
A Practitioner's Guide to Peer Counselling Research Issues and Dilemmas

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Abstract

This paper focuses on key peer counselling implementation and research questions. Included are issues as to whether or not peer counselling expands professional support services; the environmental impact, training content, process and duration of peer counselling programs, selection of peer counsellors; referral patterns; and types of clients and problems undertaken. The author draws from qualitative research methodologies, such as participant observation and phenomenology, which are more readily associated with the social sciences and education to suggest a variety of ways of collecting data which will help us to respond to the research questions and to remain sensitive to our program goals and contextual limitations.

Résumé

Cet article porte principalement sur les questions-clés concernant l'implantation et la recherche au niveau du counseling par les pairs. Des discussions telles que est-ce que le counseling par les pairs est une extension des services de support professionnel, l'impact sur l'environnement, le contenu du stage, le processus et la durée du programme de counseling par les pairs, la sélection des conseillers, les systèmes de référence, les types de clients, et les problèmes rencontrés. L'auteur tire des méthodologies qualitatives de recherche, telles que l'observation participative et la phénoménologie associées aux sciences sociales et à l'éducation, pour suggérer différentes façons de recueillir des données qui nous aideront à répondre aux questions de la recherche et pour demeurer ouvert aux buts du programme et tenir compte des limites contextuelles.

INTRODUCTION

The use of peers as a way of delivering counselling services has grown considerably over the last decade. In Canada, Carr (1986) reported that over an eight year period, peer counselling programs have increased by more than 1000 per cent. In the United States, Carroll and King (1985) labelled peer counselling as both a phenomenon and a quiet revolution which is "... a product of our times" (p. 7).

The peer counselling phenomenon has grown from the grassroots, not the ivory tower. As is the case with other practitioner-directed innovations in the education system, however, the research associated with peer counselling has been slow in its evolution. Varenhorst has observed that "Peer counseling, as a recognized counseling intervention, has a brief past, an active current existence, and a potentially strong future if supported by adequate research" (1984, p. 716).

The purpose of this paper is to present peer supervisors with key issues, research problems and possible solutions. The goal is that they can more knowledgeably implement and maintain peer programs and effectively undertake their own evaluations and research. During the remainder of

this paper, then, the author presents several key research questions and discusses the corresponding methodological issues. The questions and issues have been organized under the sequential headings of Pre-training, Training and Post-training to establish when data collection might commence. However, the researcher/practitioner should consider all of these questions and issues prior to implementing a peer counselling program in order to ensure success and to better organize appropriate data retrieval.

KEY PRE-TRAINING RESEARCH ISSUES

Pre-training research issues are represented by questions focusing on the impact that peer counsellors have on those around them and the actual selection process that applicants experience (see Table 1). Although both research issues are discussed in the pre-training section, data collection will stretch through to post-training.

Impact Issues

Four reasons underlying peer counselling implementation which have been reported are: (1) Peer counselling expands or augments current counselling and support services (Carroll, 1973; Delworth, Moore, Millick & Leone, 1974; Gumaer, 1976; Varenhorst, 1984); (2) Peer support persons can effectively handle developmental and personal issues (Varenhorst, 1984); (3) Peer counselling addresses the psycho-social needs of a peer group (Varenhorst, 1984); (4) Peer counselling can create a more positive community environment (Varenhorst, 1984).

A large number of program descriptions and formative evaluations which give practical information are available in a variety of journals. However, the majority of these articles have assumed the four rationale for implementing programs as "given." Because these rationale provide the thrust for several key research questions, a discussion of their implication to research methodologies is appropriate.

If peer counselling programs are meant to augment ongoing professional programs, in what ways do they actually supplement the programs? There does not appear to be a study that has surveyed a number of programs to document kinds of activities that are undertaken by peer counsellors in their specific groups. What are the activities in each setting? Which activities are most common?

Descriptive studies might also attempt to answer the following questions: What is the content of peer counsellors' involvement in counselling services? Which specific life and developmental issues appear to be most effectively handled by peers? In what ways do peer counsellors address the psycho-social needs of their peers? In what ways do peer counsellors add to or create a more positive environment?

