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The Lived Experiences of Clinical Supervision for Stress Mitigation Among Master's Counseling Students in Internship

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Health

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Marcia LeBeau

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Review Committee
Dr. Katarzyna Peoples, Committee Chairperson, Counselor Education and Supervision Faculty
Dr. Victoria Sepulveda, Committee Member, Counselor Education and Supervision Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2024

Abstract

The Lived Experiences of Clinical Supervision for Stress Mitigation Among Master's

Counseling Students in Internship

by

Marcia LeBeau

MA, Walden University, 2014

BS, Ashford University, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Counselor Education and Supervision

Walden University

August 2024

Abstract

There is limited information on the lived experiences of stress mitigation in clinical supervision for master's-level interns in Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)-accredited counseling programs. There is a need for insight into how policy and supervision practices in counselor education programs can contribute to supporting and educating students during this time of professional and personal development and avoid negative personal and professional consequences. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of supervision for master's-level interns in CACREP-accredited counseling programs in relation to utilizing supervision for stress mitigation. This was explored through a transcendental phenomenological approach to answer the research question that directly addressed the purpose. Themes identified from the data collected by interviews were (a) time commitment as a stressor, (b) feelings of imposter syndrome, (c) difficulty talking to others about stress, (d) program and supervisors promote self-care, (e) supervisors are supportive clinically, and (f) supervision is non-structured. The data and themes provided insight into the stressors faced by master's-level counseling interns and their experiences of supervision related to addressing stress. This study contributes to positive social change through knowledge that highlights the common stressors among master's counseling interns and providing insight into how they are experiencing addressing these stressors in supervision. This provides further evidence that proactively incorporating components of self-care and stress management for counseling students is vital.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Internship during master's-level counselor education is an opportunity for development of professional identity and applying knowledge and skills to work with clients (Bradstreet et al., 2014). However, this experience also comes with anxiety and stress as students balance the various requirements and demands of their program. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2016) accredited curricula have rigorous standards and expectations aimed at developing mastery of knowledge, skills, and a professional identity, which can increase stress levels. Though beneficial, these rigorous standards can contribute significantly to stress for master's-level interns in CACREP-accredited counseling programs. This stress can have a negative impact on a student's life and ability to be successful in their program of study (Conley et al., 2015; Fuenfhausen & Cashwell, 2013). Master's-level interns in counseling graduate programs are at a greater risk for issues like compassion fatigue, and if left unattended, this can lead to personal and professional detriments (Merriman, 2014). Conley et al. (2015) explained that leaving these stressors unattended can result in diminished academic performance or increased attrition rates. Students must learn to manage stress to prevent negative consequences, which also helps to reduce stress symptomology and contributes to positive outcomes with degree completion and stress management in other aspects of their lives (Abel et al., 2012).

One important resource for learning to manage stressors is supervision. Supervision is a part of counselor preparation and involves building a relationship that facilitates competence, skills, and even wellness (Blount et al., 2016). Master's-level

interns in graduate counseling programs operate under the same settings as licensed counselors and are exposed to similar emotional psychological and emotional demands (Testa & Sangganjanavanich, 2015). However, they have the added stressors of fulfilling the requirements for a master's program. Therefore, supervisors taking a wellness approach to supervision helps to both improve the well-being of supervisees and client outcomes for supervisees (Blount et al., 2016).

The following qualitative study provides insight into the lived experiences of master's-level interns in CACREP-accredited counseling programs in relation to stress and supervision. Programs and supervisors can gain a first-hand perspective of how students are navigating stressors and how their supervision experiences are contributing to that experience. In this chapter, I will include the background, problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

Background

Internship is a unique experience for master's-level interns in graduate counseling programs. It is their initial entry into the profession where they can utilize the knowledge learned in the program of study to work with clients and colleagues. Though entering field experience is exciting for a inters in a master's counseling program, this experience is also stressful and often anxiety-producing (Watkinson et al., 2021). There is a high frequency of stressors among psychology graduate students, with lack of time being the most frequent (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012). Research has shown that students spent an

average of 54.26 hours on school-related activities and that the amount of time spent on school activities was related to the development of anxiety symptoms (Rummell, 2015). Personal or professional challenges also interfere with daily functioning (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012). The demands of the program itself are not the only stressors that exist; debt stress also has a negative effect on some students' psychological and physical health (Olson-Garriot, 2015).

Considering the stressful nature of the intern experience and the need to educate and normalize stress experiences and symptoms for students, it is imperative that programs and supervisors have established practices to promote self-awareness, self-care, and positive mental health practices (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012; Rummell, 2015). One major part of the internship experience is supervision, which provides the important components of guidance, support, and overseeing of client welfare (Brejcha, 2021). Supervisors help master's-level interns in CACREP-accredited programs develop skills, understand counseling techniques and theory, and provide a model for being in the profession (Brejcha, 2021). As such, supervisors have a unique position to also promote and model wellness as a counseling professional (Blount et al, 2016). Thus, it is important for supervisors to consider how stressors impact master's-level counseling interns and how an approach to integrate wellness and self-care can be important to their professional development. It is important that programs and supervisors be proactive in stress management, because not all students are versed on self-care and stress mitigation (Abel et al., 2012). For instance, healthy sleep practices, cognitive reappraisal, suppression, and social support are related to lower levels of perceived stress (Myers et

al., 2012). Instructors and programs should consider how to promote wellness among master's-level counseling students so that they, in turn, can promote wellness in their clients (Burck et al., 2014).

Though it is known that internship for counselors-in-training is a stressful time, there is little information on first-hand lived experiences of stress and supervision support. Given the close nature of the supervision relationship, supervisors have the unique opportunity to both educate and model wellness and self-care with supervisees (Blount et al., 2016). Though data supports the need for stress coping and wellness in programs, there is little information about what it is like for students who are living the unique experience of counseling internship and the experience of supervision in supporting their well-being through targeting stress coping. This information is needed to provide programs and instructors with insight into the experiences of master's-level student counseling interns in CACREP-accredited programs, which can help affect positive change to provide needed resources. These resources may be changes in program curriculum that includes stress coping strategies, supervision with a focus on counselor stress and stress coping, and an overall initiative to increase awareness in counselor stress and coping strategies. This study explored these experiences to provide the needed meaningful information that can be useful to programs, supervisors, and master's-level interns in CACREP-accredited counseling programs.

Problem Statement

Internship for counseling interns is an opportunity for development of professional identity and applying knowledge and skills to work with clients (Bradstreet

et al., 2014). A significant part of this professional identity development occurs through clinical supervision and the guidance and mentorship provided through the supervisory relationship (Merriman, 2015). Master's-level interns in graduate counseling programs operate under the same settings as licensed counselors and are exposed to similar emotional psychological and emotional demands, yet they do not have the same level of experience (Testa & Sangganjanavanich, 2015). Many master's-level interns in graduate counseling programs feel anxiety during their program due to doubts about their ability, pressure related to evaluation of skills, and time demands (Watkinson et al., 2021). For this reason, supervision is a component of learning how to navigate the profession and the stressors that may accompany the profession (Merriman, 2015). If stress is not properly addressed, it can have a negative impact on a student's life and ability to be successful in their program of study (Fuenfhausen & Cashwell, 2013). Stress can lead to personal and professional detriments (Merriman, 2014) such as diminished academic performance or increased attrition rates (Conley et al, 2015). These counselor interns must learn skills to manage stress to prevent negative physical and mental consequences, helping to reduce stress symptomology and contributing to positive outcomes with degree completion and stress management (Abel et al., 2012).

There is limited information on the lived experiences of stress mitigation in clinical supervision for master's-level interns in graduate counseling programs, including those that are CACREP-accredited. Though the literature supports the high levels of stress and the need for supervision that addresses stress-mitigation (Merriman, 2014; Conley et al., 2015; Testa & Sangganjanavanich, 2015), the few studies available focused

on stress mitigation in supervision. This limits the ability of faculty and programs to gain a full understanding of how supervision is necessary for stress mitigation and management for master's-level counseling interns (Abel et al., 2012; Burck et al., 2014). A transcendental phenomenological study of the lived experiences of stress mitigation in master's-level interns in CACREP-accredited counseling programs can provide information for counselor preparation programs, instructors, and supervisors to better target potential areas of need and training. Supervisors can gain insight about student experiences that contribute to supervision models and practices that engage in dialogue about these issues and incorporate stress coping training (Cieslak, 2016). This is important to avoid negative consequences such as student drop-out (or attrition) and leaving the counseling profession altogether (Conley et al., 2015). Attrition is a significant issue for master's-level counseling students, considering the completion rate for master's programs in the United States is 61%, and 26% of students who enroll in a master's program do not complete it (National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, 2017). Understanding stress experiences and supervision experiences during one's internship in counseling in a CACREP-accredited master's program can help supervisors to be purposeful in tailoring their supervision approach to meet critical developmental needs and avoid negative consequences.

Purpose of the Study

The master's-level counseling internship is an opportunity for development of professional identity and applying knowledge and skills to work with clients (Bradstreet et al., 2014). However, the stressors of this experience can be challenging if not

addressed. The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of supervision for master's-level interns in CACREP-accredited counseling programs in relation to utilizing supervision for stress mitigation.

Research Questions

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the following research question was central to this study: How do master's-level students in CACREP-accredited counseling programs experience clinical supervision in relation to stress mitigation during internship?

Conceptual Framework

Phenomenological approaches typically refrain from defined theoretical frameworks because this methodology focuses on the experiences of participants rather than predetermined notions. Edmond Husserl, who is considered the father of phenomenology, rejected theoretical frameworks to adopt a philosophy that made no assumptions and took nothing for granted in attempting to understand a phenomenon (Peoples, 2021). In basic terms, phenomenology is the study of phenomena, or those things that are "non-real" (Husserl, 2013). In this study, the phenomenon is the experiences of supervision for stress mitigation for master's-level interns in a CACREP-accredited program. Understanding a phenomenon is done through "noesis," which is perceiving or thinking about and the "noema," which is the intentional object that this act is directed toward (Greasley & Ashworth, 2007). Husserl maintained that meaning of a phenomenon or noema is based on the natural connections to the contextual and subjective factors in one's life (Greasley & Ashworth, 2007). Husserl's (2013)

phenomenology also focuses on a specific time component, which is the present experience. This is embodied by Husserl's use of the term "horizon", which is the limit of one's sight in the present moment, and which contains the context of experiences in the present moment (Moran, 2011). This is important because present experiences that individuals are currently in cannot be bracketed or suspended (Peoples, 2021). As such, in transcendental phenomenology researchers view experiences as they are contained in the present horizon or context, which helps to form the understanding they have of the present experience (Peoples, 2021).

Since I sought to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of master's-level interns in a CACREP-accredited program in relation to utilizing supervision for stress mitigation, transcendental phenomenology was an appropriate choice for this research. It provided the opportunity to gain a perspective from the participants' unique and individual viewpoints. In Chapter 2, a more thorough explanation of how these concepts apply to the study will be presented.

Nature of the Study

This study utilized a transcendental phenomenological approach. Like the practice of counseling, phenomenological researchers seek to capture the essence of participants' lived experiences and align with a structured phenomenological approach (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018). A phenomenological approach is an approach is used to understand a construct as it presents itself to an individual's subjective vantage point and to discern the essence of participants' lived experiences (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018). This requires the researcher to put aside their own understandings of a phenomenon so that they can

authentically observe and explore participant experiences (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018).

For this study, I sought to understand the current experiences of master's-level interns in CACREP-accredited counseling programs in relation to addressing program and practice-related stressors in supervision. study utilized a transcendental approach to phenomenology that focuses on essential meanings of individual experiences (Phillips-Pula et al., 2011). I achieved this by bracketing my own perceptions and understandings and developing a textural description of participant experiences, as well as a structural description to convey the overall essence of experiences.

