

# An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Trainee Counsellors' Hindering Self- Awareness Experience

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## Abstract

Training requirements like practicum, clinical supervision, and academic components put trainee counsellors under novice stress that can cause heightened awareness of cognitions, emotions, and physiology, known as hindering self-awareness (HSA). HSA can affect how trainee counsellors perceive their competence and their evolving counsellor identity that have implications in clinical practice. However, trainee counsellors' interpretations of their lived HSA experiences and the contexts around HSA are understudied. This interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study explored ten trainee counsellors' HSA experiences in the beginning stage of training to qualitatively understand their HSA experiences. IPA data revealed two group experiential themes and four subthemes: (1) Treading each step precariously – (1a) HSA is lurking in every training context, (1b) Pendulating between the old and emerging counsellor self, and (2) Learning to become better counsellor despite the broken old self – (2a) Accepting vulnerabilities, acknowledging childhood adversities, (2b) Reconstructing childhood narratives. Trainee counsellors interpreted HSA experiences as challenging and reported HSA experiences occur during in-session, individual and group supervision, and classroom activities. Trainee counsellors associated HSA experiences with childhood adversity, and self-reflection on their HSA experiences assisted trainee counsellors in developing personal growth and professional development through reconstruction of childhood narratives in achieving an integrated self. Counselling institutions are recommended to prepare trainee counsellors in advance of potential HSA experiences in the introductory phase of training. Clinical supervisors can better support trainee counsellors with clear guidelines on their formative and summative assessments to reduce the likelihood of trainee counsellors withholding HSA-related struggles to inform clinical practice.

**Keywords:** childhood adversity, counselling self-efficacy, counsellor development, self-construction, selfhood