There are several effective ways of gathering this information. Researchers might adopt a participant observation approach whereby researchers record interactions around the environment among peer counsellors, those being helped, professional care givers and decision makers. This approach might be augmented by pen-and-paper questionnaires or interviews.

Researchers might answer questions concerning environmental changes by perusing records. For instance, in a school setting, instances of vandalism and violence might be compared prior to and after a peer counselling program's inaugural year. Increases in the number of peer counsellor applications might provide information. Questionnaires sent to decision makers and students might verify other sources of information.

Impact issues could be researched through focusing on a very few individuals. For example, a phenomenological approach might focus on the degree to which a peer counselling program has impact on a professional help giver. In-depth interviews with help givers throughout pre-training, training and post-training stages might illuminate their experiences. Do professionals perceive that peer counsellors allow more time to grapple with more demanding tasks? If so, what are those tasks? If not, do peer counsellors meet the professional's needs on other levels? Are they providing a positive outlet for the professional's efforts when the other aspects of their professional activities seem frustrated? If peer counsellors take up the professional's time and energy, do they repay that professional with support?

Impact issues concerning peer counsellors and those helped can be treated in a similar way. Peer counsellors who have volunteered and who undertake training can be followed through their experience. Peer clients can be interviewed to better understand the impact of peer help.

Selection Issues

Selection issues similarly present several research questions. What are the effects of a selection "competition" on the applicants—those that are and are not selected? Does degree of involvement of the applicants in the selection procedure have any effects on how the applicants perceive both the process and their acceptance or rejection? These questions seek out personal experiential information which can only be fully realized through in-depth and ongoing interviews. Though this information cannot be generalized to other settings or, in fact, other people, the information can provide important insight when weighing the pros and cons of various selection procedures.

In order to evaluate which selection process is most effective in producing competent and committed peer counsellors, a comparison of selection criteria from "no criteria" to "maximum criteria" might be used. In order to accomplish this while creating minimal disturbance to programs' normal selection processes, ex post facto research, also known

as causal-comparative research (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 1985; Cates, 1985) might be used. Selection processes, which have already been determined by the individual referral schools, would constitute the independent variable. Dependent variables would include change in demonstrated communication skills after training and demonstration of commitment to the program during and after training.

One of the main criticisms of causal-comparative research is its susceptibility to inappropriate attribution of causality to the independent variable (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 1985; Cates, 1985). There may or may not be an apparently strong relationship between the independent variable (selection processes) and either of the dependent variables (demonstration of changed communication skills and demonstration of personal commitment). In any case, the researcher cannot attribute cause to the selection process. Rather, the researcher may suggest several other plausible explanations, such as personality differences among sponsor teachers in schools and whether or not the target schools have parallel courses (Psychology 11, Child Care 12) in their curricula. Moreover, each school in a given study might represent a geographical location that is discernible from the others in terms of socio-economic status. The researcher may not be controlling for factors such as socio-economic status, parental education, parental employment, single-parent versus two-parent families, or previous experiences of trainees with communication skills (i.e., through family members, previous counselling or reading). Even with these obvious drawbacks, causal-comparative research offers an opportunity to minimize disturbance to selection processes, while providing some interesting information to researchers and practitioners.

KEY TRAINING RESEARCH ISSUES

The issues of curriculum content and training processes are interconnected. Peer counselling manuals generally offer psycho-educational learning approaches. However, each manual is unique in its presentation and in its concentration on particular topics. Instructors will typically find manuals that are most suited to their own learning needs or they will adapt or omit exercises with which they are uncomfortable. The questions for researchers at this stage, then, focus on trainee and program needs and the degree to which a course's content and process meet those needs. Another issue of concern at this point is instructor qualifications (see Table 2).

Training Manuals and Processes

In her overview of peer counselling, Varenhorst (1984) stressed that "... training is the area of peer counseling needing the most attention in future research" (p. 738). She emphasized the need to measure and

compare programs in terms of teaching effectiveness, personal growth of trainees and client goal-attainment (p. 739). Yet, while training stage questions and issues are extremely important, they represent significant problems to researchers and evaluators alike.

