



School Counsellors' Engagement with Regional/Rural Students During 2020 COVID-19 Learning-From-Home

Cameron Granger

Bachelor of Technology Education

Submitted to Charles Sturt University in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Master of Psychological Practice (School Psychology)

School of Psychology

Faculty of Business, Justice, and Behavioural Sciences

December 2021

Word count: 12,989 words

Table of Contents

Certificate of Authorship	5
Acknowledgements.....	6
Ethics Approval	7
Abstract.....	8
Introduction.....	9
COVID-19 in Australia	9
Literature Review	10
School Counsellors in New South Wales Public Schools.....	11
Mental Health in Adolescents	12
COVID-19 Disrupts Education.....	13
The Reality of the COVID-19 Pandemic	14
Issues With Accessing Counselling for Regional and Rural New South Wales Students	15
Challenges for School Counsellors During Lockdown.....	16
Rationale and Research Question.....	17
Research Design	17
Qualitative Research	18
Ontology and Epistemology.....	19
Theoretical Perspective and Methodology.....	19
<i>The Current Study</i>	19
Research Design/ Plan.....	20

<i>Purposive Sampling to Select Participants</i>	21
<i>Interview of Participants, Transcribing and De-identification, Analysis of Data</i>	22
Trustworthiness	23
<i>Credibility</i>	24
<i>Transferability</i>	24
<i>Dependability</i>	24
<i>Confirmability</i>	24
Ethical Considerations	24
Reflexivity.....	25
<i>Personal Reflexivity</i>	25
<i>Epistemological Reflexivity</i>	27
Results	27
Findings	38
The Unexpectedness of Learning-From-Home Hindered Counsellors’ Preparedness.....	39
Contact With Students Was Minimal or Not at All	40
Students from Disadvantaged Backgrounds Were More Disadvantaged in a Learning-From-Home Environment	40
An Opportunity to Attend to a Backlog of Administration Tasks	41
Discussion	41
Conclusion	44
Reference List	46

Appendix A.....	53
Appendix B.....	54
Appendix C.....	55
Appendix D.....	56
Appendix E.....	58
Appendix F.....	60
 List of Tables	
Table 1.....	25
Table 2.....	35
 List of Figures	
Figure 1.....	9
Figure 2.....	17
Figure 3.....	19
Figure 4.....	20

Certificate of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any educational institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Charles Sturt University or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

I agree that this thesis be accessible for the purpose of study and research in accordance with the normal conditions established by the Executive Director, Division of Library Services or nominee, for the care, loan and reproduction of theses.

I certify that appropriate ethics and other compliance approvals have been sought where required. The Charles Sturt University ethics approval number is H21207. The NSW State Education Research Applications Process (SERAP), the approval process for conducting research in NSW Department of Education schools, is 2021247.

The thesis complies with university requirements for a thesis as set out in the related University policies and procedures (see [Policy Library](#)).

Signed.....

Date 7/12/2022

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I wish to acknowledge and thank my supervisor Dr Marilyn Chaseling, whose guidance, patience and encouragement throughout the research process was invaluable. She has shared her extensive knowledge and insight with me, given me encouragement when I've been 'in the pit' and helped me navigate through the thesis forest out the other side. I have been fortunate to be under her guidance.

Thank you to all of the participants who gave their time to this research project, your insight was invaluable.

To my lovely wife Kate, who has been ever so patient and giving during this time. Kate has provided me with so much support, allowing me to vent. She is my rock. Finally, my kids, thanks for giving me the required space (to do my work), making me laugh and keeping me sane during this research journey.

Ethics Approval

The Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee approved the research reported herein.

Approval/Protocol Number: H21207

Date Granted: 17/05/2021

New South Wales State Education Research Applications Process (SERAP) approval granted herein.

Approval: 2021247

Date Granted: 19/07/2021

Abstract

School counsellors are the mainstay of mental health, wellbeing and intervention, which is at times complex and demanding for regional, rural and remote government school counsellors. The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic added pressure and disruption to an already stretched resource. This paper's aim was to examine nine New South Wales Department of Education school counsellors' experiences during the 2020 learning-from-home period and fill a gap in the literature by exploring how they engaged with their students during this time. Interviews were semi-structured and used to elicit narratives, which were then analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Four main themes were identified. During the 2020 learning-from-home period, school counsellors: i) were unprepared which hindered their ability to perform their role, (ii) had minimal contact with students, (iii) reported that the disadvantage of many of their students was a barrier for their engagement, and (iv) attended to a backlog of administration. The findings of this study suggest that engagement with students was hindered by a lack of training in telehealth, various types of disadvantages and a lack of student willingness to uptake the offers of counselling by school counsellors. This study concluded that the unexpectedness of the 2020 COVID-19 learning-from-home period meant that most regional and rural New South Wales school counsellors were unprepared. Despite their efforts to engage with their students, in most cases this did not eventuate, so school counsellors used the time to attend to their backlog of administration and further develop their skills through personal development training.

Keywords: school counsellor, New South Wales, COVID-19, learning-from-home, regional schools, rural schools

School Counsellors' Engagement with Regional/Rural Students During 2020

COVID-19 Learning-From-Home

COVID-19 in Australia

On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared a global health emergency: it advised a new coronavirus had spread beyond China and all countries needed to take urgent measures to restrict its spread (United Nations, 2020). By late February, the Australian Government enacted an Australian Health Sector Emergency after several confirmed COVID-19 cases had arrived from overseas (Parliament of Australia, 2020). On March 18, the Australian Prime Minister updated the Australian people on the Government's COVID-19 measures. This included advice that schools should remain open at that point in time (Prime Minister of Australia, 2020a). Four days later, the Prime Ministers' advice regarding schools had shifted when he advised that parents could keep their children at home and that schools were encouraged to provide students with access to online and distance learning (Prime Minister of Australia, 2020b). The following day, the New South Wales Premier advised that the State would be temporarily locked down except for essential services. Further, that schools would remain open (NSW Government, 2020b), but that from March 24 parents/carers were encouraged to keep their children at home and that schools would provide "one unit of work, whether the student is at home or at school" (para. 11). Not surprisingly, schools in New South Wales and in many other jurisdictions were plunged into a never-before-seen crisis.

Before the outbreak of COVID-19, the formal education of young people took place almost exclusively face-to-face in a school. Moreover, young people who sought support with their mental health could meet one-on-one with a school counsellor¹ in a private school space. Regardless, the 2020 COVID-19 learning-from-home directive suddenly changed all of this. Virtually overnight activities that previously occurred in a school setting were rapidly transitioned to online (Gore et al., 2021). Consequently, teachers and other school staff, including school counsellors, who might never have previously worked in a completely online environment, were required to change their

¹ In New South Wales Department of Education schools, the role of supporting the mental wellbeing of students may be undertaken by i) school counsellors, ii) school psychologists, iii) Leader Psychology Practice, or iv) Senior Psychologist Education / District Guidance Office (NSW Department of Education, 2021e). This study will focus only on school counsellors.

mode of operation to online platforms (Paredes et al., 2020). This required school staff to adapt quickly to this new format regardless of their training or technological knowledge (Chaseling et al., 2020).

