PERCEIVED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AMONG
MENTAL HEALTH PRACTITIONERS
IN NEW ZEALAND

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for Sarah
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledgments</th>
<th>iv</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

1.1 Recent Advances in Psychotherapy Research ... 1

1.2 The Therapist as a Neglected Variable in Research ... 3

## CHAPTER 2

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Conceptual and Theoretical Perspectives ... 5

2.2 Research on Professional Development ... 6

2.3 Collaborative Research Network Research Study ... 10

2.4 Measuring Therapist Development ... 11

2.5 Aims of the Present Study... ... 17

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

3.1 Sample ... 19

3.2 Measure ... 21

3.3 Procedure ... 26
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1  CRN Questionnaire Items on Professional Development  ...  14
Table 2  Factor-Analytically Derived Scales of Professional Development  16
Table 3  Caseload of Mental Health Professionals Surveyed  ...  20
Table 4  CRN Questionnaire Items on Professional Development  ...  23
Table 5  Theoretical Orientations of Mental Health Professionals Surveyed  25
Table 6  Professional Development among Mental Health Professionals
Surveyed  ...  ...  ...  ...  ...  ...  ...  29
Table 7  Mean and Effect Sizes for Professional Development Subscales  30
Table 8  Correlations between Professional Development Subscales
and Experience  ...  ...  ...  ...  ...  ...  33
Table 9  Comparison of Professional Development for Therapists in the
CRN Database (N = 3795) and Present Study (N = 254)  ...  37
Table 10 Intercorrelations between Professional Development Measures  39
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1  Mean perceived professional development by years in practice  34
Study of psychotherapy processes and outcomes has far outweighed study of its practitioners. New methodological advances in psychotherapy research have led to an increased emphasis on the role of therapist factors in ensuring successful psychotherapy outcome. Implicit in these methodological advances is the suggestion that the treatment procedures, and not the therapists delivering them, are ultimately the main determinants of successful treatment outcome.

Although researchers have incorporated therapist years of practice or extent of training when evaluating psychotherapy, this is often misleading as it fails to consider what it actually done during those training and practice years of professional development. Unfortunately, only a few studies have examined mental health professionals’ professional development, and little is currently known about the process of development over the course of a practitioner’s career. This thesis is an extension of the Collaborative Research Network’s study of mental health professionals’ professional development to New Zealand.

This thesis starts with a description of some recent advances in psychotherapy research, and how they have refocused the field’s attention towards the role of the practitioner in influencing treatment outcomes. This is followed by a description of the existing theoretical and empirical work on practitioners’ professional development, and an overview of existing methods of assessment. An outline of the CRN study aims and methods are then overviewed, before presenting and discussing the results of the New Zealand practitioner survey.