Researchers who attempt to compare peer counselling program training manuals in terms of which manual is most useful for particular target groups will have some logistic problems. Firstly, none of the manual authors have presented their manuals as being better than others on the topic. For example, in *The Peer Counselling Starter Kit* (Carr & Saunders, 1980), the authors have incorporated and acknowledged ideas and exercises from other sources and they have intended the kit to be a “starting place” from which practitioners can create and develop their own programs.

If, in fact, training manuals are seen as effective when they meet the needs of a given population, then each population must be researched independent of others. The needs of different peer communities are unique. University, high school and elementary school students will not have the same needs, although they may have some things in common. The same holds true for other peer populations—senior citizens, professionals, women and men, challenged individuals. Their experiences are unique; so are their learning needs.

Peer populations are not only distinctive in their needs on an inter-group basis. Each peer population will have its subgroups as well. Peer counsellors will be trained for specific reasons according to the needs assessment carried out for the targeted subgroup. For each setting, a specific interaction is intended to take place. For example, a general peer population, such as senior citizens, has specific needs which may be serviced by peers. The peer training coordinator may be aware of general peer counselling literature, as well as literature specific to senior citizen peer programs. However, the targeted group of senior citizens—that is, the peer population sub-group—must be seen as a “client” with a unique experience and specific needs. Based on these needs, the process and content of the peer intervention during the post-training stage will, in turn, determine content and process of future training.

Concerns about comparing training manuals used for this subgroup against other training manuals is representative of attempts to compare any two subgroups. The controls that would be needed in order to compare two given manuals would be monumental. One hypothetical design might involve dividing a group of peer counselling trainees into two groups. The same instructor(s) would facilitate the training groups. However, each group would use a different training manual. Members of each group would have to be matched on what are perceived as significant characteristics such as sex, age, learning style, locus of control, introversion/extroversion and educational level. Several factors which are more closely associated with specific peer populations may

TABLE 1
Key Pre-training Research Issues

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Methodologies</i>
1. Impact.	
a. How are peer counsellors used in counselling services?	1a-c. Descriptive: - survey
b. How do peer counselling programs augment counselling programs?	- interview with all participants
c. What kinds of activities do peer counsellors undertake?	- participant observation
c.1: ... in specific settings?	- record (journals, day book; time analysis)
c.2: ... with target groups?	- questionnaire
c.3: What duties are most common?	
d. In what ways do peer counsellors change the environment?	1d. - survey
d.1: ... impact on help giver?	- participant observation
d.2: ... impact on client(s)?	- record (changes over time)
d.3: ... impact on peer counsellor?	- interview
d.4: ... impact on environment-at-large (administrators; teachers; family; staff; friends; larger group)	- questionnaire
e. Do peer counsellors address the psychosocial needs of their peers?	1e. Descriptive: - interview
e.1: If so, how do they?	- record (changes over time)
	- Goal Attainment Scaling
	- questionnaire
f. Are there specific life and developmental issues that are most effectively handled by peers?	1f. Descriptive: - interview
	- record
	- Goal Attainment Scaling
	- questionnaire
2. Selection	
a. What are the effects of selection competitions on the applicants?	2a. Descriptive: - interview
a.1: ... those selected	- record
a.2: ... those not selected?	- participant observation
	- questionnaire

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| b. What factors are involved in an individual deciding to apply? | 2b. Descriptive:
- interview
- questionnaire
- phenomeno-logical approach |
| c. Does the degree to which an applicant is involved in the selection process have any effects on their perceptions of the process and program? | 2c. Descriptive:
- interview
- questionnaire
- phenomeno-logical approach |
| d. What are the selection criteria? | 2d. Descriptive:
- survey
- participant observation
- record |
| e. What selection processes appear most effective (screening vs. recruitment vs. self-selection)? | 2e. Ex post facto |
| f. Within screening, which criteria appear most predictive? | 2f. Ex post facto |

need to be matched. For example, in junior high school, measures of degree of egocentricity might effect a trainee's performance level. An elderly individual may have short-term memory problems. These individual differences need to be controlled through selection or matching.

Trainer biases and intra-group experiences may be more difficult, perhaps impossible, to totally control. Trainers may have a teaching style preference that is better accommodated by one of the comparison manuals. It is quite arguable that one group exercise might have a significant effect on the total training experience, either positively or negatively. Researchers may falsely believe that they are comparing training manuals when in fact the effective comparison may be reduced to a small portion of the training content.