The New South Wales Department of Education (the Department), Australia's largest provider of education (NSW Government, 2019), sought to support its teachers and parents by supplying online learning sessions, digital tools and a bank of online resources to complement learning (NSW Government, 2020c). Nevertheless, a search by the researcher of the Department's site did not reveal any comparative resources for school counsellors. While teachers, school leaders and support staff scrambled to gather resources and learning material to complement modified learning tasks for online delivery (Gore et al., 2021), school counsellors were similarly challenged. The learning-from-home requirement meant that school counsellors were now required to provide counselling services using approaches they had not typically used, for example, web-based online mental health services, mobile phones, or other web-based applications (O'Connor, 2020). Not surprisingly, many school counsellors (Nagarajan & Yuvaraj, 2021) and their students (Zainudin et al., 2021) struggled to engage in counselling services in these unfamiliar non-face-to-face environments.

It was within the unprecedented, multi-faceted juxtaposition of i) New South Wales' first COVID-19 learning-from-home period and ii) school counsellors seeking to provide counselling to their students that the study presented in this thesis is situated. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of school counsellors in rural and regional New South Wales regarding how they engaged with their students during the 2020 COVID-19 learning-from-home period. The desire to hear regional and rural school counsellors' perspectives came from the knowledge that the State has identified students from these areas as underperforming educationally compared to metropolitan students (Piccoli, 2014, p. 6). Therefore, the researcher was particularly interested to hear from these school counsellors about how they engaged with their students during the 2020 COVID-19 learning-from-home period.

Literature Review

This literature review provides the current research related to this study. Six areas of literature were examined: i) school counsellors in New South Wales Public schools; ii) mental health in adolescents; iii) COVID-19 disrupts education; iv) the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic; v) issues with accessing counselling for regional

and rural New South Wales students, and; vi) challenges for school counsellors during lockdown.

School Counsellors in New South Wales Public Schools

In New South Wales, the position of school counsellor has been defined by the Industrial Relations Commission as:

... a teacher with an equivalent of four years training and a major in psychology who has responsibility for providing schools with advice and support in matters relating to student academic and personal development, welfare and discipline and provides psychological and other testing as required” (Crown Employees (Teachers in Schools and Related Employees) Salaries and Conditions Award 2020, 2020, Clause 2.52).

The work of the school counsellor in New South Wales is complex and multifaceted. School counsellors are at the forefront of mental health services and crisis intervention (King et al., 2018) for students from kindergarten (5-6 years old) to year 12 (17-18 years old) (Pincus et al., 2020) and their families and schools (Campbell & Colmar, 2014). They also provide guidance to develop and discover potentials (Ahmed & Firdous, 2020), and assessment and diagnosis of individuals (Bell & McKenzie, 2013). School counsellors also respond to schools experiencing emergencies, provide future management support for ‘at risk’ students and refer students, caregivers and families, to appropriate professional help (Rodd, 2017). They work in conjunction with the school wellbeing and learning and support teams, school executive, parents, caregivers and external agencies seeking to improve learning outcomes and contribute specifically to students’ wellbeing (NSW Government, 2021e). Approximately 20-30% of school students interact with a school counsellor during their educational life. It is not uncommon for students to self-refer multiple times to a school counsellor once they become familiar with the services (O’Connor, 2020).

According to the NSW Government School Counselling Service (2021), approximately 1,100 school counsellors are located in New South Wales metropolitan, regional, rural and remote public schools. Some school counsellors work across multiple school sites (Campbell & Colmar, 2014), which is standard practice across regional and rural areas where there may be shortages (King et al., 2018).

School counselling has traditionally been a face-to-face, one-on-one, school-based service for students (NSW Government, 2020b). In this client-centred therapy model, body language and facial cues can be recognised and decoded (Bell & McKenzie, 2013). Empathy is at its strongest during face-to-face sessions due to connectedness and a counselling relationship that is possible by the physical space occupied by both parties during a counselling session (Bell & McKenzie, 2013).

Mental Health in Adolescents

Social, physical and emotional changes impact young people's psychological wellbeing as they transition into adolescence (Long et al., 2020). During puberty (when many physical, cognitive and biological changes occur), young people tend to become more self-cautious, self-aware and more concerned with the opinions of others (Sebastian et al., 2008). Although adolescent children still yearn for some social fulfilment, the teenage brain gives greater focus to those who make judgements, observations comparisons and evaluations of them. Adolescents raised in nurturing environments—where positive self-concept is seen as necessary and vital to development and where problem-solving is encouraged—tend to have better social connections, resilience and an ability to adjust to new contexts in life (González-Valero et al., 2020; Maslen et al., 2020). Therefore, adolescence is the most vulnerable period for an individual's mental health (Drane et al., 2020; McMahon et al., 2020). Approximately half of all mental health referrals emerge around 14 years of age (Long et al., 2020).

Young people experience most of their social interaction and engagement and their emotional and behavioural regulation in the family home. In addition, they experience this at school, specifically in the classroom (Wang et al., 2016). Young people can disconnect socially and academically from school when they are deprived of routine and consistent school-associated activities. This deprivation can result in disruptive behaviour and lower educational attainment (Drane et al., 2020). The five-week 2020 COVID-19 learning-from-home period was a catalyst of disruption for many students' educational and social routines (Paredes et al., 2020) and potentially more so for young people with mental health issues.

The COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected young people. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reported that over 40% of respondents stated their social connectedness had suffered (AIHW, 2021). Reports were comparable across the globe with significant increases in the symptoms of anxiety and depression in young people.

The OECD Policy Response to Coronavirus Report indicated that mental health issues in adolescents increased between 30% and 80% in the first half of 2020 (OECD, 2021).

In Australia, according to Nicolson et al. (2020), during the January to April 2020, Kids Helpline, a free phone and online counselling service for young people aged five to 25, reported a 12% increase in counselling contact. Of this 25% were from regional or rural areas. Whilst Headspace (2020) reported a 70% increase in telehealth engagement to regional, rural and remote areas. This suggests that although there were significant mental health increases in young people at this time, more young people than pre-COVID times saw third party providers of telehealth as a lifeline to appease their worries, anxieties and depressive mental states.

COVID-19 Disrupts Education

Much of the COVID-19 literature related to schools examines the disruptions and inequities for education and the psychological and social impacts on students during and after the COVID-19 learning-from-home period (Drane et al., 2020; O'Connor, 2020). Research reveals that the disadvantaged, vulnerable and lower socioeconomic groups have been most affected during the COVID-19 learning-from-home period, as students who were academically driven, eager or who had supportive parents learnt new routines and were able to continue alternative learning online (Chesters & Watson, 2013; Schleicher, 2020). Those most at risk and most vulnerable during the COVID-19 learning-from-home period were students 1) not developmentally ready for school based on educational assessments, 2) below the national minimum standards (NAPLAN results); and 3) at risk of not completing senior years of school due to low attendance or non-academic attempt (Lamb et al., 2020).

COVID-19 and the ensuing lockdown disconnected many young people from vital physical and social interaction. Current research suggests that many children and adolescents were at risk of decreasing their well-being and increasing mental health issues (Long et al., 2020). Other disadvantaged groups included Australia's Indigenous students, primarily rural and remote Indigenous populations, where approximately 50% perform below basic levels of educational outcomes (Lamb et al., 2020). In some lower socioeconomic Indigenous communities, the most disadvantaged live in rural or remote areas, where there is a reliance on the whole community to assist with raising the children (AIHW, 2019). Aunties and some uncles of Indigenous communities "are instrumental in making sure children attend school" (Brown et al., 2020, p. 16).

However, the COVID-19 lockdown interrupted this routine making it virtually impossible to motivate and engage such students to attend to online learning (Brown et al., 2020, p.16). Societal disadvantage combined with the lack of necessary technology, reliable internet connection, learning material, a quiet space for study and motivation would prove to be the most significant barriers to any educational benefits during the five-week 2020 lockdown across New South Wales schools (Paredes et al., 2020).