Interviews help phenomenological researchers to observe and examine stories to achieve a more meaningful and deep understanding of the phenomenon (Van Manen, 2014). To capture the lived experiences of participants in the study, I utilized the following approach to gathering data:

1. Individual phone interviews with master's-level interns in CACREP-accredited counseling programs (through in-person, online, and hybrid formats).
2. Follow-up interviews to address gaps in data, including missing information, misunderstandings, and issues in clarity.

Qualitative data analysis sought to discover descriptive data through the analysis of statements, phrases, or quotes to identify meaning and themes (Phillips-Pula et al., 2011). Data analysis for this phenomenological study included the following steps (Peoples, 2021):

- Read and review the transcribed interviews and omit any information that is

irrelevant.

- Develop preliminary meaning units.
- Conduct any needed follow-up interviews and journal for bracketing.
- Finalize meaning units for each interview question.
- Utilize final meaning units to draft situated narratives.
- Utilize situated narratives from each participant to draft general narratives that integrate the major themes of all participants.
- Generate a general description to discuss the themes.

Definitions

Epoché: This is a process that a phenomenological researcher utilizes to “bracket” or set aside their experiences, beliefs, and attitudes to see experiences from the viewpoint of others without bias or presumptions (Husserl, 2013).

Internship: This is when a master’s-level counseling student works for a practice or organization (typically unpaid) to gain experience in the profession. Students have a site supervisor and university supervisor who provide ongoing supervision and oversee the experience. Students work with clients utilizing counseling knowledge and techniques they have gained throughout their educational program and essentially practice fulfilling the role of counselor and all aspects that accompany it (paperwork, consultation, supervision, etc.).

Stress: Stress was defined broadly as the experience of emotional, mental, or physical strain that participants identify as directly related to their experience of participation in a master’s level internship.

Transcendental phenomenology: This is a philosophy that was developed by Husserl (2013) and utilized for qualitative research. This philosophical approach to research seeks to understand human experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Assumptions

My assumptions within this study included the notion that I would be able to conduct interviews that provide rich and detailed information about participants' experiences, which is necessary to understand the phenomenon from the participants' perspective. Further, I assumed that master's-level counseling interns would be honest about their experiences and share these with me during the interview process so that the perspectives gained were accurate and true. Lastly, I assumed that utilizing the transcendental phenomenological philosophy and approach to research would provide an understanding of the lived experiences of participants.

Scope and Delimitations

The study focused on master's-level interns in CACREP-accredited counseling programs. To ensure that these students have similar standards to uphold, I decided that CACREP-accredited programs would provide the best information on lived experiences. Since I was selecting master's-level students in CACREP-accredited programs who are currently in internship, it provided an opportunity to explore lived experiences as the students are experiencing them rather than relying on recall. I excluded any programs that were not CACREP-accredited as well as any master's-level counseling students who were not currently in internship.

Limitations

Master's-level counseling interns may be reluctant to admit struggles related to stressors due to the stigma of counselors seeking help for mental health issues, which may have limited the study by hindering participant willingness to be completely candid and honest about their experiences (Rummel, 2015). I encouraged participants to be honest and authentic about their experiences and ensured they understood the measures taken to ensure confidentiality in the study by clearing explaining and outlining this in my informed consent. An additional barrier or limitation was the smaller sample size that is typical of phenomenological studies, which limits generalizability. Having been a master's-level counseling student myself, it was also important to be aware of any biases. The phenomenological approach specifically addresses this area through the horizon and epoché, as these concepts required me to acknowledge and be aware of how my own experiences and perceptions could lead to bias, and that my job as researcher was to observe and not to interpret through my own lens.

Significance

Stress is a normal part of life for graduate students, including academic, personal, financial, and social stresses (Abel et al., 2012). Studying stress factors that can contribute to preventative measures and systemic supports for mental health issues, reducing rates of program incompletion, improving educational performance, and improving quality of life for master's-level interns in graduate counseling programs. Research suggests that immersion in education and awareness of protective factors for issues like compassion fatigue can be the key to prevention (Merriman, 2015). Protective

factors include areas such as self-care, supervision, self-regulation, and support in the work environment (Merriman, 2015). A study of student stress experiences can also help fill the gap by providing insight into the lived experiences of supervision for stress mitigation for master's-level interns in CACREP-accredited counseling programs. Stress mitigation is important in preventing burnout that results from work that can be emotionally taxing and work environments that can be stressful (Newton et al., 2020). Data regarding these experiences can help inform counselor supervisors because it may contribute to insight that could aid the development of supervision models that address these needs. Data can also inform counselor education programs on what may be needed to develop programs that could contribute to education about issues related to stress mitigation during this crucial stage of counselor development.

Summary

This qualitative study provides insight into the lived experiences of supervision for master's-level interns in CACREP-accredited counseling programs in relation to stress mitigation. This chapter provided a summary of background information and an outline of the problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study. In Chapter 2, I will provide a literature review that includes a more comprehensive discussion of the theoretical framework, and an exhaustive review of how the current literature relates to key concepts of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There is a wealth of information on the stressors of counseling internship in graduate programs. The literature provides analysis of stressors, coping skills, and the need for integration of self-care and stress management in programs of study (Abel et al., 2012; El-Ghoroury et al., 2012; Myers et al., 2012; Rummell, 2015; Testa & Sangganjanavanich, 2015). However, there is little information on the experiences of master's-level counseling interns in CACREP-accredited programs in relation to how they experience supervision for mitigating stress. The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of supervision for master's-level interns in CACREP-accredited programs in relation to utilizing supervision for stress mitigation. In this chapter, I will provide a brief overview of literature search strategies and conceptual framework and present the current literature review of key concepts including stress and self-care, stress as a learning experience, master's-level counseling students' stress perceptions, program integration of stress management, and supervision and compassion fatigue.

Literature Search Strategies

Utilizing the Walden Library, I searched multiple databases including PsycINFO, ProQuest Central, SocINDEX, SAGE Journals, and Taylor & Francis Online. Keywords utilized for the search process included *counselor education and supervision, supervision in counselor education, internship in counselor education programs, counseling internship and stress, intern compassion fatigue, counselor wellness and supervision, stress coping in internship and counseling, compassion fatigue and supervision,*

supervision models and compassion fatigue, stress coping and supervision, and *CACREP programs and demands*.

The database search provided a wealth of literature on counselor education and supervision, stressors experienced during internship and counselor training, and the importance of wellness approaches to both education and supervision. Another theme gleaned from the literature search was the perceptions of counseling trainees in relation to their own self-care and wellness, and how this an often-overlooked area due to the perceived pressures of maintaining high functioning to complete a program (Lee et al., 2018). Though these are important areas of consideration, the search highlights the gap in the literature for understanding the lived experiences of master's-level counseling interns in CACREP-accredited programs in relation to experiences of supervision and managing stress within this supervisory relationship.

Conceptual Framework

The nature of a phenomenological study is rooted in a philosophy of subjective openness that does not attempt to explain why things but rather to capture the essence of the experience from the perspective of the participant without making assumptions (Husserl, 2013). To scientifically explore thoughts, the researcher must pay attention to the detailed descriptions from the perception of participants in the present moment (the here and now; Husserl, 2013). As such, this study was conducted to explore the phenomenon of the experiences of mitigating stress through supervision for masters-level counseling students in internship. As Van Manen (2014) maintains, this helps us to be in direct contact with the world around us by gaining unique insights from direct

experiences. The present study was conducted from the transcendental phenomenological framework to understand a construct as it presents itself to an individual's subjective vantage point, and to discern the essence of participants' lived experiences (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018).

To achieve the goal of this study, I will use Husserl's (2013) philosophy of transcendental phenomenology to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of master's-level counseling students in internship in relation to utilizing supervision for stress mitigation. Transcendental phenomenology brings into focus the participants' perceptions of the subject, and data are based on the participant descriptions of their direct and personal experience of the phenomenon (Husserl, 2013).

Anything outside of the participant's current awareness, including the researcher's own knowledge, is not relevant and therefore it requires the researcher to set aside their own perceptions and knowledge (Husserl, 2013).

This study will incorporate Husserl's philosophies of 'noesis' and 'noema'. *Noesis* means to perceive or think about, and noema in the object that noesis is directed toward (Greasley & Ashworth, 2007). According to Husserl, the meaning of a phenomenon, or *noema*, is based on the natural connections to the context or subject factors in an individual's life (Greasley & Ashworth, 2007). Phenomenological reduction is another important concept where the researcher uses epoché (or bracketing) to suspend their own experiences or perspectives, to witness a phenomenon just as it presents in the present (Van Manen, 2014). Epoché, or bracketing, allows the researcher to set aside their own judgments or biases to observe and describe from a first-person point of view

(Van Manen, 2014). Further, phenomenology also focuses on a specific time component, which is the present experience that cannot be bracketed or suspended (Husserl, 2013). As such, in transcendental phenomenology researchers view experiences as they are contained in the present horizon or context, which helps to form the understanding we have of the present experience (Husserl, 2013).

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

For the literature review, I focused on key concepts relating to supervision in counselor education, stress in counseling education and the counseling profession, and counselor wellness. These include stress during (a) students' master's-level counseling internships, (b) perceptions of stress, (c) self-care, (d) stress management and counselor wellness in program curriculum, (e) supervision and stress management, and (f) supervision models that incorporate wellness components. The literature relating to these subjects highlights the importance and purpose of this study.

CACREP-Accredited Requirements for Supervision

CACREP (2016) requires counselor preparation programs to include at least 40 clock hours of practicum direct service experience and at least 240 clock hours of internship direct service experience, each of which include 1 hour of weekly individual supervision and 1.5 hours of weekly group supervision. Supervisors are both program faculty and site supervisors who hold a professional license (CACREP, 2016). The CACREP standards also charge counselor educators to educate about self-care in relation to their role as counselors to assist in creating resilience through the instillation of healthy wellness practices (Harrichand et al., 2021). Though these standards are helpful,

counselor educators and supervisors themselves may have challenges modeling self-care and wellness practices, which can impact the ability to effectively instill these important elements into either curriculum or supervision (Harrichand et al., 2021).

While university supervisors have terminal degrees in counselor education and supervision, site supervisors are often not trained in some of the gatekeeping or development aspects of counselor preparation in relation to supervision (McKibben et al, 2022). Though CACREP requires supervision both at the university and site levels, often site supervisors may not be prepared with the knowledge and competence required for developing counselors (McKibben et al, 2022). For example, McKibben et al (2022) found that 91.3% of programs in their sample offered orientation, 100% offered consultation, and 89.1% offered professional development opportunities. However, there were discrepancies in how supervisors utilized these supports that were offered with only 75% overall participating in orientation, and in some programs as little as 10% participating in orientation. Overall, only 44% were utilizing the offered professional development, with some programs reporting as few as 2% utilizing the professional development offerings (McKibben et al, 2022). Therefore, it is equally important for programs to provide and ensure the utilization of guidance and support for site supervisors to effectively guide master's-level counseling interns in a CACREP-accredited program in their personal and professional development.

Stress During Students' Counseling Internships

Aside from physical and psychological stress, a master's counseling program can contribute to stress in other areas of students' lives. Debt stress among counseling

psychology trainees is a common concern among students in higher education (Olson-Garriott et al., 2015). The overall average debt for those holding a master's degree is $83,651, and for those attending private, for-profit institutions that average jumps to $123,339 (Hanson, 2023). Further, graduate student debit is typically 141.8% higher than the average debt of all student borrows (Hanson, 2023). The average debt for master's degree holders has increased by 113% since 2000, leaving 60% of master's degree holders owing large amounts of student loan debt (Hanson, 2023).

Research indicates that counselors who are well are better able to help and meet their clients' needs, but counselors do not always operate from the perspective of prioritizing their own wellness whether professionally or personally (Lenz et al., 2018). This makes stress mitigation and management not just an abstract concept but an ethical consideration in practice (Wendel, 2022). In a sample of clinical and counseling psychology doctoral students, over 49% of the students surveyed had three or more clinical symptoms of anxiety multiple times per week, over 39% had clinical symptoms of depression, and over 34% has clinically significant anxiety and depression combined, but only 19% of those surveyed utilized therapy services to cope (Rummell, 2015). Stigma may be the main barrier, though there are other barriers that can prevent students from seeking help to deal with program and internship stressors such as lack of time and cost (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012).