The researcher must also decide what criteria will be used to demonstrate change and to compare program manuals. Process criteria might include levels at which trainees participated, attendance and drop out rates. Examples of outcome criteria are levels of basic communication skills acquisition, changes in self-concept, and changes in locus of control at end of training. Further examples of outcome criteria during post-training include numbers of clients seen, client satisfaction, and practicum drop out rates. Of course, even if there are "significant" differences in criteria, a researcher cannot assert a causal relationship. There are too many intervening factors. Only after several replications with similar results can we *begin* to infer any causality. Varenhorst lamented

the lack of replication of training models. She cited Danish & Brock (1974) and Schweisheimer and Walberg (1976) who had previously raised "... questions of internal validity (do the programs really work?) and external validity (could they be used effectively with varied populations of trainees?)" (1984, p. 727).

There are other research vehicles which can provide information concerning peer program manuals. Content analysis (Good, 1972) can describe typical content areas of various program manuals and what proportion of each manual deals with specific content areas. Researchers can compare and synthesize this information to describe what content is emphasized "on the average." They can describe what portion of the average manual focuses on areas like skills acquisition, group processes and intrapersonal exploration.

Similarly, content analysis can describe training processes, such as what portion of the total training is focused on lecturing, roleplays, group activities, discussion, and pen-and-paper activities. Content analysis of frequencies of feeling words, ownership statements and roadblocks can also provide information. Used with other research methodologies, content analysis can provide interesting information. Unfortunately, this information is inevitably reduced to some form of measurement—measurement out of context. Good suggested that these measures are "atomistic." He stated, "One may wonder if all the enormously subtle and complex patterns of human discourse can be compressed into 'units of meaning' regardless of size" (1972, p. 287).

Naturalistic inquiries (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) represent yet another method of researching counsellor training. Participant observation, vehicles for data analysis, such as video and audio recording, trainee journals, memos and official records, questionnaires and individual interviews can all provide researchers with information concerning the program or program materials.

A researcher might take a phenomenological approach whereby one or more participants are asked to describe the personal meaning the training and training experience has had for them. Researchers may be interested in questions surrounding the dynamics of an actual peer training process which may involve a combination of interviews, participant observation and video or audio recording. Researchers may wish to document impact and changes to the environment and so may choose to record interviews with participants, clients and "key" personalities in the extended environment, as well as to search for environmental records (Murray, Levitov, Castenell & Joubert, 1987). Crosson-Johnson (1976) suggested that researchers may be interested in improving peer counselling course content and process and may take an action research approach to their inquiries, more fully described by Kemmis and McTaggart (1982).

Naturalistic inquiries, far from being atomistic, attempt to present as

full a context as possible. Naturalistic researchers describe the environment, the participants, the activities and even their own impact on the research environment. Naturalistic researchers are not interested in generalizing in a global sense. Rather, through fully describing their research environment, it is left to practitioners and future researchers to distinguish the documented context from their own, thereby generating appropriate, practical applications and new research ideas.

Problems associated with comparing and contrasting peer counselling curricula, manuals and training programs are parallel to evaluation problems experienced during the early sixties when researchers were asked to evaluate federally funded mental health programs in the United States. In measuring and comparing program effectiveness, researchers needed to contend with differing clientele, mandates and goals, and interventions among programs.

One instrument, Goal Attainment Scaling, was advocated as a vehicle for evaluating and comparing the effectiveness of several therapeutic interventions within the same program, as well as a tool for comparing effectiveness among programs (Kiresuk & Sherman, 1968). Goal Attainment Scaling, as an innovative evaluative research approach, appears to have withstood and has changed to meet the demands of the next two decades (Kiresuk, 1973; Kiresuk, Steimachers & Schltz, 1982). Adapted versions have been utilized in evaluating educational programs (de Rosenroll, 1982) and counselling adolescents and young adults (de Rosenroll, 1982; Moyer & de Rosenroll, 1984).