A consequence of the COVID-19 learning-from-home period was the predictable disruption to school routines and school connectedness (Chaseling et al., 2020). Habits and routines are fundamental to developing a child's social skills, academic success and resilience, especially when faced with a crisis (Arlinghaus & Johnston, 2019). Lee (2020) points to school routines as a fundamental "coping mechanism for young people" (p. 421), and removing routines can result in children negatively acting out. Removing routines can result in students experiencing anxiety, depressive moods, and psychological distress as they start to lose school connectedness and develop a belief that people in the school do not care about their learning and well-being (Drane et al., 2020). It is agreed that positive routines and progressive habits are necessary for children to learn and adapt during counselling sessions to correct maladaptive behaviours (Arlinghaus & Johnston, 2019; Rubin et al., 2013).

The Reality of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Current literature addressing the 2020 learning-from-home-period explores the systemic nature of its effects on communities and mental health and speculates on how life will function in a COVID-19 free environment (Schleicher, 2020). This is comparable to studies exploring the panic and mental health issues resulting from substantial disasters (Lee, 2020; Pincus et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2020). Other studies investigate the shortfalls of government promises, inequities of the disadvantaged and issues surrounding access and attitudes to technology (Paredes et al., 2020; Chaseling et al., 2020). One study uncovered an uncertainty surrounding lockdown which became a reality for parents and carers who had pre-existing mental health issues, were a struggling one-parent family or parents who had job uncertainty due to their employment conditions (Gore et al., 2021). They found it especially difficult to function in an unfamiliar tech-savvy environment and retain a sense of worth when seeking government JobKeeper payments (Phillips et al., 2020). It is difficult to predict when a national crisis will occur, the duration, the seriousness, who will be most affected and the resources necessary for intervention (Saladino et al., 2020).

Issues With Accessing Counselling for Regional and Rural New South Wales

Students

The New South Wales Government has recognised regional and rural New South Wales as places of educational disadvantage. This disadvantage begins in early childhood and is across all school stages. By the time regional and rural students have reached 15 years, they are 1.5 years behind their metropolitan peers (Piccoli, 2014). Not surprisingly, 18 months into COVID-19, the OECD reported that the pandemic had “seriously disrupted education systems” (OECD, 2021, p. 5), and resulted in severe impacts on students’ learning and well-being, especially students from disadvantaged backgrounds and secondary schools (OECD, 2021, p. 3).

This Piccoli and OECD findings afford with Paredes et. al’s conclusions regarding New South Wales rural and disadvantaged primary school during the 2020 COVID-19 learning-from-home period. Paredes et al. determined that the Government’s “presumptions of successful on-site learning and technology implementation [were] challenged” (p. 175) by the experiences of rural schools. Also, that in two of the six primary schools in their research sample, parents did not want their children to have computers or devices because of the lifestyle they chose to live or because they were living off the electricity grid with little or no internet.

Nevertheless, engaging with learning-from-home and counselling sessions during lockdown periods required students to have access to technology and be motivated to stay connected (Brown et al., 2020). Despite this, 20% of Australian households do not have a suitable computer (not including smartphones, tablets etc.), which made access during the COVID-19 2020 lockdown problematic (Drane et al., 2020; McCutcheon, 2020, Paredes et al., 2020). Furthermore, close to 15% of Australian households do not have an adequate, or any, internet connection (Thomas et al., 2020).

Students who usually meet with a counsellor not only required access to a computer or devices and appropriate internet connection, they also need a private space free from distractions within the home, with suitable furniture, as well as parental/carer support for engagement in counselling (Brown et al., 2020). Research reveals that lower-income families were far less likely to have access to a quiet place for study or counselling, consistent access to technology or parental support, leaving students

disadvantaged, which resulted in disengagement (Armour et al., 2020; Clinton, 2020; Lamb et al., 2020).

Challenges for School Counsellors During Lockdown

During the learning-from-home across Australia, school counsellors had to engage with online communication methods to service their students (O'Connor, 2020). Studies of student contact with school counsellors during the 2020 five-week lockdown revealed a significant decrease in the provision of school counsellor services compared with lockdown free years (O'Connor, 2020). Some students lacked the motivation or means to seek online mental health services, while some refused contact, which proved challenging for school counsellors (Ahmed & Firdous, 2020; O'Connor, 2020; Saladino et al., 2020). Some students experienced elevated levels of negative self-worth, perceived failure, frustration or hopelessness (Drane et al., 2020). This was to be expected given crises, traumatic events and pandemics, on both global and local scales, are known to cause fear and panic within communities and individuals (Karaman et al., 2021). The uncertainty surrounding COVID-19—its transmission, infection rates, possible mortality, and lockdowns—caused worry, fear and catastrophising emotions in which negative views had the opportunity to gain momentum within school students (Radwan et al., 2020), including those with existing mental health issues. Despite the issues that potentially overwhelmed students, it was the responsibility of school counsellors to try to connect with students, provide ongoing mental health support (O'Connor, 2020) and psychoeducation to students and often to parents (de la Fuente et al., 2021).

Students who lacked the motivation to engage with online learning materials could also experience a decrease in their mental health over time (Brown et al., 2020; Schleicher, 2020). Withdrawal from online engagement may also have resulted in increased emotional repercussions, psychological distress, losses in school connectedness, maladaptive behaviours, increases in anxiety and depression and belief that no one cares (Drane et al., 2020) or those students, a real risk of not re-engaging after the learning-from-home period was likely (Brown et al., 2020).

This literature review has found that New South Wales school counsellors are trained to provide advice and support for students with mental health issues in face-to-face school settings. However, overall, school counsellors were not adequately prepared to engage with students during the 2020 COVID-19 learning-from-home period when most students were not on a school site. Further, regional and rural New South Wales

are places of disadvantage (Piccoli, 2014) where some students may not have access to a computer or device or sufficient internet for engagement. Hence, the Government's presumption that school activities would rapidly transition to online was flawed in terms of school counsellors working with students in places of disadvantage.

What was not located in the literature was research into what school counsellors in regional and rural communities actually did during the learning-from-home period to engage with their students.

Rationale and Research Question

The rationale for this study emanated from two related sources. First, the researcher experienced the five-week 2020 COVID-19 learning-from-home period as a New South Wales Department of Education secondary teacher in a regional high school. Second, the researcher is keen to understand how school counsellors engaged with their students during this same learning-from-home period as he is a school counsellor in training in 2021/2022. In 2023, he will be a school counsellor appointed to regional and rural schools. Understanding the perspectives of school counsellors in regional and rural areas can benefit the researcher and other school counsellors during future lockdown periods.

The researcher appreciates that school counselling is traditionally a one-on-one, face-to-face service conducted in a room in a school. However, during learning-from-home, school counsellors presumably had to completely change their practice in terms of contacting their students and being contacted by and counselling their students in a setting beyond a schoolroom. A literature review revealed a shortage of research on this topic. Thus, the researcher sought to hear from school counsellors who lived and worked through the lockdown period about their experiences and what they believe could be put in place to support students during any subsequent prolonged disruptive time. Hence, this study seeks to fill a gap in the literature by exploring the question: How did New South Wales regional and rural school counsellors engage with their students during the 2020 COVID-19 learning-from-home period?