Perceptions of Stress in Master's-Level Counseling Students

Though counseling students may be skilled at identifying stress and promoting wellness and self-care with their clients, often they can have difficulty in identifying the

importance of and applying these same concepts on a personal level in their own lifestyle (Callender & Lenz, 2018). Counselors are not always proactive about incorporating self-care during times of stress and may not even take time off during times of distress, especially if there is a perceived pressure to perform (Baker & Gabriel, 2021). Research has highlighted (a) the importance of supportive relationships with peers and significant others, (b) having a formal support network outside of the program, (c) creating a supportive environment, (d) helping students develop positive wellness strategies, and (e) the infusion of wellness in counselor education programs from advising to curriculum, especially during stressful times such as final exams (Burck et al., 2014).

Master's-level counseling interns in graduate counseling programs can also be self-critical in holding themselves to very high performance standards, and as such, develop irrational beliefs about needing to be constantly at peak performance, enthusiasm, and competence at all times, which leads to minimizing their own stress levels (Lee et al., 2018). Given the multiple responsibilities and roles as students, counselors, researchers, and other personal and professional roles, high expectations mixed with inabilities to manage the overwhelming demands can leave counseling interns highly susceptible to burnout (Lee et al., 2018). Attributional style, which is the patterns of cognition that explain how individuals appraise and react to positive and negative events, can be an important part of how counseling students view and react to these multiple stressors (Lee et al., 2018). It is important for counselor educators and supervisors to be aware of and identify attributional styles and attitudes that can lead to burnout and other negative impacts of stress in counseling students (Lee et al., 2018).

Counselor educators and supervisors can help master's-level counseling interns to self-monitor and identify their own cognitive patterns and how that may be contributing to their perceptions and ability to manage stress (Lee et al., 2018).

The Importance of Self-Care and Wellness for Counselors

Despite the multiple stressors counselors face during their work, many may not have effective self-care practices and positive coping behaviors to maintain overall wellness (Ko & Lee, 2021). Counselors and counselors in training expend a lot of energy tending to the needs of clients and may as a result neglect consideration of their own needs, which can lead to burnout (Ko & Lee, 2021). Self-care is both preventive and interventive in attending to physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being (Plath & Fickling, 2022). It is important to maintain an appropriate level of self-care to effectively fulfill the demands of a professional counseling role (Ko & Lee, 2021). Practicing good self-care can also contribute to better boundaries with clients, as counselors are not as likely to use the client relationship to meet personal or professional needs (Coaston, 2017). The importance of self-care is supported by the inclusion of self-care as part of the standards and ethical codes by CACREP and the ACA. Self-care for counselors can be defined as "taking care of one's own needs by maintaining balance between one's individual and professional selves" (Ko & Lee, 2021, p. 1). Self-care is a process by which counselors renew themselves, nurturing their emotional, social, spiritual, and intellectual health, to develop a lifestyle that is self-nurturing and helps to prevent burnout and distress (Ko & Lee, 2021). There are many self-care techniques and strategies, and all of them contribute to an individual's overall wellness (Guler &

Ceyhan, 2021).

Wellness, in general, is also a fundamental part of counselor development both personally and professionally (Plath & Fickling, 2022). Wellness is a way of life that helps an individual have an optimal state of health and being (Guler & Ceyhan, 2021). It is "a self-directed, evolving process that is multidimension, holistic, positive, and affirming" (Mumbauer & Kim, 2021, p. 1). While counselor education in general aims to promote wellness, it can be hard to measure in counselors in training and is often subjective (Mumbauer & Kim, 2021). Wellness is something that may not be addressed with counselors in training until it becomes apparent that there is a lack of wellness due to decreased professional competency, which can be highly problematic (Mumbauer & Kim, 2021). This makes education and intervention critical to building these practices. While there is limited information about wellness education and interventions with counselors in training, a study by Wolf et al. (2014) that integrated wellness psychoeducation and workshops with counselors in training reported a statistically significant increase in wellness. Participants reported that the program kept them accountable and provided a reminder of the importance of personal and professional self-care (Mumbauer & Kim, 2021). Meany-Walen et al. (2016) conducted a study with counseling students using a wellness-focused supervision intervention which found moderate to large treatment effects, indicating that wellness-focused supervision can be beneficial (Mumbauer & Kim, 2021).

Self-Care During Students' Master's-level Counseling Internships

Lawson (2007) surveyed about 400 post-graduate counseling students and found

that nearly half were operating professionally between stressed and impaired on a wellness spectrum (Wendel, 2022). Helping professionals can neglect operating from a wellness perspective even though the nature of the counseling profession by nature tends to lead to stress and a higher need for good self-care practices to mitigate stress (Blount et al, 2016). Myers et al. (2012) conducted a quantitative survey of 488 psychology graduate students from across the United States to gather data on self-care practices and stress. The authors found that healthy sleep practices, cognitive reappraisal, suppression, and high levels of social support were significantly related to lower levels of perceived stress (Myers et al., 2012). Self-care practices were found to be related to perceived stress levels among psychology students, and factors like age, relationship status, and financial factors can also contribute to perceived stress levels (Myers et al., 2012). Testa and Sangganjanavanich (2015) examined the contribution of mindfulness and emotional intelligence in relation to burnout among counseling interns in a CACREP-accredited program. One specific finding which was significant is attending to moment-to-moment experiences to facilitate awareness of one's emotions and feelings toward others (Testa & Sangganjanavanich, 2015). This ability can help counseling interns to understand their emotions to better regulate them, thus developing emotional coping skills to prevent strain on emotional resources (a major factor in developing burnout).

Some students may utilize negative coping to deal with stressors related to their program of study and field experience. Verdi, Weyandt, and Zavras (2016) offer a quantitative study of 807 graduate students' non-medical use of prescription stimulant medication. This study examines the relationship between non-medical use of

prescription stimulants with academic self-efficacy, psychological factors (anxiety, depression, and stress), and internal restlessness. Participants indicated that motivators for use of stimulants were academic in nature, and related to performance, focus, and test taking performance, while some reported recreational use (Verdi, et al., 2016). Many indicated that they perceived prescription medications to be safer in nature than other stimulants (Verdi et al., 2016). Negative coping styles can also be problematic. Fuenfhausen and Cashwell (2013) completed a quantitative survey to examine the effects of participation in a CACREP-accredited graduate counseling program on marital satisfaction. The authors found that attachment avoidance and marital satisfaction can be mediated in part by dyadic coping, and that those with anxious attachments interpret potential threats as being more stressful than those without anxious attachments. Highly avoidant individuals use deactivating strategies to cope with stress, including denial of attachment needs, avoiding intimacy, and trying to deal with stress alone (Fuenfhausen & Cashwell, 2013). This illustrates the importance of helping students to develop healthy and positive coping skills and habits to avoid the development of negative coping skills and habits. Further, professional identity is shaped during career training and development, so implementing a self-care component is important for developing a healthy lifestyle in a long-term counseling career (Guler & Ceyhan, 2021).

Program Integration of Stress Management

Counselor education programs can assist master's counseling students with learning appropriate stress management skills and techniques. In fact, CACREP requires wellness components in counselor education curriculum, including education about

strategies for personal and professional self-evaluation, self-care strategies for counselors, ethical and cultural strategies for promoting resilience, development, and wellness, and concepts related to the interrelationship between work, mental health, relationships, and other life roles (CACREP, 2016). The *ACA Code of Ethics* also requires counselors to engage in self-care to monitor their own well-being, and supervisors to operate from a place of promoting these ethical standards (ACA, 2014). While both CACREP and the *ACA Code of Ethics* require programs, supervisors, and counselors to address these things to maintain wellness, often students do not build the knowledge and skills needed in these areas professionally or personally (Wendel, 2022). A study by Baker and Gabriel (2021) found that there was an overall lack of information and awareness of how lack of self-care can have an impact, and that most counselors do not take breaks from client work during times of personal distress. This illustrates the importance of incorporating wellness-based education and strategies in counselor education and supervision.

Incorporating wellness and self-care became even more evident during the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020. This was the most widespread pandemic of the 21st century and resulted in millions of deaths globally (Harrichand et al., 2021). Because of this global pandemic, many experienced changes in their quality of sleep, trouble concentrating, increased substance use and abuse, increased prevalence of mental health disorders and suicide, social isolation, anxiety, and panic related directly to the pandemic, extreme lifestyle changes, financial issues, and overall distress (Harrichand et al., 2021). These issues and changes made it imperative for counselors and counselors-in-training to

change how they provided services to clients, and often also created barriers to their typical modes of self-care and wellness (Harrichand et al., 2021).

The COVID pandemic also had a negative effect on higher education, as in-person campuses emptied during the spring of 2020 and most, if not all in-person classes were moved to a virtual platform (Kelchen, 2022). It caused a large drop in the enrollment of new undergraduate students and caused significant financial effects on higher education institutions in the realm of $115 billion (Kelchen, 2022). The shift to online courses had less of an impact on graduate students as almost one-third of graduate students were already in fully online programs prior to COVID (Kelchen, 2022). However, there was more scrutiny on new programs or initiatives in higher education due to the financial burdens that COVID caused, and future student loans and income-driven repayment plans might be limited because of the impact of the pandemic (Kelchen, 2022). Though repayment of student loans was suspended during the pandemic, these payments are resuming in 2023, which may add a new stressor for graduate students completing a program (Kelchen, 2022).

A specific stress management course may help counselors in training build those necessary skills, such as that conducted by Abel et al. (2012). This quantitative study sought to measure how a stress management course affected state and trait anxiety among counselors in training. Of 101 participants, 55 were enrolled in an elective stress management course (treatment group) and 46 were enrolled in the general program. Those participants who were in the stress management course had positive changes in stress-related symptoms (Abel et al., 2012). Including wellness and stress management in

counselor preparation programs can help students learn to effectively cope with daily stressors and in turn help their clients as well. This type of education may help students ultimately prevent burnout and impairment as future counselors (Abel et al., 2012).

Supervision in Counselor Education

Supervision is a requirement for master's-level counseling students and post-master's counselors working toward licensure and has two central purposes: (a) to foster personal and professional development and (b) to protect the welfare of clients (Blount & Mullen, 2015). Clinical supervision aims to develop clinical skills and professional and ethical competencies (Brejcha, 2021). Supervision is an important part of counselor education in that it is an evaluative process which ensures clinical competency is met during the critical professional development process (De Stefano, Hutman, & Gazzola, 2017). Clinical supervision provides both support and instruction to supervisees, oversees the welfare of clients, and serves as an important part of the gatekeeping process in counselor preparation (Crunk & Barden, 2017). The supervision process is developmentally supportive and helps to foster a sense of professional identity by overseeing interventions that lead to positive client outcomes (Callender & Lenz, 2018).

Counselors-in-training are required to utilize clinical supervision throughout their program and pre-licensure process, and often do not have the ability to select their supervisor or change to a different supervisor if they perceive they are not getting what they need (De Stefano et al., 2017). Therefore, it is important for supervisors to also be mindful of the power differential in the relationship, balancing a critical watchful eye with a supportive and often intuitive sense (De Stefano et al., 2017).

Supervisors adhere to theories and pedagogical methods of supervision to evaluate supervisees and to build their professional competence (Blount & Mullen, 2015). There are many models of supervision that focus on counselor development, emphasize theories of psychotherapy and the process of supervision, and the different roles of the supervisor (Crunk & Barden, 2017). Counselors and counselors-in-training assist individuals with difficult experiences, which can lead to burnout, compassion fatigue, or even vicarious traumatization if not properly addressed and managed (Wendel, 2022). Given the stressful nature of counselor training and the practice of counseling, supervision models should also include components that address wellness and self-care (Merriman, 2015).