Varenhorst recommended Goal Attainment Scaling as a tool that could be used to validate a program's effectiveness by measuring the degree to which individual client goals have been achieved (1984, p. 735). A Goal Attainment Scale represents a clear statement of each client goal and a five-point outcome continuum scale, from worst to best possible expected outcomes for each goal. The degree to which goals are met, by way of designated outcomes, is described through an aggregate score of the ordinal data.

Goal Attainment Scaling, in an adapted version, could also be used to measure the degree to which a given peer counselling training program realizes goals which evolve from an initial environmental needs assessment. The program implementer can meet with key personalities in the targeted environment to articulate results of the needs assessment and, thereby, create a mandate for the peer counselling program. The mandate can be expressed in measurable goals and possible outcome measures for each of the goals. During training and post-training stages, necessary data can be collected in order to measure attainment. Just as with mental health and educational programs, peer counselling programs could be measured so that each program can adapt to meet its clients' needs and aspects of different programs can be compared to ensure that the most suitable program contents are being used.

KEY POST-TRAINING ISSUES

Several researchable post-training issues have been mentioned in either the pre-training section or the training section. Specifically, these questions concern the effectiveness of peer counsellors in working with their peers. The questions focus on differential teaching methods, key problem areas to which peer counsellors can readily respond, and the quality of the helping relationship itself. Although these questions have already been noted and the data needed to answer the questions will have been previously decided during the post-training stage, researchers will collect the data during this stage. The post-training stage is, after

TABLE 2

Key Training Research Issues

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Methodologies</i>
1. Content	
a. Which training manuals appear to be most often used?	1a. Descriptive: - survey - volume of sales
b. Of the most popular manuals, what are the similarities and differences in: b1: ... content areas (skills; issues) b2: ... learning processes b3: ... population served?	1b. Descriptive: - content analysis
c. Do any of the training models have any effects on the trainees? c.1: Which model has what effects? c.2: ... to what population? c.3: Do any personal changes occur in the trainees? c.4: Do trainees learn what they are supposed to? c.5: ... and for how long? c.6: Does follow-up training have any effect?	1c. Descriptive: - questionnaire - interview - participant observation - video taping - phenomenological approach Experimental - comparison groups - pre/post-skills demo. - pre/post-testing
d. Are there changes to the environment that could be attributable to the training model (without post-training)?	1d. Descriptive: - interview - participant observation - questionnaire - record

2. Process

- a. Are there differences in training processes among groups?
 - a1: If so, what are the similarities and differences?
 - a2: Which process seems most effective?
 - a3: ... with which population?
- b. What process do the participants prefer?

- 2a. Descriptive:
 - survey
 - questionnaire
 - interview
 - participant observation
 - pre/post-testing
- 2b. Descriptive:
 - survey
 - questionnaire
 - interview
 - phenomenological approach

3. Instructor

- a. Who usually does the instruction?
 - a1: What are their qualifications?
 - a2: What are their relationship to the target environment?
 - a3: How do they perceive their roles?
- b. What training do instructors have?
 - b1: Is any particular training of benefit to the instructors?
 - b2: Does teaching experience make a difference?
 - b3: Does communication skills training make a difference?
- c. Are two instructors better than one?
 - c1: How do they work together?
 - c2: What are the pros and cons of each?
- d. What are the reasons that instructors choose a specific curriculum or learning approach?

- 3a. Descriptive:
 - survey
 - questionnaire
 - interview
 - phenomenological approach
- 3b. Descriptive:
 - survey
 - questionnaire
 - interview
 - Experimental
 - comparison groups
 - pre/post-testing
- 3c. Descriptive:
 - survey
 - questionnaire
 - interview
 - participant observation
 - video taping
 - Experimental
 - comparison groups
 - pre/post-testing
- 3d. Descriptive:
 - survey
 - questionnaire
 - interview
 - Phenomenological Approach

all, where peer counselling programs are intended to have an impact on their environments and work toward achieving goals set during pre-training, as a result of the needs assessment.

The other questions which have not previously been discussed focus on referral systems which match peer counsellors to clients and involve a comparison of formalized and spontaneous helping interactions (see Table 3). Both of these questions are difficult to research due to confidentiality issues which arise in any attempts to collect data. However, indirect methods, when used in numerous settings, might circumvent these ethical problems.