Research Design

This section outlines and justifies the methodological approach used in the current study. Elements, adapted from Crotty (1998) that inform one another (p. 76) have been outlined (Al-Ababneh, 2020). It begins by viewing the researchers' qualitative research, then examines the ontology and epistemology which informs the

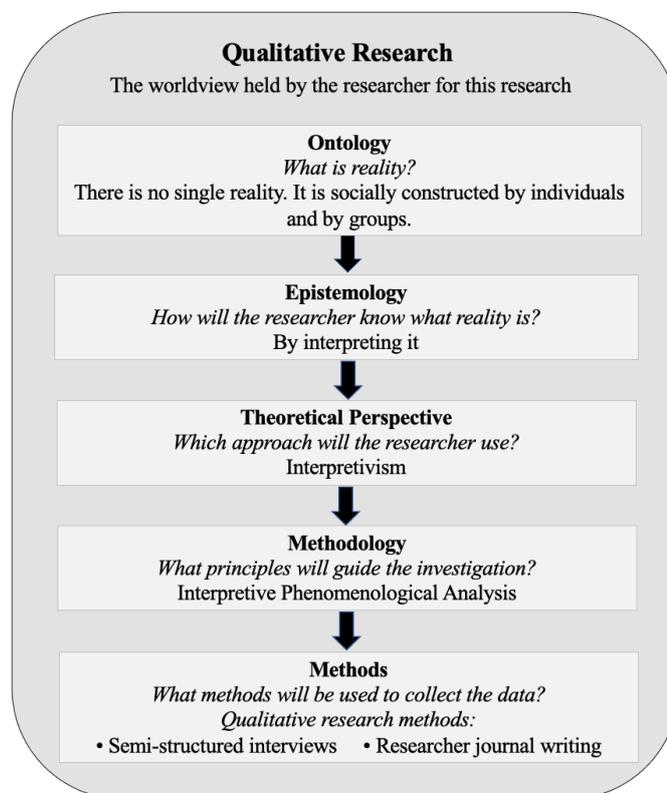
theoretical perspectives and methodology. After this, the methodology chooses the method of research the procedural steps in the study's research design are outlined. This section concludes by viewing the characteristics of the study's trustworthiness, reflexivity and ethics.

Qualitative Research

The researcher chose qualitative research as his worldview (Johnson & Christensen, 2014, pp. 33-34) for this inquiry because it allowed him to focus on individuals and rely on data that was expressed in words (Walliman, 2018, p. 148). Qualitative research is subjective, interpretative, conducted in a natural setting, unstructured, unpredictable and emergent. It is concerned with developing meaning, gaining clarity and understandings from participants regarding their personal experiences and feelings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Figure 2

A Visual Representation of the Researcher's Worldview, Ontology and Epistemological Beliefs that Influenced His Choice of Methodology and Method



Note: Adapted by the researcher from Crotty, (1998, pp. 1–17) and Patel, (2015).

Ontology and Epistemology

As depicted in Figure 2, the researcher's qualitative approach is underpinned by his ontological and epistemological beliefs which then influenced his research. His ontological beliefs—beliefs about the nature of reality or being (Al-Saadi, 2014) – is that there is no single reality or truth, rather reality is created by individuals or groups. His related epistemological beliefs – theory of knowledge beliefs as researchers attempt to answer the how and what questions (Willig, 2019) – is that researchers learn about reality by interpreting it (Crotty, 1998, pp. 8-9).

Theoretical Perspective and Methodology

In alignment with his qualitative research approach, the researcher engaged with Interpretivism as his theoretical perspective (Figure 2). Interpretivism has as its central idea that reality exists as a social construct and needs to be interpreted (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Lining up with Interpretivism is the methodology of Phenomenology that was chosen for this study. Phenomenology is concerned with the meanings, feeling and emotions of a participant's lived experience and the commonalities between participants within particular contexts (Willig, 2008). Through obtaining commonalities, the researcher developed a narrative to describe what participants experienced and how they experienced it (Willig, 2008).

The specific type of Phenomenology chosen was an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach where the researcher provides a detailed examination of personal lived experiences (Peoples, 2021). IPA focuses on a small sample group of individuals and draws out their experience and the meanings of that experience for those people (Gibson and Hugh-Jones (2014). It uses a single homogenous sample of participants and moves away from contexts that are particular or specific (ideographic) to shared experiences of a particular event or phenomenon (Eatough & Smith, 2017) as a probable shared perspective upon the phenomenon of interest (Larkin et al., 2019). The aim of IPA is not to make generalisable claims but uncover universal laws in the world of the participants and discover themes that are identifiable across narratives (Gibson & Hugh-Jones, 2014).

The Current Study

Aligning with the principles of an IPA, the current study—with its focus on school counsellors' experience of the 2020 learning-from-home period in NSW public

schools—allowed the researcher to explore how participants dealt with the immediate lockdown, how they engaged with students, the mental health effects and the aftereffects of the lockdown. The use of this qualitative methodology allows contextual richness of understanding and real-world events to be interpreted in relation to the barriers of engagement with students in many different settings of regional NSW (Yin, 2015).

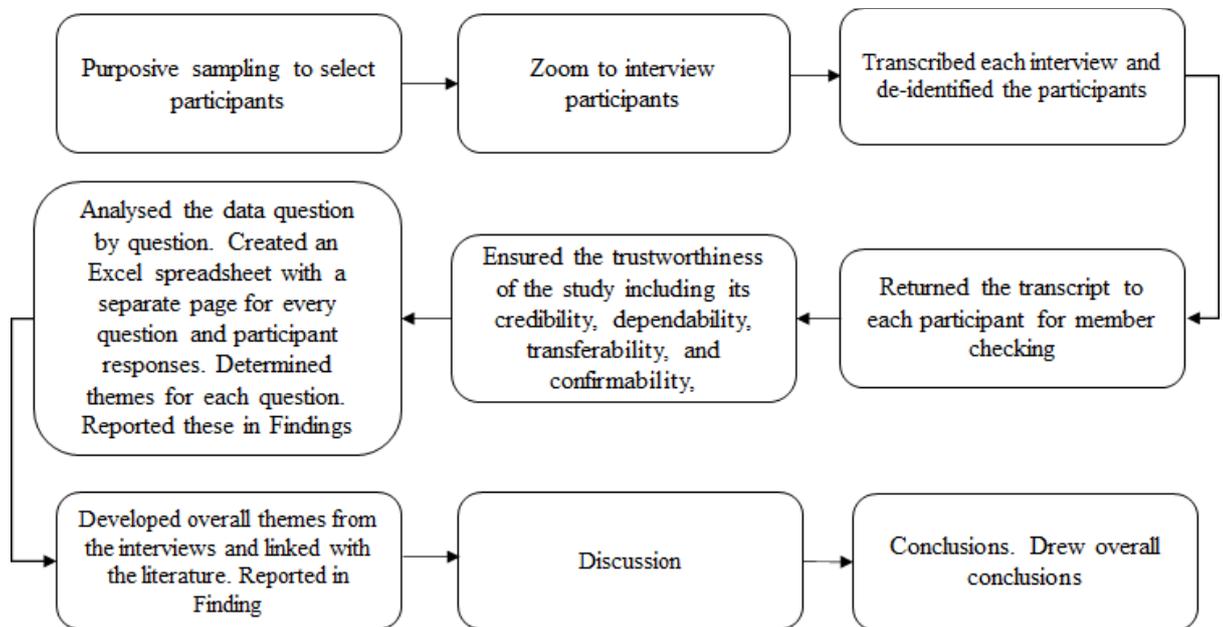
In this study, the researcher accepted there were many factors and variables for each participant's point of view, which created different realities encircling the one phenomenon. These realities were real to the participants where their perspectives of engagement with students during the 2020 COVID-19 learning-from-home period was determined and impacted by circumstance such as: underlying social influences, geographic location, structures, supports and belief systems. This study identified patterns of meaning around the central theme of engagement with students, and drew subthemes together into a structure that produced important patterns of meaning.