Online Counselor Supervision

With the growing prevalence of online programs and the increased use of virtual meetings since the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, some supervision may take place virtually (Villarreal-Davis, Sartor, & McLean, 2021). While there are some benefits to online counseling including convenience, flexibility, accessibility, and meeting non-traditional students' needs, there may also be some challenges (Villarreal-Davis et al., 2021). Challenges may include issues related to confidentiality, issues with technology, problems with understanding technology aspects for those engaging, potential confidentiality issues, and not having the visual cues that in-person supervision provides (Villarreal-Davis et al., 2021). Because of these dynamics, supervisors would need to be mindful to attend to the working alliance between supervisors and supervisees, as well as any ethical considerations that may present in utilizing this type of modality for

delivering supervision (Villarreal-Davis et al., 2021).

Models of Supervision

There are various models of supervision, and just as counselors can incorporate multiple counseling theories into their practice to create an eclectic approach to counseling, supervisors may also take this approach to supervision (Brejcha, 2021). Whatever model supervisors utilize, they must have competency in using supervision models to provide supervision that promote supervisee development, client welfare, and evaluative processes (Bellinger & Carone, 2021). One type of supervision model is the relationship approach, which includes models like the Systems Approach to Supervision (SAS), the Supervisory-Matric-Centered (Relational) approach, and the Common Factors Discrimination Model (CFDM; Brejcha, 2021). These models tend to focus on building a concrete supervisory relationship, but do not define supervisor roles within the relationship that may be critical to counselors in training to have a sense of structure (Brejcha, 2021). The Discrimination Model, developed by Bernard in 1979, combines the relational aspect of clinical supervision with a clear definition of the supervisor's roles of counselor, teacher, and consultant (Brejcha, 2021). Bernard's Discrimination Model also includes frameworks for how issues are addressed in supervision which he termed "foci," and includes intervention, conceptualization, and personalization (Dantzler & Volkmann, 2018). This model tends to be helpful for beginning supervisors because of its simplicity in defining roles and clear boundaries, and ability to be incorporated with many different theoretical orientations (Timm, 2015).

The systems approach to supervision is another development model developed by

Elizabeth Holloway (1995). Holloway laid out seven dimensions of supervision that are all connected centrally by the supervision relationship (the core factor; Holloway, 1995). These dimensions include the functions of supervision, tasks of supervision, the client, the trainee, the supervisor, and the institution (Holloway, 1995). According to Holloway, the goal of supervision using this model is to provide opportunities for the supervisor to learn various professional attitudes, skills, and knowledge, and that this happens within a "complex professional relationship that is ongoing and mutually involving" (Holloway, 1995, p. 6).

There are also psychodynamic approaches to supervision, where the supervisor is viewed as the "uninvolved expert" who guides and assists the supervisee, putting the supervisor in a position of authority and shifting the focus from the supervisee to the client (Smith, 2018). There are also developmental models of supervision such as the Integrated Development Model (IDM), that provides a more structured approach for supervisors to conceptualizes the skills and levels of their supervisee (Bellinger & Carone, 2021). Though all these models provide great structure and guidance for the clinical and relational aspects of counselor supervision, they do not provide specific structure or guidance for the promotion of counselor wellness.

Supervision and Stress Management

Supervision provides a more direct means for development of stress mitigation strategies and self-assessment because supervisors can learn more on an individual-level about how stress associated with the counselor role is impacting personal wellness in the counselor-in-training (Callender & Lenz, 2018). Since supervisors have an ethical

obligation to address the holistic well-being of supervisees, it can be a catalyst for assessing and regulating personal and professional development, as well as monitoring and assessing the quality of care and intervention given to the supervisee's clients (Callender & Lenz, 2018). Supervisors can provide unique and direct support on finding strategies for work-life balance and healthy self-care strategies (Callender & Lenz, 2018). Merriman (2015) conducted a case study article on compassion fatigue, symptoms and risk factors, protective factors, the purposes of counselor supervision, counselor development, and practical strategies for prevention compassion fatigue during supervision. Miller and Sprang (2017) recently published a components-based practice and supervision model to reduce compassion fatigue in clinicians. The components for enhancing clinician engagement and reducing trauma (CE-CERT) model has five skill components to help clinicians working with trauma (Miller & Sprang, 2017). Though targeted to counselors providing trauma counseling, it has useful components for self-monitoring and self-care.

Since anxiety can be common for counselors in training in relation to things such as their ability to be competent, struggles with perfectionism, and pressures of external evaluations from supervisors and faculty, it is important to address this in supervision as a part of a wellness model (Watkinson, Cicero, & Burton, 2021). Too much anxiety can negatively have an impact on learning and professional development (Watkinson et al., 2021). Incorporating mindfulness-based constructivist supervision approaches that help counselors in training make meaning of their experiences can help to create positive change and help supervisees learn and grow from these stress experiences (Watkinson et

al., 2021).

Merriman (2015) notes that supervisors should engage in dialogue with counseling interns to discuss symptomology, risk factors, and protective factors for compassion fatigue. This can help interns be prepared to recognize when they are developing compassion fatigue symptoms and create an open environment in supervision to discuss these issues freely (Merriman, 2015). Practices such as these normalize the notion of addressing stress and compassion fatigue in supervision for both the supervisor and the intern, which can help to prompt early intervention if needed and the development of positive coping and protective factors (Merriman, 2015). Within the scope of supervision, compassion fatigue education should include the need for consulting, debriefing, peer support, and appropriate boundaries (Merriman, 2015). Further, supervisors should promote self-awareness and self-reflection as well as appropriate and positive self-care practices as a standard rather than a luxury. Merriman (2015) further suggests that supervisors both teach and model values of continuous and systematic self-care and to address adverse experiences as growth opportunities to normalize feelings of inadequacy that counselors in training may feel because of stress.

Supervision Models Incorporating Wellness

Supervision incorporates both structured and non-structured interventions and supports professional development during both counselor education and during pre-licensure (Callender & Lenz, 2018). Counseling supervisors are also gatekeepers for the profession in that they monitor functioning which includes a wellness perspective, making a wellness approach to supervision an important part of both gatekeeping and

promoting career-sustaining behaviors in counselors in training (Callender & Lenz, 2018). However, supervision models overall lack a focus on wellness apart from a few models (Meany, Davis, & Lindo, 2016).

The Wellness Model of Supervision (WELMS) integrates wellness into the supervision process, with wellness accounting for 40% of the overall model and including components that measure and assess wellness in supervisees (Wendel, 2022). This approach includes four major components: education, assessment, planning, and evaluation of progress (Wendel, 2022). A study by Callender and Lenz (2018) of mental health counseling interns in a CACREP-accredited program found that utilizing the WELMS model of supervision resulted in positive changes to professional quality of life (ProQOL). The authors used the ProQOL, which is a 30-item self-report scale with subscales for Compassion Satisfaction, Burnout, and Secondary Traumatic Stress, as well as a Five Factor Wellness Inventory (5F-WEL) which is a self-scoring tool that measures total wellness (Callender & Lenz, 2018). Participants completed the ProQOL prior to intervention with WELMS to assess a baseline and then weekly thereafter, and completed the 5F-WEL online and used the score to develop an individualized wellness plan prior to beginning the WELMS (Callender & Lenz, 2018). Results showed a reduction in traumatic stress, an increase in compassion satisfaction, and a decrease in feelings of burnout (Callender & Lenz, 2018). This study supports the importance of integrating a proactive approach to wellness strategies and assessments that help to develop career-sustaining behaviors during both practicum and internship (Callender & Lenz, 2018).

Other models of supervision also incorporate wellness, including the Integrated

Developmental Model (IDM) and the discrimination model of supervision, however the wellness components are more subtle than the WELMS model of supervision (Wendel, 2022). The discrimination model of supervision is adaptable in that it allows the supervisor to fill the roles of educator, counselor, or consultant (Jackson, 2022). Within this model, the counselor in training focuses on developing self-awareness, identifying cognitive processes, and using skills and interventions, all of which can be utilized to improve wellness and self-care (Jackson, 2022; Crunk & Barden, 2017). The IDM utilizes the theoretical components of the discrimination model in that it meets the supervisee's development needs, and further includes wellness to support healthy functioning. IDM includes processes including development of the supervisory relationship, evaluation of development, and assessing wellness to inform needed interventions (Blount & Mullen, 2015).

Students' Experiences of Supervision

Wheeler and Richards (2007) reported how supervision provides counselors in training with building skill efficacy, overall increased self-efficacy, and needed social support. With technology and other changes in society, online supervision has increased, which can change the experience of supervision as a whole (Amanvermez et al., 2020). A study by Amanvermez et al. (2020) found that those receiving online supervision posited similar benefits to those receiving face-to-face supervision in the study by Wheeler and Richards (2007). One additional benefit of online supervision was the increased ability to find time for supervision sessions because it offers more flexibility in scheduling (Amanvermez et al., 2020). However, there may be some limitations regarding

communication cues and the overall dynamics of online versus in-person supervision (Amanvermez et al., 2020). Overall, counselors in training experienced enrichment from supervision though it is still unclear if that includes addressing stress mitigation or wellness in either the online or in-person supervision setting (Amanvermez et al., 2020).

Counseling students' experiences with supervision can also rely on the structure utilized in supervision (Cook & Sackett, 2018). Since supervision is time-limited, counselors in training tend to try to effectively use that time to address client needs and learning needs (Cook & Sackett, 2018). This may lead to leaving out important clinical details to save time (Cook & Sackett, 2018). This begs the question of whether counselors in training may also omit their person needs for stress mitigation and management as well, which leads to the research question at hand: How do master's counseling students in a CACREP-accredited program experience clinical supervision in relation to stress mitigation during internship?

Summary

While there is a wealth of information on counselor education, supervision, and the stress experienced during a counseling internship, I have not been able to find research specific to the lived experiences of master's-level counseling interns in a CACREP-accredited program in relation to supervision and the inclusion of stress mitigation elements. Considering the literature support for the importance of stress management, self-care, and the import role that supervision plays in counselor development, having a first-hand perspective of these lived experiences would be helpful for supervisors and counselor educators. As the literature has shown, learning to manage

the many stressors that accompany the counseling profession is an important part of both counselor development and career-sustainability in counseling. In Chapter Three, I will provide detailed information on the philosophical framework and methods for this study, including design, rationale, the role of the researcher, methodology, data analysis procedures, a discussion of the trustworthiness of the study framework and methodology, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Through my study, I aimed to contribute to the problem of limited information on the lived experiences of stress mitigation in clinical supervision for master's-level interns in CACREP-accredited counseling programs. My goal was to contribute to insight into how policy and supervision practices in counselor education programs can contribute to supporting and educating students during this critical time of professional and personal development. The literature supports the importance of stress management education in counselor preparation stages to help mitigate long-term stressors (Abel et al., 2012; Burck et al., 2014). The current study addressed the question: How do master's-level interns in CACREP-accredited counseling programs experience clinical supervision in relation to stress mitigation during internship?

Research Design and Rationale

This study is a transcendental phenomenological exploration of the lived experiences of master's-level interns in CACREP-accredited counseling programs. Though there is a wealth of information on the stressors faced by this group and the importance of supervision and wellness practices, there is limited research about the experiences of master's-level interns in CACREP-accredited counseling programs in relation to stress mitigation during counseling supervision. The rationale for conducting a phenomenological study is that transcendental phenomenology is used to gather knowledge solely from the perspective of the subject (Husserl, 2013). Humans are influenced by others and their environment of context and culture (Henriques, 2014). The meaning of a phenomenon, or noema, is based on the natural connections to the

contextual and subjective factors in one's life (Greasley & Ashworth, 2007). This allowed me to capture the essence of these experiences from the perspective of master's-level interns and relied only on descriptions based on the participants' intimate experiences with the phenomenon (see Giorgi, 2012). Utilizing a transcendental phenomenological approach also requires the researcher to set aside any knowledge, prejudgments, or perceptions (Giorgi, 2012; Husserl, 2013). This required me to bracket my own viewpoints, biases, experiences, and assumptions, especially since I have at one point in time been a master's-level counseling student in internship. This approach helped me to capture the essence of the participants' experiences.

