ways that other training standards or criterium.
- A systematic literature related to the same topic could enhance the evidence found on this paper.
- Future research could explore differences on impact of volunteering versus graduate clinical training in graduate psychology students who participate in both activities. This could demonstrate whether psychological well-being resulting from volunteerism extends to psychology graduate students.

Articles Reviewed by Theme



Graph 1: Distribution Themes Presented in Articles Reviewed

## References

List available through:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ehLkIvrzEWeclA0oSu1QGgo\\_3mFpOAXf/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ehLkIvrzEWeclA0oSu1QGgo_3mFpOAXf/view?usp=sharing)