Research Design/ Plan

The research design or plan for this study was the overarching structure (Creswell & Poth, 2018) the researcher used to collect and analyse the data to answer the research question (Fraenkel, 2015, p. G-7) (see Figure 3). Mapping out the research design determined how the research question would be investigated, provided a salient path for the research, and ensured the gathered data was valid (Creswell, 2013, p. 49).

Figure 3

Procedural Steps in the Study's Research Design



Note: Figure 3 shows the steps that the researcher engaged in for his research design. While the steps are presented as linear, on occasions earlier steps were repeated.

Purposive Sampling to Select Participants

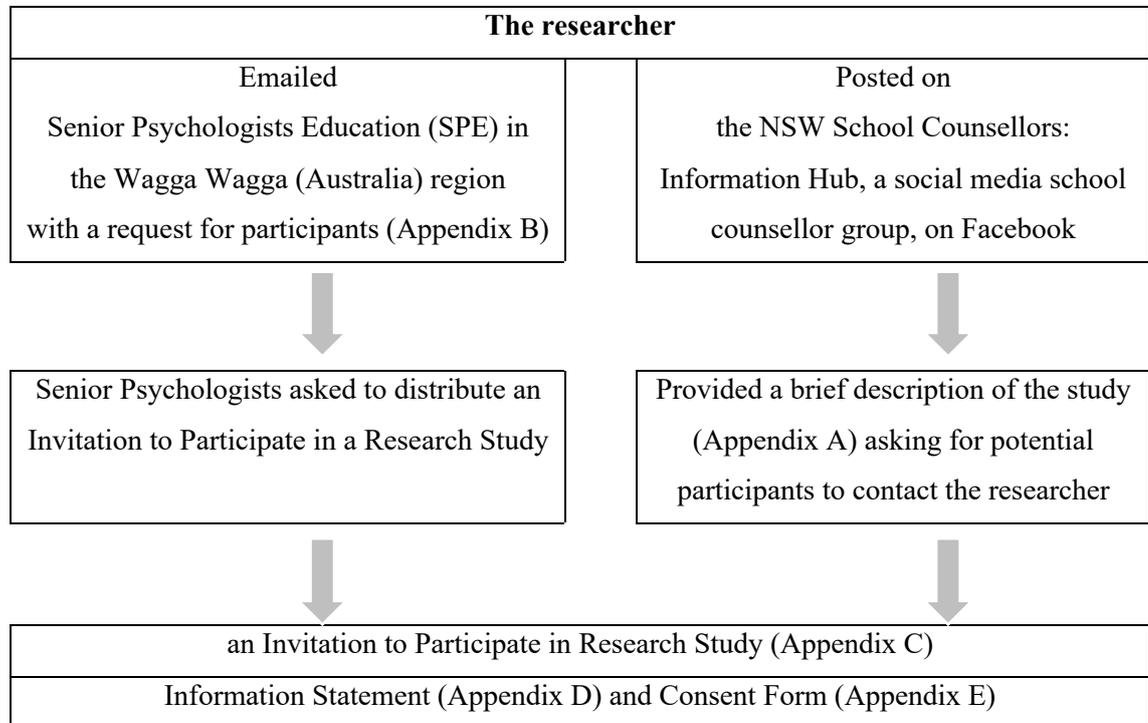
This study sought to gain the perspectives – beliefs, values, knowledge, experiences and interaction with objects and events (Borghi & Barsalou, 2021) of the group who provide psychological counselling services for New South Wales students (NSW Government, 2021e). The researcher chose school counsellors rather than school psychologists for participants as he deemed them the most qualified to discuss their interactions with students during the school-based learning-from-home period. This was because school counsellors in New South Wales must be qualified teachers, while this is not a requirement for school psychologist (NSW Government, 2021d).

To source school-counsellor participants, the researcher used *purposive sampling*—a process whereby he selected individuals based on the characteristics of the population he wished to interview (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). For this study, the characteristics required, school counsellors who: i) are Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) qualified, ii) are from regional or rural, primary and secondary New South Wales Department of Education schools in New South Wales, iii) practised during the March/April/May 2020 COVID-19 learning-from-home period. School counsellors were chosen as they are the most qualified to discuss their

interactions with students during the school-based learning-from-home period. The dual process used to recruit the participants is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Participant Recruitment Process



Note: As shown in Figure 4, the researcher recruited participants through email communication with Senior Psychologists Education (SPE) in the Wagga Wagga (Australia) region and by posting on a NSW School Counsellors, Facebook group.

Interview of Participants, Transcribing and De-identification, Analysis of Data

The data-collection method chosen for this Phenomenological study was *semi-structured interviews*. Semi-structured interviews involve a process where the researcher asks each participant a set of pre-determined questions (Appendix F), with the added benefit of enabling the researcher to use a flexible interviewing style if further clarity or more information is required on a topic of interest (Willig, 2008). Through this approach, the researcher was able to steer the interview toward insightful data relevant to the research topic (Willig, 2008). Four types of questions were planned which asks participants about their knowledge, opinion, feelings (Fraenkel et al., 2015, p. 451) regarding the study’s research question. Each interview began with general context/demographic questions (Appendix F), followed by more specific (open-ended) questions relating to the research question.

Interviews were conducted via the Zoom video teleconferencing platform and transcribed using Otter.ai software, an automated speech to text application. Each interview lasted between 30-45 minutes and used the same scripted questions with the opportunity for additional questions. Interviews were held in culturally and physically safe environments at agreed times. As a result of the recruitment process, nine study participants were sourced—seven female and two males.

After the interview, the researcher transcribed each interview, then sent a copy to the participant for *member checking* to check the accuracy of the report (Fraenkel et al., 2015, p. 456).

Interviews were analysed using Roulston's (2014) three-analytic process which is described below:

- (i) Data reduction – To capture the true essence and interpretation of the interview, the researcher first reduced the data by removing repetitive words, then colour-coded the transcripts to reveal the central idea or coding words that revealed important symbols/themes relevant to the topic (p. 304)
- (ii) Reorganising, classifying and categorising data – statements were generated through reorganising and reassembling the data (or coding). Links and common themes developed as the data was assembled. Repetition of common themes produced connections. These were sorted into categories and given coding that related to the topic of interest. Key concepts were distinguished reflecting common links, a process that was repeated as necessary (p. 304).
- (iii) Interpreting and Writing up Findings – Formulation of a script emerged that was critically reviewed. Direct quotes were chosen to illustrate main ideas. Through the growing number of themes, the researcher created a narrative that explained intricate meanings, details and arguments (p. 305).

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the issue of the rigor or confidence in the research findings is referred to as trustworthiness (Ary et al., 2019, p. 442). The four widely accepted aspects to establish trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 42-43; Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield 2018).

Credibility

Credibility is defined as the extent to which the reality of findings represents the participants' experiences and perceptions of the phenomena (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). To ensure the research findings were as credible as possible, the researcher used strategies such as: member checking (each participant was sent a copy of their transcript and offered the opportunity to read the final report) and; assiduously analysing and reporting the data to represent the reality of the interviews (Ary et al., 2019, pp. 442-3).