Role of the Researcher

For this study, I was the sole researcher and I do not have a personal or professional relationship with selected research participants. As the researcher, I assumed the role of observer of participants' experiences. Giorgi (2012) explains that the researcher utilizing a phenomenological approach must assume "the correct attitude" (p. 4) of phenomenological reduction in letting go of assumptions, experiences, knowledge, and perceptions to truly observe and embrace the present experiences and perceptions of the participants. As such, I bracketed my own experiences, beliefs, and attitudes so that I could be open to the lived experiences and meanings of the phenomenon I was studying. As the researcher, it was my role to uncover lived experiences of human existence that, as much as possible, are open and abstinent from theoretical orientations and emotional reactions (Van Manen, 2014). Since I have lived the experience of a master's-level student intern in a CACREP-accredited counseling program, it was important for me to

be self-aware and monitor my ability to remain an objective observer of their lived experiences in the present. I did this through bracketing and constantly being aware and mindful to remain objective as an observer. Bracketing is a core concept in phenomenology that includes reflection and reflexivity (Dörfler & Stierand, 2021), which refers to the researcher's awareness and attention to the process of constructing knowledge, and in this process also avoiding biases and position in the generation of data, analysis of data, and synthesizing the results (Nicholls, 2019). There is a basic concept of *intentionality*, which is the state of being conscious of something, and further seeing consciousness as an action rather than a state of being (Nicholls, 2019). Intentionality or *reflective awareness* results in a shift of attitude to the *reflexive researcher stance* that is essential for phenomenological research and in performing *reductions* (Nicholls, 2019). The first of two stages of reduction is *epoché*, also referred to as transcendental reduction or bracketing, which Husserl posited as fundamental in phenomenological research to suspend or bracket the researcher's attitudes, judgements, biases, and worldview to uncover the noetic-noematic essence of the subjects' lived experiences of the phenomenon as it is in the present moment (Nicholls, 2019). Eidetic reduction uses imaginary variation to consider what makes the object of study what it is, identifying the basic components that make up the essential structure of the phenomenon to make it what it is and not something else (Nicholls, 2019). Utilizing a transcendental phenomenological approach, I sought to understand the experiences of stress mitigation in supervision for master's-level counseling interns. From these interviews and utilizing the participants' own language and expressions, I identified the following themes related

to stress and supervision experiences: time commitment as a stressor, feelings of imposter syndrome, difficulty talking to others about stress, program and supervisors promote self-care, supervisors are supportive clinically, and supervision is non-structured.

I first sought to capture the essence of participants' experience utilizing bracketing and epoché to avoid and be mindful of how my own experiences as a past master's-level counseling intern could potentially create bias. The concept of the horizon must also be considered within this transcendental phenomenological study. The phenomenon of these students' experiences at a particular point in time, and from my vantage point as observer is one aspect of master's-level counseling interns' supervision and stress experiences, or the current 'horizon'. Within this horizon is the potential that the observer, or researcher, makes certain assumptions based on past experiences and the perception of these experiences (Husserl, 2014). My horizon is that of a researcher who has experienced the phenomenon in the past, while the participants' horizon is of one experiencing the phenomenon in the present moment. This concept made it important to utilize bracketing to set aside my own assumptions of participant experiences so that I could truly capture the essence of their experiences at this moment in time. "Intentionality" in phenomenological research is central in that every conscious act and experience is intentional, and these are correlated to an object (Husserl, 2014). In this study, that object was the experience of supervision for master's-level counseling interns at a particular point in time, or within this horizon. The participants experienced the phenomenon (supervision) in the present time at the time of the study, so they offered the intentionality of perceiving it from that direct perspective.

Methodology

Population and Sampling Strategy

According to Moustakas (1994), participants should be selected based upon their experience of the phenomenon being explored and their willingness to participate. Since qualitative studies seek to understand what experiences are like, the main criteria for selection of participants was whether they are living the experience the researcher is studying (Englander, 2012). As such, criteria for participating in this study included (a) master's-level students enrolled in a CACREP-accredited counseling program, and (b) students who are currently enrolled and active in internship. For the purpose of this study, age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, geographical location, and other factors were not considerations for participation. To increase accessibility and provide variation, I selected students for the study from a local university and from online social media platform groups specifically for master's-level counseling students, allowing me to recruit students enrolled in in-person and virtual programs, as well as programs in various regions as applicable. For the local university, a flyer was provided to the department faculty that was distributed to students who were currently enrolled in internship. This flyer outlined the purpose of the study in addition to any disclaimers, and those interested were directed to contact me by email or by phone for consideration. For the social media platform, I posted information on the study similar to the flyer used for the in-person recruitment asking those who were currently enrolled in internship to contact me by private message, email, or by phone if interested in consideration for the study. Once participants respond with interest, I provided informed consent by email regarding the

nature and purpose of the study including the participants' rights and researcher responsibilities. This also included consent to record interviews and provide information on confidentiality and security of data. Participants were invited to ask questions if needed, and also asked to respond to the email with "I understand and I consent" in order to move forward with participation.

The standard sample size for phenomenological methods of study is variable and there is no set standard for the number of participants needed because it is based on what the researcher is seeking to know or the purpose of the inquiry (Patton, 2002). As O'Reilly and Parker (2013) explain, there is no formula or set of standards for selecting a sample size. Boyd (2001) finds that 2 to 10 participants is sufficient, while Creswell (1998) typically recommends 10 (Groenewald, 2004). Considering these recommendations, I aimed for a range between 2 to 10 participants as recommended by Boyd (2001), with the final determination resting upon achieving data saturation. Saturation is the point where data collection offers no new insights or information, and there is no more relevant data that is not redundant (Dworkin, 2012). I achieved data saturation with 6 participants.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

I collected data using semi-structured interviews with master's-level students enrolled and active in internship in CACREP-accredited counseling programs, and interviews were conducted by phone. Phone interviews were audio recorded, with consent from the participant, so that interviews could be transcribed for reference and review. I allowed for follow-up questions to clarify responses and ensure a complete

understanding of the experiences from the participant point of view. My interview questions were based on information gathered in the literature review process to address gaps in information. Interview questions were semi-structured, and interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes in length. I utilized open-ended questions and when necessary, followed up with additional non-structured questions to gain an accurate and textural description of participants' experiences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Once I completed all the interviews and reviewed the responses collected, I scheduled and conducted 20-minute follow-up interviews to fill in any gaps in information that occurred. The gaps and additional information were added to the end of the original transcripts.

Data Analysis

In transcendental phenomenology, the researcher seeks to explicate rather than analyze data. This involves distillation where the information that is not related to the research question is removed and the statements and core themes that relate to the research question are brought more into view (Devinish, 2002). The steps for data analysis included the following steps:

Step 1: Review Transcripts and Assign Preliminary Meaning Units

During the initial step, I reviewed the descriptions by the participants as a whole to get a sense of them, and then went back through the descriptions to derive more meaning and assign preliminary meaning units for responses (Giorgi, 2012). Responses from the interviews were reviewed by highlighting similarities in phrases, relationships, between variables or patterns and themes on the transcripts, and by isolating patterns and

commonalities to derive common themes (Miles et al., 2014). I also was mindful to utilize Husserl's (2013) concepts of bracketing, *noesis* and *noema* to remain transparent about my own biases during this initial step. I analyzed the data directly from the participants' experiences and language rather than my own to eliminate my own interpretations of the subject matter.

Example of Step 1. The first meaning unit identified self-care as an experience of supervision for master's-level counseling students. P1 described their experience in supervision: "Weekly, my supervisor is asking me what I am doing for self-care, during our intern supervisions in class every week they're talking about self-care."

Step 2: Use Preliminary Meaning Units to Create Final Meaning Units

The second step involved taking the preliminary meaning units and creating themes, or final meaning units, to provide a richer description of the participants' experiences.

Example of Step 2. The preliminary meaning unit identified from P1's response was "Master's-level counseling students experience a promotion of self-care during their internship within supervision and in their program courses." The final meaning unit derived was, "Program and supervisors promote self-care."

Step 3: Create a General Narrative

In the third step, I created a general narrative using the participants' responses in order to give a general description to both clarify and identify the themes that were present from the participants' experiences in a cohesive way (Giorgi, 2012). I organized the narratives as follows:

"Most" = all participants experienced theme

"Many" = not all but at least 5 of 6 of participants experienced theme

"Some" = 4 of 6 participants experienced theme

"Few" = 3 of 6 (half) or less experienced theme

Example of Step 3. Theme one: Program and supervisors promote self-care. General narrative: Supervision experiences among participants were generally described as overall positive. All participants described both their programs and their supervisors as promoting self-care and overall well-being.

Step 4: Create General Structure of Population

Step four used the general narrative to create a general structure of the population rather than that of the participants. This brings together the meanings in a way that is cohesive and applicable to the population studied.

Example of Step 4. Below is an example of the general description: Supervision experiences among master's-level counseling interns are generally overall positive. Master's-level interns experience both their programs and their supervisors as promoting self-care and overall well-being.

Trustworthiness

Phenomenological research does not eliminate subjectivity and does not provide concrete validity, but instead clarifies the role that subjectivity plays because knowledge is correlated with subjectivity (Giorgi, 2002). Because of this it is important to consider a subject is present to a phenomenon, and Husserl's necessary structural aspects of consciousness help to provide a more structured solution to this problem (Giorgi, 2002).

Therefore, phenomenology seeks to “arrive at a structural understanding of specific and concrete experiences by being fully and critically present to situations where the desired experiences take place” (Giorgi, 2002, p. 9). Ultimately phenomenology seeks to maintain fidelity to the phenomenon being studied (Giorgi, 2002). Trustworthiness or “validity” in qualitative research “refers to the ways that researchers can affirm that their findings are faithful to participants’ experiences” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 186).

For this study I employed peer review and provided rich descriptions to assist in building trustworthiness. Further, I utilized member checking to ensure the accuracy of information gathered from the participants’ perspective. This gave the participants an opportunity to review the transcripts for accuracy to ensure that I had captured and transcribed their experiences exactly as they had relayed them. As mentioned previously, saturation was utilized to ensure credibility of findings. My dissertation committee also served to provide an objective review of my study and findings.

Credibility

Credibility in this study was achieved by using peer review, providing rich descriptions, and detailed informed consent. Peer review was achieved by having a colleague review and ask questions about my study and findings to bring up any possible gaps or issues that may have been present, as well as ensure credibility and lack of bias. The peer review did not result in any gaps or issues being identified. I also provided rich descriptions of the participants’ experiences and used quotes from their interviews to support these descriptions. Providing a detailed informed consent to each participant also ensured that participants had adequate knowledge about the process, their protections and

rights, and the purpose of the study so that they were more comfortable in providing honest responses to the questions being presented. To further ensure credibility, I ensured saturation, so the data fully provided the needed context to answer the research question at hand.

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research refers to how the study can be applicable to a broader context while still having a richness that is specific to the context (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In other words, though the results of my study can be compared to other studies for context, there is no generalization to specific populations, settings, or other factors (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To achieve this, I have detailed descriptions of data in addition to the context or rich descriptions. I also included information about the participants, the settings, and the timeframe to provide details that can be used for comparisons in future studies.

Dependability

Dependability involves having consistency and stability, and a solid argument for how the data will be collected and how this collected data supports answering the research question (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This means using appropriate methods, and in my study, I have provided a detailed explanation of the research process including reasoning for selecting my methods, how this will achieve the purpose of the study (answering the research question), and the steps by which this was achieved.