Peer Counsellor Effectiveness

Varenhorst (1984) suggested three research questions for which data might be collected at the post-training stage. "Do peer counselors significantly assist their peer counselees? Are peer counselors who are trained by certain methods more effective in helping their peers? Are there differential problem areas more responsive to peer counseling intervention?" (p. 735).

The data that relate to Varenhorst's three questions are basic to our increased awareness of how to more effectively use peer counselling as a resource. However, Varenhorst also qualified her three questions with, "Better research designs may be needed to answer them" (p. 735). Tindall and Gray (1985) added a warning to potential researchers, "Experience frequently shows... that time and working conditions do not allow for highly sophisticated research designs" (p. 262). Peer counselling researchers may be caught "between a rock and a hard place."

The most fundamental research questions at this stage appear to be methodological. How can a researcher effectively collect data without disrupting the helping process? How can the informal helping relationships into which peer counsellors enter, both in and outside of the formal peer counselling environment, be monitored? Without breaching confidentiality, how can researchers gather data concerning peer counsellors' clients?

Varenhorst (1984) reported that only two groups of researchers have reported on their investigations into "... peer counseling as an agent of change" in schools. Grady (1980) indicated that the school climate improved and peer counsellors and their clients reported higher self-esteem, as well as stronger school spirit and commitment. Data was collected using several approaches. Both the retention rate of second year peer counsellors and the numbers of new applicants were considered. Teacher and parent involvement were noted. Peer counsellor and client anecdotal statements were also included. Kane (1983) described the use of several approaches to collecting data, such as those used by Grady, as

methodological triangulation. Because researchers do not rely on one data collecting approach, they can verify data by comparing it to data collected through other means. Data that “triangulates” or overlaps among different data collecting approaches has more credibility.

In another study, Fink, Grandjean, Martin & Bertolini (1978) distributed questionnaires among faculty members and randomly selected clients who had either been formally referred by teachers and counsellors or had been seen informally by the peer counsellors. Questions concerned the perceived effectiveness of the peer counsellors and the kinds of issues with which they dealt. Data indicated that clients with whom the peer counsellors had worked had generally improved. Data also suggested that the kinds of problems with which the peer counsellors dealt could be associated with whether or not the client had been formally referred. Teachers and counsellors tended to refer clients with academic issues, while clients with personal concerns approached peer counsellors on an informal basis.

Data for both studies was collected as the programs were ending for the school year, so minimal disruption would have been caused to the peer counselling process. All data from one study and most data from the other was based on participant perceptions. Neither study, then, indicated the effectiveness of peer counselling in their particular environments but, rather, indicated participants’ perceptions of peer counselling effectiveness.

Again, methodological issues surface. All sorts of data can be collected to indicate participant perceptions of peer counselling as a helping resource. However, the key questions do not just deal with perceptions but also demand data that lends itself to measurement. For example, the numbers of clients that are either self- or other-referred each year over a three year peer counselling program could be monitored in an attempt to indicate changes in numbers of clients and client issues.

Clients who are formally referred could be asked to voluntarily fill in a feedback form after each session and also at a later date. However, confidentiality problems may arise from this intrusion. Also, asking clients to fill in forms may affect the peer counsellor’s abilities, either positively or negatively, and colour the client’s perceptions (i.e., Hawthorne Effect).

In order to collect more data on informal helping relations, peer counsellors might be willing to wear telephone pagers so that researchers could “buzz” them and have them write down what they are doing and saying at various times throughout the day and night. Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1984) reported their successful use of this method of tracking adolescents in order to piece together information on their habits. Again, the intrusiveness of the monitoring device may be seen as outweighing the information it provides.

On an individual basis, a program’s own evaluation instruments can

provide a great deal of worthy research information (Tindall & Gray, 1985). The program has established clear goals and objectives during the pre-training stage. These objectives have been framed in terms of "... how, when and how much change is expected" (p. 251). The post-training stage of peer counselling represents the majority of outcomes which can be measure and documented in order to find out to what level the objectives have been attained.