Transferability

Transferability is the extent to which a study's findings are applicable across populations, contexts and situations (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). In this inquiry, the researcher provided rich, thick descriptions of the study's context—school counsellors in regional and rural New South Wales—so potential study users could make judgements about similarity and, therefore, transferability (Ary et al., 2019, pp. 445-6).

Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency of the findings (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). The researcher strove for dependability by providing as much detail as possible in his methodology so the study could be replicated even though he recognised that replication would be near impossible given different contexts and participants (Ary et al., 2019, pp. 446-7).

Confirmability

Confirmability is defined as the process used by the researcher to ensure biases were monitored and did not influence the findings (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). Through the use of journaling and the reflexivity section of this thesis, the researcher's declared his personal biases to minimise their impact on the study (Ary et al., 2019, pp. 448-9).

Ethical Considerations

This Australian study involved human participants. It is bound by the Australian Code for Responsible Conduct of Research, 2018 (Australian Government, 2018). Ethical approval for this research was granted by the Human Research Ethics

Committee of Charles Sturt University under protocol number H21207. Permission to interview New South Wales Department of Education employees was granted by New South Wales State Education Research Applications Process (SERAP) under number 2021247 (NSW Department of Education, n.d.).

Various ethical considerations were at the forefront of the researcher's thinking and actions throughout this study. These include the ethical principle of *do no harm*, which involves protecting the participants' rights (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Regarding this, the researcher provided participants with an Information Statement that explained the research details (Appendix D) and a Consent Form that they were asked to sign (Appendix E). It was clear from these documents that participation was voluntary and that participants could withdraw at any stage up until two weeks after receiving their transcript. To protect each participant's privacy, their identifying information including school locations were de-identified and participants were referred to by a pseudonym. The researcher stored hardcopy data in a locked filing cabinet at his home and uploaded electronic data to Google Drive https://www.google.com/intl/en_mu/drive/, a password-protected storage cloud provided by the Charles Sturt University IT department. Cloud storage platforms allowed sharing through an "invite-only" function.

Reflexivity

Qualitative research is interpretive research, where the researcher is involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants, which can potentially impact the research process (Creswell, 2013, p. 294). To reduce such influences, qualitative researchers need to engage in reflexivity (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015, p. 278). Through reflexivity, the researcher explores their personal subjectivity, biases, or positions held within the research process (Rankl et al., 2021) then strives to ensure the research is transparent and that the researchers' influence is mitigated (Smith & Luke, 2021). As such, it is crucial to explore a researcher's personal story to understand their relationship with social structures, organisations or traditions because researchers have diverse roles in their lives (Dodgson, 2019; Subramani 2019).

Personal Reflexivity

The topic the researcher chose for this thesis—the COVID-19 2020 learning-from-home period in New South Wales schools—is of great interest to him as this pandemic is changing the world, including Australian schooling and forcing

governments to act in unprecedented ways. Having experienced the learning-from-home period as a teacher and parent, the researcher, like others, was in uncharted waters. In his teaching role, he prepared lessons and activities which he delivered through Google Classroom, a web-based platform that allows the sharing of files as an online interactive classroom (Google, n.d). He also made regular contact by holding weekly Zoom meetings with classes and he regularly attended to email and phone calls from students. What really struck the researcher about the learning-from-home period was the mix in student attitudes to their prepared lessons. Some students were very attentive to the work and would complete the necessary tasks, they would also regularly attend the online class sessions, these students were supported at home and would present as high achievers at school. Other students sporadically completed lesson activities and rarely attended online classes. These students were capable but viewed the lockdown as time to have *off* from learning. Then there was a small portion of students who did not engage in lesson activities, attend the online classes and they were not available to answer check-in calls or emails either. Many of these students were disengaged from school, on the wellbeing radar and from disadvantaged or troubled households. Some of these students had had interactions with the school counsellor in the past. Regarding this, the researcher questioned how if he struggled to engage with these students as their teacher, how then did school counsellors engage with their caseload of students? Especially when the learning-from-home period was socially isolating for students, and exposed flaws in access to all manners of technology, especially in regional and rural pockets of New South Wales, where the very nature of the face-to-face counselling session was challenged.

Concurrently, he, as a parent, attended to his own primary children's online learning. His children used Google Classroom and had weekly Zoom meetings with their teachers, which were well planned, resourced and interactive. At times the researcher had to intervene with his children's learning, to keep them on task and away from distractions. However, as a result of he and his wife's parental organisation, the children had lesson time which included breaks, regular exercise and backyard sports and games. His children were predominantly self-sufficient with their online learning ability.

Throughout this thesis, the researcher engaged in a journaling process to develop himself as a reflective thinker. He found journaling critical for his study as it was a permanent record made by him about himself. The journaling enabled the researcher to learn more about himself, his values and personal biases and what was important to

him. During his engagement with this supervisor, and with peers who were also engaged in a thesis, the researcher used his journal entries as prompts for conversations and reflections.

Before the interviews, the researcher's assumptions were centred on the unequable socioeconomic and educational divide between metropolitan and regional/rural New South Wales. Having been a teacher in the Riverina region of New South Wales, the researcher has observed disadvantages amongst various students. This is likely to have predisposed the researcher to find themes of disadvantage amongst students.

Epistemological Reflexivity

This study is confined to the study of phenomena in its natural setting and interprets meaning given by participants' experiences through the qualitative process. Tuffour (2017) explains it is through patterns of expected and unexpected relationships that phenomena are exposed. Although prejudices and biases will exist, they should not be totally discarded as they are unique to the importance of the interpretation (Palaganas & Estacio, 2018), researcher's must keep their prejudices and biases visible, acknowledging how this shapes the research (Tuffour, 2017). Thus, this current study has been shaped by interpretive phenomenological analysis where the findings were constructed by participants responses to the phenomena and then interpreted by the researcher.

Results

The demographic details of the nine school counsellors who participated in this study are shown in Table 1. Their gender, the number of schools they service, the populations of those schools and the school type (as per the New South Wales Department of Education School Finder, 2020) are all displayed. Information relating to weekly counselling interactions with students pre-COVID-19 learning-from-home period, during the COVID-19 learning-from-home period and post COVID-19 learning-from-home period is detailed. The communication methods these nine school counsellors used are also specified.

Table 1*Participants Demographic Information*

Participants	Gender	No of Schools	Student Numbers in Schools	School Type	Students / Week			Communication Medium Used During COVID
					Pre-	During COVID	Post	
P1	f	3	*HS - 700 HS - 600 **PS - 300	Regional Regional Regional	18	18	18	Zoom phone email
P2	m	1	HS - 900	Regional	15	0	20	None
P3	f	2	HS - 1050 PS - 550	Regional Regional	20	0	40	none
P4	f	4	HS - 1100 PS – 650 PS – 75 PS - 50	Regional Regional Regional Regional	20	0	25	none
P5	f	4	PS – 200 PS – 150 PS – 20 PS - 6	Rural Rural Remote Remote	6	0	6	none
P6	m	3	HS – 460 PS – 450 HS - 40	Regional Regional Regional	10	0	20	none
P7	f	4	HS - 1100 PS – 330 PS – 28 PS - 19	Regional Regional Regional Regional	20	4	20	email Coviu phone
P8	f	3	***CS - 150 HS – 160 PS - 130	Rural Rural Rural	10	3	15	email phone
P9	f	3	HS - 1100 PS – 300 PS - 150	Regional Regional Regional	20	3	25	email phone

Note: To de-identify participants, each was given a pseudonym from P1 to P9.

* HS refers to high schools which in NSW educate children from 12 years to 18 years.