Confirmability

Confirmability in qualitative research is similar to objectivity in quantitative

research; however, given the subjective nature of qualitative research, this can often be difficult. Confirmability is typically achieved by acknowledging bias and remaining neutral (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In my study, I utilized Husserl's (2013) concepts of bracketing, *noesis* and *noema*, to build confirmability, and I was transparent about my own biases. I also analyzed the data directly from the participants' experiences and language rather than my own to eliminate my own interpretations of the subject matter.

Ethical Considerations

As a researcher, I have an ethical responsibility to ensure the security and privacy of data and participant information. Access to participant data was limited to myself as sole researcher and to my committee. Participants were made aware that committee members had access to data gathered for the purposes of this study. Further, data were secured, password protected, and will be destroyed within one year after the dissertation approval date. Electronic data has been secured by being kept on my password-protected computer in my locked office where only I have access. Any written data or documents have been kept secured in a locked desk in my locked office. My dissertation committee also served to provide an objective review of my study and findings. The IRB application process helped to provide a review and approval of the methods and nature of the study to ensure the study met ethical research guidelines and ensured the safety and welfare of participants.

Though participants who were recruited are consenting adults, I also remained cognizant that individuals may still have other vulnerabilities such as stigmas or pressure to perform in their academic programs. I provided participants with informed consent and

provided opportunities to ask questions or address any concerns that may have arisen. Informed consent provided information on subjects including data collection, privacy and confidentiality, treatment of data and protections for confidential data including storage procedures, and a summary of commitment to ethical procedures in research and any identifiable conflicts of interest. I also let participants know they can choose to end their participation in the study at any time.

Summary

This study provided an exploration of the lived experiences of stress and utilizing supervision during students' their master's-level counseling internship. To fully capture these experiences, a transcendental phenomenological exploration provided the means to fully achieve this goal. I utilized the theories and concepts of transcendental phenomenology to set aside my own biases, judgments, experiences, and knowledge so that I could gain the full perspective of the phenomenon from the participants' lens. I also took measures to ensure that this study is trustworthy and ethical, so my findings are useful. In Chapter Four, I will provide an account of the process and procedures of the study including descriptors of the data collection process, analysis of data, and measures used for trustworthiness, concluding with an overview of the results.

Chapter 4: Results

This study addresses the problem of limited information regarding the lived experiences of stress mitigation in clinical supervision for master's-level interns in graduate counseling programs. My goal was to contribute to insight into how policy and supervision practices in counselor education programs can contribute to supporting and educating students during this critical time of professional and personal development. I explored the lived experiences of supervision for master's-level interns in CACREP-accredited counseling programs in relation to utilizing supervision for stress mitigation through a transcendental phenomenological approach.

Setting

Interviews took place by phone in participants' various locations that were most convenient and conducive for the participants to participate. Follow-up interviews also took place by phone in the same manner. I am not aware of any conditions that would have influenced the participants or their experience in participating in the interviews during the data collection process.

Data Collection

The total number of participants for this study was six interns from master's-level counseling programs. Interviews and follow-up interviews were conducted over a 45-day period, and I followed a plan outlined to both recruit and collect data. A local university sent email invitations to their current master's-level interns in the counselor education program, and I posted in relevant social media groups to recruit as well. Participants contacted me by email, and I sent a detailed informed consent, inviting any questions or

need for clarification and asked for a confirmation of consent through email. Participants who consented were then scheduled for an initial phone interview. Interview calls were recorded with an audio recording device and then transcribed manually. I reminded participants that I would be sending a transcript once it was ready and scheduling a follow-up interview. After this initial call was completed, I sent participants their $10 e-gift card.

Once transcribed, the transcript was sent by email to the participants for review prior to the follow-up interview so that participants could ensure accuracy and determine if any responses needed clarification. In this email, I asked to schedule a follow-up review at their convenience to ask some quick follow-up questions and to provide them an opportunity to add anything that might be relevant. Follow-up interviews were scheduled and conducted by phone, recorded with an audio device, and then manually transcribed. I reminded participants that study results would be sent once completed and encouraged them to reach out with any questions or concerns. There was no variation in data collection from the initial plan for the study.

Data Analysis

Since this is a transcendental phenomenology, I sought to explicate rather than analyze data through distillation, where the information that is not related to the research question is removed and the statements and core themes that relate to the research question are brought more into view (Devinish, 2002). I first reviewed the transcripts and the descriptions by the participants to get a sense of it and then went back through each transcript individually and reviewed the participants' descriptions to derive more

meaning (Giorgi, 2012). I utilized bracketing, or epoché, to separate myself and suspend my own experiences and judgments as a past master's-level counseling intern so that I could truly get a sense of the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants (Van Manen, 2014). I also observed the horizon and used intentionality to observe the present moment of the participants' descriptions of their experiences (Moran, 2011). Within this horizon, it was important to acknowledge that my present role as a counselor educator and supervisor cannot be suspended, though bracketing provided a means to suspend experiences and judgments associated with that role.

Throughout this process I was identifying similarities in phrases, relationships, between variables or patterns and themes, and isolating patterns and commonalities (Miles et al., 2014). From this I created a general description to both clarify and identify the themes that were present from the participants' experiences in a cohesive way (Giorgi, 2012). During this process, I assigned preliminary and final meaning units to the participants' responses based upon the research question (Giorgi, 2012). Themes identified were (a) time commitment as a stressor, (b) feelings of imposter syndrome, (c) difficulty talking to others about stress, (d) program and supervisors promote self-care, (e) supervisors are supportive clinically, and (f) supervision is open and non-structured.

Illustrated Data Analysis

The first step in data analysis was to review the descriptions by the participants to get a sense of them, and then go back through the descriptions to derive more meaning and assign preliminary and final meaning units for responses (Giorgi, 2012). Preliminary meaning units such as "self-care is promoted" started to emerge from the transcripts. For

example, the following participants quotes highlighted this major theme:

- P1: "Weekly my supervisor is asking me what I'm doing for self-care."
- P2: "(Supervisors) regularly talked about self-care and the importance of self-care to prevent burnout … my program really focuses on self-care."

Once the preliminary themes were identified, I sent transcripts to participants for review to ensure that there were no errors in their responses, and to give them an opportunity to add to or clarify any responses. This is referred to as member checking, which helps to build trustworthiness in the study. During follow-up interviews I also clarified demographic information was correct and filled in gaps in information by asking participants to clarify or expand on their response. For instance, when asking about how stress from internship impacted their life, P2 mentioned during the initial interview that "my relationships are impacted, they try to be supportive." I asked the follow-up question, "tell me more about this statement" and P2 disclosed, "It really impacted my relationships because I had no one who understood or was just as upset as I was (about the stressors). It took me a few days of processing and being with my supports to help me be okay and actually be able to find a logical solution."

The next step was to assign final meaning units to the participants' responses and transform these into narratives. I identified similarities in phrases, relationships, between variables or patterns and themes, and by isolating patterns and commonalities to create a general description to both clarify and identify the themes that were present from the participants' experiences in a cohesive way (Giorgi, 2012). I also removed any repetitive or irrelevant information that did not pertain to the research question or that were not

necessary for data analysis. I then used the participants' own words and observations to create narratives using reduction to highlight the main themes of participants' lived experiences. This helped me to create structural descriptions of participant experiences.

Results

The following are the results of the data collection and analysis. First, I will provide a description of the demographics of participants, including a table. Next, I will provide a description and table of the themes identified, followed by illustrated themes.

Demographics

All participants in the study self-identified as master's-level counseling interns currently enrolled in a CACREP counselor education program. They were from five different universities and one of these attended online, one attended hybrid (both online and in-person), and four attended in-person on a university campus. Participants were all female and between the ages of 25 and 51 years, and all reported having three supervisors between their university and site supervisors (see Table 1).

Table 1

Demographics Table

Participant Demographics	Age/Gender	In-Person or Online	Number of Supervisors
Participant 1 (P1)	51 / F	Online	3
Participant 2 (P2)	23 / F	In-Person	5
Participant 3 (P3)	44 / F	In-Person	3
Participant 4 (P4)	25 / F	In-Person	3
Participant 5 (P5)	23 / F	Both (Hybrid)	3
Participant 6 (P6)	36 / F	In-Person	3

Illustrated Themes

I used the participants' own words and observations to transform the meaning units into expressions or narratives while considering the psychological value using free imaginative variation (Giorgi, 2012). Using the collective themes, I created textural and structural descriptions of participant experiences in relation to supervision experiences as master's-level counseling interns in CACREP-accredited programs (Miles et al., 2014). The following table represents the final meaning units for the participants' responses:

Table 2

Table Related to Themes

Themes Identified	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Theme One: Program and Supervisors Promote Self-care	X	X	X	X	X	X
Theme Two: Supervisors Supportive Clinically	X	X	X	X	X	X
Theme Three: Time Commitment as a Stressor	X	X		X	X	X
Theme Four: Feelings of Imposter Syndrome	X		X	X	X	
Theme Five: Supervision is Open and Non-structured	X		X		X	X
Theme Six: Difficulty Talking to Others About Stress			X	X		X

Theme 1: Program and Supervisors Promote Self-Care

All participants described programs and supervisors who promoted self-care. P1 said, "Weekly my supervisor is asking me what I'm doing for self-care." P1 also mentioned that supervisors stated regularly, "just let us know if you need a break." P2 said that supervisors "regularly talked about self-care and the importance of self-care to prevent burnout". P2 mentioned "my program really focuses on self-care and being aware…they encourage us to take breaks." P3 mentioned life challenges faced during internship and described the experience as "both supervisors were very mindful of my stress level and regularly encouraged self-care." P3 also added, "they were very

encouraging of me to take days off." P4 said that at their site the supervisor "really harped on self-care" and described their school supervisor as "very solution focused" when it came to self-care. P5 said that their "supervisor is very encouraging with having us talk and share our experiences and promotes self-care and taking care of ourselves." P6 also described their experience of having the ability to take time to tend to self-care or personal issues when needed, explaining "if I had something personal going on in my life, my site and supervisor encouraged me to take whatever time I needed to take care of it and myself." All participants provided descriptions of programs and supervisors that had an element of promoting self-care among counselor interns and were comfortable taking the time they needed to tend to self-care or personal issues.

Theme 2: Supervisors Supportive Clinically

All participants described their supervision experience and their supervisors as being supportive on a clinical level. P1 mentioned, "They always seem to be there for a second opinion to give you a new perspective clinically." P1 also added that "we usually do a case consultation type thing and that's been very beneficial." P2 described their site supervisor as "a consultant who is part of work supervision, but also clinical questions." P3 described supervision as a process of learning and support that evolved, "in the beginning it's very much like, how to navigate if the client hadn't done the paperwork…and the progress notes. Now it is, she just really opens the floor up to what do you need to talk about today?" P3 also mentioned, "I can address clinical and ethical concerns." Themes emerged in this category that supported a clinically focused and solution-oriented experience, as P4 described "my supervisor for the school site, she was

a very solution-focused kind of person." P5 mentioned, "I meet with one of my site supervisors every week, I can talk about any case or a case that I'm struggling with or just anything in general." P6 said that "the supervisor is literally accessible 24/7…she is available if I have any questions or need anything." This support was generally viewed as positive and helpful, as one participant described "what really helped was having all that support with supervision." In general, all participants describe supervision as a source of support and their supervisors as a supportive role in their clinical field experience.

Theme 3: Time Commitment as a Stressor

Participants were asked about stressors in their program of study, and one theme that was present for many of the participants was the stress of time commitment. P1 said, "I've been working 6 days a week" between a regular job and unpaid internship…so I would say the biggest impact is a lack of quality time with friends and family." P1 also said, "I sacrificed a lot of me time." P2 mentioned "the time aspect is hard, having to write papers every few weeks." P4 added that "it took a lot of time to decide on an internship site, and then the time spent managing internship and schoolwork." P5 described "carving time in between work, finishing a course, having my weekly sessions, being at university, being a mother and a spouse, and all the other things in life is challenging." P6 said that "time is an added stress for me…it's not like I get extra time outside of internship to develop my skills further because there is no extra time."