TABLE 3

Key Post-training Issues

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Methodologies</i>
1. Referrals	
a. How are clients referred?	1a-b. Description:
a1: Who refers them?	- survey
a2: Why are they referred specifically to peers?	- questionnaire
b. What kinds of issues do referred clients have?	- interview
b1: self-referred? other-referred?	- record
b2: Do their initial problems change after referral?	- journals
2. Informal versus formal helping systems	
a. How do peer counsellors meet their clients?	2a-b. Descriptive:
b. What portion of client contacts are formal and what portion are informal?	- survey
	- questionnaire
	- interview
	- participant observation
	- record
	- journal
c. Are clients more likely to seek peer counsellors out in a formal setting or in an informal setting?	2c. Descriptive:
	- questionnaire
	- survey
	- interview
	Experimental
	- comparison groups
d. Are the issues which are dealt with in the two settings different?	2d. Descriptive:
	- questionnaire
	- survey
	- interview
	- journals
	- record

This information can serve a dual purpose. Firstly, information can provide evaluative feedback to program participants and interested parties in terms of how well their needs are being met. The program can then be fine-tuned and goals and objectives can be further defined or changed. Secondly, formative evaluation can provide descriptive research for interested others. However, the researcher must clearly and fully describe the context of the peer counselling program. The description must include locale, immediate environment, general population and target groups. Descriptions should focus on those elements of the pre-training environment from which needs arise and to which goals are addressed. Many of the pre-training, training and post-training issues described in this manuscript must be considered. Needs assessment procedures, selection processes, trainees, networking, training duration, methods and models, trainer qualifications, placement and evaluations can provide essential information. The researcher's responsibility here is to document the research experience in a thorough manner. The practitioner's responsibility, in reading the study, is to apply what is transferable from the research environment to their own environment. The task for future researchers is to re-create similar environments or key elements of the research document to verify data.

IMPLICATIONS

Tindall and Gray (1985) stated, "Peer counseling training is still in its initial stages of development and the continual input of many people is needed to improve this process" (p. 262). For virtually every issue with which a peer counselling coordinator must grapple, there are one or more research issues to be tackled as well.

Coordinators may wish to attack certain issues in the context of evaluating their programs for external bodies who control funding or decision-making. They may be more interested in action research, whereby they can make changes to their programs based on evolving needs of their communities. They may wish to contribute to the literature and thereby share their specific experiences and learning with a wider group of people.

Issues that are unique to each stage of peer counselling implementation and issues that knit their way through the whole of the training have been isolated and discussed. Experts, like Varenhorst (1984), having reviewed much of the literature, have suggested many key research questions. The number of peer counselling programs in North America are expanding. Yet, research is not forthcoming.

There are four reasons to explain the lack of adequate research. Tindall and Gray (1985) have covered two. Firstly, many practitioners who are developing and maintaining programs have only time for

priority activities and research is a low priority. Effects of research are less immediate than many of their other priorities.

Secondly, research projects are often seen as invasions of human rights and interactions or as just plain irrelevant by many practitioners or administrators.

A third reason is that many peer counselling coordinators have only basic research and evaluation skills. They may want to evaluate their programs and might be glad to contribute research to the growing literature. Their administration and fellow participants may be quite open to some form of program investigation. However, they just don't know how.

Finally, the fourth reason focuses on the "how" of the third reason. In order to describe or measure aspects or outcomes of a program, tools need to be constructed, borrowed from other research areas and described. Appropriate methodologies need to be suggested and illustrated. There is no one manual to which researchers can refer that offers examples of approaches they can use to investigate specific issues and which describes tools they can use, as well as pros and cons of each approach and tool.

Certainly, there is much to be borrowed from other research fields — sociology, anthropology, curriculum studies in education, and life span development in psychology, for example. There are many useful approaches available which lend themselves to gathering peer counselling data. Many of these approaches are already being used and have been discussed.

If a source book for peer counselling research and program development were constructed, program coordinators could more knowledgeably decide on whether or not the research issues merited their efforts. If certain issues were regarded as important, coordinators could more prudently decide on how they would undertake that particular research. The production of a research sourcebook is an important step toward more quality peer counselling research and expansion of useable knowledge. Not only would more and better research be generated for public consumption, the sourcebook would also provide peer counselling programs with a keener awareness of issues upon which they may need and want to focus.

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