** PS refers to primary schools which in NSW educate children from 5 years to 12 years.

*** CS refers to central school which in NSW educate children from 5 years to 18 years.

Question 1: Prior to the 2020 COVID-19 learning-from-home period, what did your normal day look like?

When asked what their normal day looked like prior to the COVID-19 learning-from-home period, participants defined their typical work-day in various ways. All participants reported that they spent part of their day counselling students. A

representative comment here was “... attend to priority students (for counselling) as soon as possible before the day gets away” (P6).

The next most frequently mentioned response was assessing students formed part of their day. One participant reported “I was doing quite a lot of behavioural assessments because we had several paediatricians that we met with once a term...” (P5).

The only participant who did not mention this was participant P1, the Telehealth school counsellor who had explained elsewhere that her role did not include assessment. The next most reported response, from just over half of the participants, was meetings with teachers and wellbeing teams. A substantial minority of participants mentioned meeting with parents and meetings with third parties. The following comment was characteristic of this response “... meetings with parents concerning assessments of kids, discussions with classroom teachers about how to support kids with needs, completing disability confirmation sheets and speaking to allied health professionals or paediatricians” (P3).

Due to the vast distances most of these school counsellors have to travel between their allocated schools, a substantial minority reported a long commute of over 100 kilometres is part of their day. The participant most impacted by this was P5 who reported that her three schools are each over 100 kilometres from her base school, with one (of the three schools) close to 200 kilometres and so remote the roads are unpassable during rain.

In summary, prior to the 2020 COVID19, counsellors reported that they: attended their base schools where they counselled students; conducted student assessments; conferred with school executives, wellbeing teams and classroom teachers; consulted with third parties, and; travelled between their base schools.

Question 2: In what way were you prepared for the COVID-19 learning-from-home period?

Participants were asked in what way they were prepared for the COVID-19 learning-from-home period once the NSW Premier had announced new restrictions to social gatherings (Storen and Corrigan, 2021). The response from almost all participants was they were not prepared, or had no forewarning leading to the learning-from-home period. “Well, I wasn't [prepared] in any way it happened so fast” (P9) and “I don't think anybody was prepared” (P4) were characteristic responses.

Fortuitously, for some participants a substantial minority had completed some form of telehealth training through which they were trained to complete their client consultations by phone or videocall (Australian Digital Health Agency, 2021). Two participants spoke positively about this training. The following comments were characteristic of this response: "... the easiest way I found to engage with the students was with CoviU [a video telehealth program] (CoviU, 2021), I had done the training and it worked quite well" (P7). Another participant stated "... I was going through that phase where they were handing me a lot of information on how to work remotely, and had completed the training" (P1).

Only one participant (P1) was prepared for the lockdown. She explained that the New South Wales Department of Education had employed her in 2019 to counsel students who were affected by the catastrophic New South Wales bushfires in the Snowy Mountains Local Government Area of the state. Given most of the students she was counselling then were not attending schools, MAX Solutions Health, a New South Wales Department of Education contingent workforce, had trained her in the use of telehealth. As a result, when the 2020 learning-from-home period arose, she was already experienced in this electronic approach to counselling.

In summary, the substantial majority of school counsellors were not prepared for COVID-19 learning-from-home period due to a lack of resourcing, training and policies and procedures surrounding the use of telehealth. A minority of school counsellors who did engage with students during the COVID-19 learning-from-home period were proficient in the use of telehealth and had organised consultation with students prior to the learning-from-home period commencing.

Question 3: What was your immediate response when the COVID-19 restrictions were enacted?

When participants were asked their immediate response to the COVID-19 restrictions school counsellors provided a variety of responses. About half reported their first action was to collect counselling files to take home, something they did not often do. Regarding their location of work two participants reported they worked a mixture of home and school, while a further two explained they continued going into work at their base school even though there were no students present. As one participant explained, he felt safe and organised in his work environment. The following comment was characteristic of this response:

I went to work every day. I continued on as usual, because I was in the office by myself and could easily stay away from others, I just felt it was better for me to be at work, to be more organised and have all the resources that are needed (P6)

In summary, the majority of school counsellors' immediate response to the COVID-19 restrictions was to: ensure they attended to the health of their family members, loved ones and themselves; keep in contact via Zoom with their school counselling team, school executive teams, and; attend to outstanding administrative duties.

Question 4: What communication methods/mediums did you have/use with students during the COVID-19 learning-from-home period?

From the responses to this question, it was clear that participants' contact with their students was varied with participants using a mixture of telehealth platforms including Coviu, Microsoft Teams and Zoom or a combination of mobile (telephone) and email or text. About half of the participants reported they had telephone or email communication with their students. Included amongst these responses were: "I was doing phone calls, using Coviu and using student email addresses..." (P7) and "I used phone calls from my own phone but protected the identity of my phone number" (P9).

One participant, P1, had consistent contact with students during the learning-from-home period. This was because her contingent workforce, MAX Solutions Health, was already set up with telehealth. P1 reported, because of this, she "hit the ground running".

Just over half of the participants reported having no contact with any students. The following comments were characteristic of this response. One participant noted "None, nothing they didn't have the confidential platform for video sessions that just was a nightmare of how we were going to do it. There was little we could do to get in contact with the students" (P3). Another participant noted "... because [the learning-from-home period] happened so suddenly, I couldn't call them [during the period]. I didn't have access to them" (P2). Whilst communication with students was attempted, one participant noted "I would call students to check in on them but the phone calls would ring out. I would call back later but didn't want to look like I was harassing them" (P4).

In summary, there was a variety of communication methods/mediums available to school counsellors to be used during the COVID-19 learning-from-home period. The

majority of school counsellors had no contact with their students, irrespective of any communicative medium being used. Whilst a minority of participants who used telehealth did so due to their proficiency in using telehealth platforms.

Question 5: As far as contacting students or them contacting you what worked and what did not work?

Seven participants who had communication methods available to them outlined many issues with engagement. About half of these participants reported issues with Coviu. They explained that Coviu was very data hungry, especially for families on data plans. Within weeks of it being endorsed by the NSW Department of Education, the Department discontinued its use and replaced it with Zoom which two participants used. One participant explained: "... I think Coviu lasted about three months. It didn't work well at all. It was a lesson well learnt... And then we went to Zoom [which] was a lot more secure ...” (P1).

P1’s position as a telehealth counsellor gave her a unique opportunity. Due to P1’s extensive training across many telehealth platforms she had the advantage of utilising the most appropriate one that suited the Department of Education’s policies and was compatible given the students level of connectivity. Despite her access and experience with telehealth P1 also reported that “some of her students were uncontactable.” The dynamic and infrastructure of some households meant that some had no internet, others had only one phone for the entire household, while for others there was no private space for counselling or no parent available for consent (Thomas et al., 2020).

Regarding what worked well during the learning-from-home period, two rural and remote counsellors noted that their Teachers and School Learning and Support Officers (SLSO) colleagues were their main source of inquiry lines with most students and their families. It is not an uncommon practice for support teachers and learning assistants (in the classroom) to build relationships and connect with students, through this they relay valuable information back to the staff who require it (Maple et al., 2019) as one participant noted: "... some SLSOs [in rural and remote areas] were relatives of some of the families of whom their children had had previous had contact with the school counsellor, through the SLSOs we could maintain small amounts of connection regarding their wellbeing" (P5).

Regarding what did not work well during the learning-from-home period, two participants advised ineffective principals made communication with students difficult.