Theme 4: Feelings of Imposter Syndrome

Many participants also described feelings of imposter syndrome as a stressor in their program of study during internship. P1 described experiencing their feeling, "Their

(the clients') mental health is now in my hands. And, if I'm not careful I can do some damage. I felt a little unprepared." This was prevalent at the beginning of field experience, as P3 described "the stress when you first start of not knowing what you're doing and having a sense of imposter syndrome." P4 said, "a lot of stress comes from doubting myself, especially in the beginning…when someone is looking directly at me for answers." P5 mentioned "a lot of the stress came from doubting myself from the beginning. Am I worthy enough to see clients? Do I have enough knowledge?"

Theme 5: Supervision is Open and Non-Structured

Some participants described their supervision experience as non-structured and driven by supervisee needs. P1 mentioned that "weekly group supervision is open to discuss whatever you need." P3 said, "my supervisor has not come into supervision with an agenda, she lets me come in and discuss the things I wanted to." P5 describes the unstructured nature as positive, stating "the supervisor starts off asking if anyone has any questions or concerns…I can talk about any case or a case I'm struggling with, and it really does open it up so I can get my concerns addressed." P6 also mentioned, "my supervisor just opens up the floor to talk about cases and anything that I may have questions about." Overall, these participants described supervision as an open forum to discuss issues, especially related to clinical work, clinical challenges, and learning.

Theme 6: Difficulty Talking to Others About Stressors

A few participants also expressed difficulty in not knowing who to talk to or go to for support with stressors resulting from internship in their program of study. P1 said, "It really impacted my relationships because I had no one who understood." P3 mentioned,

"Others in my life try to be supportive, but they don't really understand what I am going through so it's hard to talk about or explain." P4 explained, "I found myself feeling kind of lonely, and weird talking about my issues" and further mentioned "I just didn't know who to tell certain things to…sometimes I don't really know how to tell my supervisor." These participants' responses illustrate their experiences as master's-level counseling interns as one that is unique, and a shared experience that can often be difficult to seek support from other sources such as personal relationships and social supports.

General Narrative

Based on the participants' interview responses and the analysis of these responses using phenomenological methods to capture their experiences, themes emerged that were consistent among them that highlighted commonalities in both stressors experienced during their field experience and their lived experiences of supervision. Supervision experiences among participants were generally described as overall positive. All participants described both their programs and their supervisors as promoting self-care and overall well-being. Additionally, all participants described experiencing supervisors who were clinically supportive and open to case conceptualization and working through clinical changes. Most participants found that time commitment was a main stressor in their field experience, and many expressed feelings of imposter syndrome and uncertainty as a major stressor during their field experience because of the newness in seeing clients on their own, and the time commitments of the program along with other life roles made it challenging to find balance tending to personal relationships and sometimes even their own self-care. Some also experienced supervision as an open and non-structured platform

to discuss clinical concerns and other issues related to internship and clinical work. A few even found it hard to know who to talk to about their stressors since those in their personal life may not understand their unique position and challenges as a counselor-in-training, and some were uncertain if they should discuss personal challenges with their supervisors.

General Structure

Supervision experiences among master's-level counseling interns are generally overall positive. Master's-level interns experience both their programs and their supervisors as promoting self-care and overall well-being. Master's-level interns also experience supervisors as clinically supportive and open to case conceptualization and working through clinical changes. Most master's-level interns find that time commitment is a significant stressor, while many feel imposter syndrome as a major stressor during their field experiences. Some master's-level counseling interns also experience supervision as open and non-structured, providing a forum to discuss concerns related to study and practice. A few master's-level interns find it difficult to know who to talk to about their unique stressors. Some find that it was hard to talk to friends or loved ones because they didn't understand the dynamics and challenges of a master's counseling internship.

Phenomenological Reflection

Master's-level counseling students in internship describe their unique consciousness and experiences of supervision, including their perceptions and how it contributes to their experience in this horizon, or point in time. The concept of

intentionality in this study tells us that participants experience supervision as one that is supportive and one that is connected in a unique way. Master’s-level counseling students in internship describe their experiences of supervision from a perspective that was overall positive, suggesting an intentionality or consciousness of their experiences. Further, there is intentionality in the roles of supervisor and supervisee. Supervisors have the intentionality or intention to support, guide, and teach, while supervisees participate in the experience of supervision with the intentionality of seeking support, seeking guidance, and learning. Master’s-level counseling students in internship in this study describe the intentionality of their roles as supervisee in seeking support and guidance through supervision, and even their perceptions of supervisors being a catalyst for that in offering things like open forums for discussing challenges and clinical concerns, as well as promoting and supporting self-care.

Another important aspect of transcendental phenomenological reflection in this study is the horizon. Within the participant horizon, in the moment of experiencing it was hard to talk about, they felt alone. The phenomenon of these students’ experiences at the particular point of time of the study and from my vantage point as observer is one aspect of master’s-level counseling interns’ supervision and stress experiences, or the current ‘horizon’. The participants’ current horizon is that of a student currently experiencing the phenomenon (supervision). An outer horizon may exist later as master’s-level counseling students in internship enter practice independently or even someday become supervisors, where there is a possibility that they may view these experiences differently. Will they still perceive their experience in supervision as supportive? Will they view their current

experiences as positive when outside of this horizon in time? Within this horizon is also the potential that the observer, or researcher, makes certain assumptions based on past experiences and the perception of these experiences.

It is also important to consider how bracketing impacts the participant experiences. Entering into supervision and into practice as learning counselors, master's-level counseling interns bracket their own perceptions of what counseling or supervision looks like, their own experiences of participating in counseling as clients, or biases about counseling or supervision in order to fully experience supervision and learning in their roles as supervisees, students, and counselors-in-training.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of this study was achieved through ensuring processes that lend to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility in this study was achieved through using peer review, providing rich descriptions, and detailed informed consent. For peer review, a colleague reviewed the study and findings for any possible gaps or issues and asked questions about the process. Many of these questions centered around the researcher as observer and bracketing experiences to prevent researcher bias. During the peer review, we discussed how bracketing helped me to set aside my own experiences, assumptions to truly allow the participants to provide a description of the phenomenon of supervision from their own lived experiences and in their own language. This peer review process revealed no gaps, bias, or other issues. Rich descriptions were also provided to lend to credibility, and I ensured that all participants received and fully understood the detailed informed consent. For transferability, I

provided detailed descriptions of the data and the context, including information about participants, their setting, and the timeframe so that this can be used for comparisons in future studies. For dependability, the detailed explanation of the research process and reasoning for methodology explains how the purpose of the study is achieved. For confirmability, I utilized Husserl's (2013) concepts of bracketing, *noesis* and *noema*, confirmed my own biases as a past master's-level counseling intern, and analyzed data from the participants' experiences and language rather than my own to eliminate researcher interpretation. I further utilized member checking by emailing transcripts for review to participants so that I could ensure the accuracy of information gathered from the participants' perspectives. All participants participated in a brief follow-up interview to confirm the accuracy of the transcripts and data gathered and were given an opportunity to clarify or add additional information.

Summary

Chapter 4 provides a detailed description of this study and the process used to obtain and analyze data using a transcendental phenomenological approach. This includes information about the setting and participants, data collection and analysis procedures, measures for trustworthiness, and a discussion of the results. Themes identified from the data collected by interviews were: (a) time commitment as a stressor, (b) feelings of imposter syndrome, (c) difficulty talking to others about stress, (c) program and supervisors promote self-care, (d) supervisors are supportive clinically, and (e) supervision is non-structured. The data and themes provide insight into the stressors faced by master's-level counseling interns and their experiences of supervision related to

addressing issues relating to stress. In Chapter Five, I will provide a discussion of how this information contributes to knowledge in this area, consider limitations of this study, provide recommendations for future research, and discuss the implications for social change in counselor education.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

There is limited information on the lived experiences of stress mitigation in clinical supervision for master's-level interns in CACREP-accredited counseling programs. The few studies available focused on stress mitigation in supervision limit the ability of faculty and programs to gain a full understanding of how supervision is vital to stress mitigation and management for master's-level interns in CACREP-accredited counseling programs. Further, the lack of information limits insight into how policy and supervision practices in counselor education programs can contribute to supporting and educating students during this critical time of professional and personal development. Without proper training and guidance on managing the unique stressors of the counseling profession, master's-level counseling interns may experience negative personal and professional consequences (Conley et al., 2015; Fuenfhausen & Cashwell, 2013; Merriman, 2015). Though the literature supports the high levels of stress and the need for supervision that addresses stress-mitigation (Merriman, 2014; Conley et al., 2015; Testa & Sangganjanavanich, 2015), especially long term (Abel & Smith, 2012; Burck et al., 2014), there is limited information on the actual lived experiences of master's-level interns to explore how they use supervision as a resource to address these concerns.

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of supervision for master's-level interns in CACREP-accredited counseling programs in relation to utilizing supervision for stress mitigation. This was explored this through a transcendental phenomenological approach to answer the question: How do master's-level interns in CACREP-accredited counseling

programs experience clinical supervision in relation to stress mitigation? Themes identified from the data collected by interviews were (a) time commitment as a stressor, (b) feelings of imposter syndrome, (c) difficulty talking to others about stress, (d) program and supervisors promote self-care, (e) supervisors are supportive clinically, and (f) supervision is non-structured. The data and themes provide insight into the stressors faced by master's-level counseling interns and their experiences of supervision related to addressing issues relating to stress.

Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this study highlight and supplement the key findings from the literature review conducted prior to the study. The following provides a synthesis of the findings incorporated with the literature review to illustrate the connections, differences, and gaps that were revealed.

CACREP-Accredited Requirements for Supervision

CACREP standards for supervision in counselor education programs include weekly individual and group supervision by licensed and qualified supervisors (CACREP, 2016). But some site supervisors may not be prepared with knowledge and competence specific to supervision to fully benefit developing counselors (McKibben et al., 2022). Since supervisors were not included in this study, it is not known what training the site supervisors had in relation to supervision. However, all participants reported having three supervisors, one of which is a university counselor educator who are required, by CACREP standards, to have training and education specific to counselor education and supervision. CACREP standards also maintain that counselor educators are

to educate about self-care in relation to their role as counselors to assist in creating resilience through the instillation of healthy wellness practices (Harrichand et al., 2021). Participants all described programs and supervisors who discussed and promoted self-care. I found from all participants' responses and descriptions of their supervision experiences that this was evident both in their university supervision and in their site supervision experiences.

Stress During Students' Counseling Internships

This study revealed that time is a major stressor to all participants. In the literature, time is both a cause of stress (not having enough time) and also a barrier to coping or utilizing wellness activities (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012). Many participants in the study identified the stress of time in relation to juggling the various roles in their personal, professional, and academic lives. Students can spend an average of 54.26 hours on school-related activities and that the amount of time spent on school activities (Rummel, 2015). The rigorous standards of CACREP-accredited programs and the expectations aimed at developing mastery of knowledge, skills, and a solid professional identity, can also increase stress levels dramatically, making time for self-care and stress management a high priority. Some students in the study also identified a lack of quality time with friends and family as a stressor, illustrating that the stress related to the time commitment of an internship during a CACREP-accredited counselor education program can be a real issue for many master's-level counseling interns.

Counseling Students' Perceptions of Stress

In the literature review, I found that one researcher's study concluded that

master's-level counseling interns in a CACREP-accredited program can be self-critical in holding themselves to very high performance standards, causing them to adopt irrational beliefs about needing to be constantly at peak performance, enthusiasm, and competence at all times, which leads to minimizing their own stress levels (Lee et al., 2018). While I found that some sense of self-criticism existed in the form of imposter syndrome, all participants seemed to have adequate insight into the importance of managing their stress levels. They did express some pressure to perform and time constraints that made it difficult to self-care or have quality time with their support systems. While counselors are not always proactive at incorporating self-care during times of stress, especially if there is a perceived pressure to perform (Baker & Gabriel, 2021), perhaps the time stressor is a major barrier to having the capacity to be more proactive. Further, exhaustion may lead to negative coping like avoidance or over-indulging in food or sleep as a few participants in the study described.

