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Training outcomes in an APA-Accredited PsyD program

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Abstract

- Over the past several decades psychotherapy outcomes have been extensively investigated. However, clinical training outcomes have been largely overlooked.
- In a longitudinal study a single cohort of clinical psychology doctoral students was investigated for evidence of gains in knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes (KSAs) over the course of doctoral training. We hypothesized that trainees would show gains in KSAs over the course of graduate study.
- Participants were 18 doctoral students (7 male; 11 female), 17 (94%) were Caucasian and one (6%) was Asian. Mean age was 27.28 (SD = 6.37). In an intact groups repeated measures design, the independent variable was clinical psychology training and the dependent variable was ratings of KSAs.
- Internal consistency among the KSA items was strong and the three domains were strongly correlated. Paired sample *t*-tests indicated highly significant gains in KSAs with large effect sizes over three years of professional training.
- Results are limited by the small sample size, lack of ethnic diversity, missing data, situational factors unique to the training program, and any unique historical events. Client gains were not investigated. However, these findings suggest that it is possible to reliably measure outcomes of clinical training. They provided support for the hypothesis that clinical training produces gains in KSAs.

Introduction

- Clinical training outcomes remain largely overlooked. Fauth, Gates, Vinca and Boles (2007) proposed a "trans-theoretical model" for clinical training that includes understanding the importance of developing skills and therapeutic responsiveness.
- Boswell and Castonguay (2007) suggested that it is important to investigate clinical training from a variety of perspectives, including looking specifically within a training site (p. 382).
- Researchers such as Ladany (2007) and Hill, Sullivan, Knox, and Schlosser (2007) discussed positive influence of training and offered suggestions on understanding *how* students increase in knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs) during training. While doctoral psychology programs now routinely conduct studies of their trainee outcomes for APA accreditation, the findings are seldom made public. Thus literature about trainee outcomes remains sparse. More systematic study psychology graduate education may enhance training outcomes.
- In a longitudinal study, a single cohort of clinical psychology doctoral students was investigated for evidence of gains in knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes over the course of doctoral training. We hypothesized that trainees would show gains in KSAs over the course of graduate study.

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Method

- Participants were a single cohort of 18 doctoral students; 7 were male (39%) and 11 female (61%); 17 (94%) were Caucasian, and 1 (6%) was Asian. Mean age was 27.28 (SD = 6.37).
- In an intact groups repeated measures design, the independent variable was clinical psychology training as usual. The dependent variables were ratings of knowledge, skills, and attitudes as they were operationally defined on the field supervisor evaluation form. All items were rated on a 4 point scale from 1 = *Needs Focused Emphasis in this Area* to 4 = *Functions beyond expectations in this area*.
- Supervisors completed valuations semi-annually for 4 years, for an anticipated total of 160 evaluation forms. However, data for one semester were missing entirely, and multiple participants were missing from several additional semesters. Thus only the fall of the second year and spring of the fourth year were compared. Mean item scores were used to replace missing values for 2.9% of the items on these two occasions (McConnell, 2012).
- Data were gathered and identifying information removed by an administrative staff person. De-identified data were used for purposes of this study. Data were analyzed using alpha-coefficients, correlations, and paired-samples *t*-tests

Results

- Internal consistency was 0.88 and 0.83 for Knowledge, 0.94 and 0.86 for Professional Attitudes, and 0.91 and 0.92 for Skills for the first and second occasions respectively.
- Because KSA were strongly correlated, the items were combined for a global measure of training outcomes; alpha for combined KSA items was 0.96 and 0.95 for the first and second occasions respectively.
- Correlations among KSAs showed that Knowledge and Skills correlated above 0.90 but were somewhat less strongly correlated with professional attitudes (see Table 1).
- Student's *t*-tests for related samples compared scores for KSA and the combined measure across occasions. All were highly significant (see Table 2).
- An analysis of KSA change scores for participants showed that the mean change was large with Cohen's *d* at 1.18, 1.25, 0.83 and 1.18 for Knowledge, Skills, Professional Attitudes, and Combined KSA respectively
- Cohen's *d* was computed using the original standard deviations as proposed by Dunlop, Cortina, Vaslow, and Burke (1996).

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Tables

Table 1
Correlations among Knowledge, Professional Attitudes, and Skills, and Combined KSA

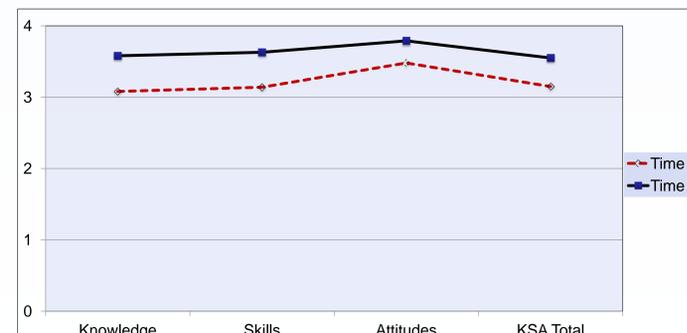
Scale	K	S	A
Time 1			
Skills	0.90**	-	
Professional Attitudes	0.69**	0.65**	-
Combined KSA	0.94**	0.93**	0.88**
Time 2			
Skills	0.91**	-	
Professional Attitudes	0.70**	0.72**	-
Combined KSA	0.94**	0.96**	0.87*

Note: *N* = 18

Table 2
Mean Item Scores, Standard Deviations, Student's *t*-tests, and Effect Sizes for Differences in Knowledge, Skills, and Professional Attitudes Across Time

Scale	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Knowledge						
Time 1	3.08	.42				
Time 2	3.58	.33	17	3.65	.002	1.18
Skills						
Time 1	3.14	.39				
Time 2	3.63	.34	17	3.98	.001	1.25
Professional Attitudes						
Time 1	3.48	.37				
Time 2	3.79	.25	17	3.39	.003	0.83
Combined KSA						
Time 1	3.15	.35				
Time 2	3.55	.27	17	3.97	.001	1.18

Figure 1
Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes, and Combined KSA by Occasion



Discussion

- Internal consistency coefficients were strong for knowledge, skills, attitudes, and combined KSAs, and provided support for reliability of the measures. We concluded that we can consistently measure KSAs.
- Validity of the KSA measures is supported by their face-valid item content, KSA growth over time, and strong internal consistency among the KSA domains. Further validation is needed, but it appears that we can adequately measure developing clinical skills.
- Strong correlations among KSAs suggested that, for this sample, measures of knowledge and skills are almost identical measures, while professional attitudes are somewhat less strongly related to these two domains. Ideally, knowledge, skills, and attitudes should be somewhat distinct aspects of clinical functioning. We wondered whether supervisors made a global response to these items rather than independently assessing these aspects of trainee performance. It is also possible that KSAs are inherently related. Further exploration of this question seems warranted.
- Measures of change in KSAs over time consistently pointed to large and highly significant changes in all three domains and in the combined measure. At an individual level, a few trainees did not show progress, or even appeared to deteriorate in KSAs, but sixty one percent showed large gains.
- Results are limited by the small sample size, lack of ethnic diversity, missing data, situational factors unique to the training program, and any unique historical events. However, these findings suggest that it is possible to measure outcomes of clinical training and provided support for the hypothesis that training results in gains in knowledge, skills, and attitudes.
- As Fauth et al. (2007) suggested, continued research along these lines can further our understanding of clinical training and its application to trainees' professional growth and success as future psychologists.
- These data support the hypothesis that training contributes to growth in KSAs although causality is not established.

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