The Importance of Self-Care and Wellness for Counselors

Self-care and wellness are important for anyone, and the demands of a counseling internship can lead to stressors that make self-care a vital resource for wellness. Self-care is both preventive and interventive in attending to physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being (Plath & Fickling, 2022). Further, for counselors and especially counselors-in-training it is important to maintain an appropriate level of self-care to effectively fulfill the demands of a professional counseling role (Ko & Lee, 2021). Most participants described self-activities that helped them to mitigate stressors, such as yoga, breathing, meditation, exercise, and spending time with loved ones. While time could be

a hinderance, it was evident that the participants understood the importance of making self-care and wellness a priority both personally and professionally. As Coaston (2017) mentioned, practicing good self-care contributes to better boundaries with clients because they are not as likely to use the client relationship to meet personal or professional needs (Coaston, 2017). Though Mumbauer and Kim (2021) posited that wellness is something that may not be addressed with counselors in training unless a problem is evident, it is important to note that participants all described experiencing both supervisors and programs that highly promoted wellness and self-care.

Self-Care During Students' Master's-Level Counseling Internships

Self-care routines like healthy sleep practices, cognitive reappraisal, suppression, and high levels of social support can be significantly related to lower levels of perceived stress (Myers et al., 2012). Participants in the study reported many healthy self-care habits that can support reductions in stress. Many also reported attending to their reactions and emotions in their clinical work. This is important because acknowledging the moment-to-moment experiences to facilitate awareness of one's emotions and feelings toward others helps to reducing stress (Testa & Sangganjanavanich, 2015). Some participants also reported unhealthy coping mechanisms including over-eating, over-sleeping, over-indulgence in alcohol, and avoidance. The study by Verdi et al (2016) of graduate students' use of prescription stimulants found that performance stressors contributed to use. Fuenfhausen and Cashwell (2013) found that avoidant coping strategies can often use deactivating strategies to cope with stress, including denial of attachment needs, avoiding intimacy, and trying to deal with stress. While substance use

was not described as a negative coping experience among participants, a few did mention avoidance and deactivating such as scrolling through social media or binge-watching television as negative coping strategies.

Program Integration of Stress Management

In addition to CACREP standards for program implementation of wellness components, the *ACA Code of Ethics* requires programs to address issues related to maintaining wellness (ACA, 2014). As found by Baker and Gabriel (2021), there can be an overall lack of information and awareness of how inadequate self-care impacts the counselor, so most counselors do not take breaks from client work during times of personal distress. I found during my study, however, that most participants described experiences of support during their program when they were experiencing personal stressors. Though one participant said that the supervision experience sometimes did not feel connected on a personal level, that participant also stated that they understood the importance of boundaries in the supervision and academic supervisor relationships. All participants in the study described both programs and supervisors who prompted them to take time to tend to their personal needs or to deal with life stressors that arose during their field experience, even if the supervisor did not necessarily help with personal stressors due to the need for professional boundaries.

Supervision in Counselor Education

Supervision is a vital part of counselor education because it ensures clinical competency during the critical professional development process (De Stefano, Hutman, & Gazzola, 2017). The aim is to develop clinical skills and professional and ethical

competencies (Brejcha, 2021). Participants generally described supervision that included case conceptualization, skills development, and support in ethical and clinical concerns. Many described their supervision as very solution-oriented and development focused. The supervision process is meant to be developmentally supportive and foster a sense of professional identity by overseeing interventions that lead to positive client outcomes (Callender & Lenz, 2018). Though some of the participants identified imposter syndrome as an initial issue, they gained more confidence and professional identity as they participated in supervision and clinical practice. Further, models of supervision guide supervision in providing a focus on counselor development, emphasizing theories of psychotherapy and the process of supervision, and the facilitating the different roles of the supervisor (Crunk & Barden, 2017). Some of the participants described supervision as open and unstructured, and since this study did not explore experiences of supervisors it is not known if any particular models or theories were utilized to incorporate self-care or wellness.

Online Counselor Supervision

In this study, two students participated in online learning and supervision. Villarreal-Davis et al. (2021) explains that online supervision may present challenges may such as issues related to confidentiality, issues with technology, problems with understanding technology aspects for those engaging, potential confidentiality issues, and not having the visual cues that in-person supervision provides. Participants in the study described positive experiences in supervision overall, and none of these challenges were presented as stressors. This may be contributed to some of the benefits of online or virtual

supervision including convenience, flexibility, accessibility, and meeting non-traditional students' needs, there may also be some challenges (Villarreal-Davis et al., 2021).

Models of Supervision

The literature covers various models of supervision, and whatever model supervisors operate with, they must have competency in using supervision models to provide supervision that promotes supervisee development, client welfare, and evaluative processes (Bellinger & Carone, 2021). Models such as the relationship or Systems Approach, Bernard's Discrimination Model (Bernard, 1979), the psychodynamic approach, and developmental models of supervision are examples of models that provide structure and guidance in clinical supervision (Brejcha, 2021). This study did not explore supervision experiences from the supervisors' perspectives, so it is unknown if any particular models of supervision were utilized to enhance the participants' experiences.

Supervision and Stress Management

Supervision can be a direct resource for master's level counselor interns to learn stress mitigation strategies as the supervisory relationship is more personalized and can better identify stressors and how it is impacting the individual supervisee (Callender & Lenz, 2018). Participants in the study described promotion of self-care as a component of their supervision. They also described experiencing support and encouragement to engage in self-care when faced with life or training-related stressors. Supervisors provide unique and direct support on finding strategies for work-life balance and healthy self-care strategies and have an ethical obligation to address well-being of supervisees, especially in relation to the quality of care given to the supervisee's clients (Callender & Lenz,

2018). Though participants expressed experiences with addressing issues related to self-care and stress management in supervision, it would be beneficial to dive deeper into specific strategies supervisors are utilizing to address these issues in future studies. Since anxiety is common for counselors in training, having strategies to address stressors and reduce potential anxiety is an important component of wellness-based supervision (Watkinson, Cicero, & Burton, 2021).

Supervision Models Incorporating Wellness

While it is not clear if supervisors of the master's-level counseling interns in this study incorporate a supervision model or a wellness-based supervision model, self-care promotion and education are part of the supervision experience for all participants in this study. Utilizing a specific model like the WELMS model of supervision may provide structure in counselor supervision that could result in positive changes to professional quality of life (ProQOL) for counseling interns (Wendel, 2022). This is especially important since supervision models tend to lack a focus on wellness (Meany, Davis, & Lindo, 2016). It may even be helpful to incorporate other models that incorporate self-awareness and interventions, such as the Integrated Developmental Model (IDM) (Jackson, 2022; Crunk & Barden, 2017). Having a clear path and structure to providing the needed education, guidance, and support for stress management and self-care through a solid supervision model with a wellness component can only enhance the experience for counseling interns, and likely shape their ability to tend to these important areas throughout their career.

Students' Experiences of Supervision

Supervision can provide an enriching experience for master's-level counseling interns (Amanvermez et al, 2020). Participants in this study all had three supervisors, and all described supervision as a source of support and encouragement as well as a source for clinical direction. Though Cook and Sackett (2018) posit that counseling students may rely on structure in supervision to effectively address needs and concerns, some participants in this study identified non-structure as a benefit to facilitate case conceptualization and discussion of personal and professional challenges. This includes discussion of stressors related to clinical work, and a promotion of self-care and wellness as an important component of professional identity. Participants overall viewed their experiences of supervision as one that is positive, supportive, and important to their professional and academic development.

Limitations of the Study

As mentioned previously, one limitation may be a hesitation for master's-level interns in CACREP-accredited counseling programs to admit struggles related to stressors due to the stigma of counselors seeking help for mental health issues, which may limit the study by hindering participant willingness to be completely candid and honest about their experiences (Rummel, 2015). Though participants were open in discussing some of the challenges and impacts of stressors in their programs, there is a possibility that some elements of stressors could have been omitted due to issues like stigma or self-consciousness. I provided encouragement to participants and was diligent about conveying how their confidentiality would be protected in the study. An additional

limitation is the smaller sample size. Since this is a phenomenological study, the sample size utilized was six participants as that was the point of saturation. Further, the participants were all female, and I did not include multicultural demographics. This could potentially limit generalizability, so future studies may focus on replicating the study with other genders and consider multicultural factors to explore if these factors contribute to any other theme emergence. Finally, my experience of being a master's-level counseling student in the past also brings about the question of bias. Utilization of epoché and the horizon helped me to pay attention to this possibility so that I could truly explore the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants. Lastly, since this study was completed from only the perspective of the master's-level counseling students, much is not known about the particular supervision models, structure, theories, or techniques employed by the supervisors of these participants. While we know that participants experienced a promotion of self-care, we do not know what specific strategies were utilized by supervisors to incorporate these into the supervision process.

Recommendations

It would be beneficial to conduct future studies on the experiences of supervision from the perspective of the supervisor. Since incorporating wellness and self-care into supervision and counselor training is an ethical and professional obligation (CACREP, 2016), it would be helpful to know what supervisors' experiences are in integrating this aspect into their chosen models or theories of supervision and applying them in the practice of supervision. It could also be helpful to explore more of the master's-level counseling interns' experiences of coping and seeking help. As Baker and Gabriel (2021)

pointed out, counselors may not always be proactive in incorporating self-care during stressful times and counseling students especially can have a perceived pressure to perform. Many of the participants in the study described specific stressors related to their program of study and healthy self-care practices, but it is not known what their experiences were in seeking help or support outside of practice-related issues in supervision, if any. Since there can often be a sense of stigma associated with seeking help among counselors and helping professionals (Rummel, 2015), it would be helpful to explore master's-level counseling interns experiences specific to seeking help such as counseling or other mental health care support for stressors during their program of study.

Implications

Stress is common, especially for master's-level counseling students who are juggling the responsibilities of academic, personal, professional, financial, and social stresses (Abel et al. , 2012). This study highlights these stresses further and provides insight into how master's-level counseling students are experiencing addressing these stressors in supervision. As such, it highlights the importance of being purposeful about incorporating a component of addressing not just self-care, but the many facets of stress that students encounter throughout their program and especially during the vital period of internship. This contributes to knowledge that counselor educators, counselor supervisors, and university programs should implement preventative measures and systemic supports for mental health issues. This would aid to reduce rates of program incompletion, improve educational performance, and improve the overall quality of life for master's-level counseling students in CACREP-accredited programs, as well as other

counseling graduate programs. This study of student stress experiences in relation to supervision also helps to fill a gap by providing insight into the lived experiences of supervision for stress mitigation for master's-level interns in CACREP-accredited programs from the perspective of the student. As we know, stress mitigation is important in preventing burnout that results from work that can be emotionally taxing and work environments that can be stressful (Newton et al., 2020). The data gathered in this study of master's-level counseling interns can help inform counselor supervisors by helping to provide additional insight that could aid the development of supervision models that specifically address these needs. Data can also inform counselor education programs about what may be needed to develop programs that could contribute to education about issues related to stress mitigation during this crucial stage of counselor development. Further, this study may help to normalize the experiences of stress for master's-level counseling interns, therefore reducing some of the stigma and reducing the hesitation to seek help or support if needed.

Conclusion

This study sought to capture the essence of the experiences of master's-level counseling interns' experiences of addressing stress in supervision. It is clear from the participants' rich descriptions that their experiences are overall positive, and both supervisors and programs are actively promoting self-care for counselors in training. These experiences confirm that the counselor wellness is an important aspect of professional identity, and as such wellness is something that counselors at every level of experience should be mindful of. The experience of being a master's-level intern is both

unique and challenging, and research that highlights and contributes to the development of strong teaching and supervision practices can be beneficial to the profession. This is especially important as the profession of counseling is constantly evolving and developing to meet the growing needs of the individuals we serve.

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