They maintain that “[their] school principals’ organisation skills were a determinate of the functionality of the school” during the learning-from-home period. A further two participants attempted to contact students with no success and five participants reported that they had no contact at all with students despite communication attempts from their end. Responses were characterised by one participant stating “Communicating with students [in rural and remote areas] was almost impossible. That is because they didn't have the technology to interact with” (P5). Another participant noted “I had just come back from leave, had the Covi training then we went into lockdown. I was always available but no-one contacted me. I reached out to kids I knew who were struggling, but it was quiet” (P2).

In summary, most school counsellors had various issues with telehealth platforms, that stemmed from internal problems with the platforms and external problems – student connectivity, privacy or lack of technological devices. Other school counsellors reported that through the use of support staff and classroom teachers, who had most contact with students, some communication was maintained on the health and welfare of vulnerable students.

Question 6: What was a normal day like during the COVID-19 learning-from-home period?

With most students confined to their homes, the majority of school counsellors worked on files that were taken home, attempted to contact students, had daily Zoom meetings with teams, principals, their Senior Psychologist Education (SPE) and wellbeing teams. About half of participants looked after their own wellbeing in conjunction with daily meetings and working on files. The following comments were characteristic of this response:

... every day we had a team meeting, to see how people were coping, as I feel like the shift went to looking after your own wellbeing. We were all struggling a little with, what does this [learning-from-home period] mean for us, students, staff and our own families. The unknown was vast and daunting (P4).

I made sure I checked in with both my SPE and base school principal. I tried to keep to a normal schedule and I'd take a couple of breaks every few hours. During that time, I would sit in my dining room where I had all the paperwork spread out and I would work on these files. I was communicating with schools by our email and I was communicating with my team via zoom (P5).

A substantial minority of participants reported contact with at least one student per day, P1 found no difference in day-to-day routine. As a telehealth school counsellor, she advised that the learning-from-home period made little difference to her ability to contact students, except for a few students who relied on connectivity and computers provided at their school to engage in telehealth. P1 stated that “students without the convenience of school computers [for Zoom calls] ended up using mobile phones for counselling sessions”.

In summary, due to the context of COVID-19 stay at home requirements, most school counsellors attended to their immediate family and personal wellbeing. During this time, school counsellors reported they maintained contact with their SPE, school principal and wellbeing teams. A minority of participants continued to have contact with students using various telehealth platforms.

Question 7: How do you believe your students’ mental health was impacted due to COVID-19 learning-from-home period?

When asked how students mental health was impacted during the COVID-19 learning-from-home period, just over half of participants identified the greatest risk were vulnerable students. One participant noted “.... badly especially for some of our Indigenous students...” (P5). Another participant stated “You have already disadvantaged families spending their JobKeeper payment on alcohol increasing domestic violence DV behaviours. The abuse of alcohol and drugs which deteriorated the household dynamics certainly had an effect on student mental health...” (P1).

About half of participants reported students viewed the lockdown as a period of time off. A representative comment here was “I feel like honestly at the time it was one big holiday for a lot of our kids, [because] people hadn't been in this situation before. So, I feel like it was time for them off school” (P4).

A substantial minority of participants reported students with social anxiety flourished. The following comments were characteristic of this response:

... some kids really flourished being in home schooling lockdown especially if they had social anxiety. Because all of a sudden, you've removed that aspect of their life that's harassing them and causing stress. And even the ones that came to school (students of essential workers) the school site and small class sizes, they did really well (P9).

... the kids that have anxiety, really bad anxiety going to school is a difficult thing for them. So, they flourished and loved being at home. They thought

home-schooling was perfect. They didn't have any of the expectations of having to socialise with people or anything like that. So, they were very good. As long as their family was functional (P3).

Whilst three participants reported that the biggest populations to suffer were students with existing learning difficulties or with English as a second language. One participant stated that "...dysfunctional families fared the worst" (P3). Another participant noted that "the EAL/D (English as an Additional Language or Dialect) population probably comes to mind there. The tricky part of that obviously was the language barrier" (P4). One school counsellor reported worries of suicide. "... we were worried about students with suicidal ideation and self-harm, that kind of stuff" (P7).

In summary, most school counsellors reported that the COVID-19 learning-from-period had a negative effect on student wellbeing – especially those who were most vulnerable or disadvantaged. It was reported that other students saw the learning-from-home period as "me time" time off school and still others, who had social anxieties flourished not having to be in the social school environment.

Question 9: What impact did the COVID-19 learning-from-home period have on you as a school counsellor?

A substantial minority of participants reported that their own personal issues bought tension during the learning-from-home period. This revolved around immediate family members and their home schooling of them, together with the vulnerability of elderly family members and those with pre-existing health problems. These themes discussed by two of the participants noted "Personally, my situation was probably a bit more extreme than other counsellors because I had a family member who was quite sick and had to have medical attention...." (P3). "I was trying to come to terms with online learning with my kids" (P4).

A substantial minority of counsellors advised that they completed a lot of the backlog in reports, notes and other administrative duties during this time. A typical comment from this group was "I managed to get through a huge backlog of other administrative things to do" (P6).

Two participants reported they were geared to being more creative about how counselling was done with young children during this time. Two participants spoke about their concern for vulnerable students when there was no contact. Whilst two other participants reported the enjoyment of being home and not having to go into the office. They noted "I probably did remarkably well, I'm fairly introverted so I can actually like

being at home” (P5). “I was worried about the students especially the ones I couldn't contact that were on my high [needs] list” (P7). One participant noted:

It probably encouraged me to become a bit more creative, you know think outside the box when you have sessions with these kids. It was finding new and creative ways to engage students. For example, I was able to engage with some students using the imbedded draw functions. With smaller children, due to their limited concentration, I would use TV show clips from YouTube (P1).

In summary, most school counsellors used the learning-from-home period to clear administration backlogs and participate in personal development training, however there was consensus amongst school counsellors that they had ongoing concerns for their most vulnerable students.

Question 10: In what way were you prepared for the students’ return to school after the mandatory learning-from-home period had been lifted?

The responses to this question were mixed. The most frequently reported response to this question was that there was no training or nothing prepared school counsellors for what to expect upon the students’ return to school. Comments here stated “I don't think there was any formal preparation for their return...” (P5). “There was very little transition. It was just boom [and we] went back...” (P4). “...little really. We tried to educate staff on not pushing them (students) too hard...” (P3).

About half of the participants reported that it was pleasing to see the students again. A substantial minority of participants reported there was much preparation with a lot of planning around the students’ return. One participant noted “... it was a staggered return and there was support from our senior executive” (P9). Another participant stated “I felt quite prepared for the kids to come back. I was looking forward to seeing them again” (P5). And lastly a participant noted “It didn’t take long for them to feel comfortable talking to me again. I think everybody was just really pleased to see the kids because we missed their faces” (P8)

A substantial minority of participants reported domestic violence (DV) problems and student suicides after the COVID-19 learning-from-home period ended. One participant noted “... we had a suicide at our high school, which was one of my students He suicided two days before we came back out of lockdown” (P3). Another participant responded by noting:

I reviewed those cases from where we had left off and made a priority to deal with them when the students got back. I would be in meetings with the welfare

team to catch up with complex cases. Nothing prepared us for the months after though. We had a suicide (P2).

In summary, school counsellors provided mixed responses regarding their students' return after the 2020 COVID-19 learning-from-home period. Some school counsellors reported that the transition back to school learning was smooth, some that schools had little preparation for the return, while others revealed that they were pleased to see the students again. A few school counsellors divulged that they were left shocked due to student suicides in the days after the learning-from-home period.

Question 11: Has the COVID-19 learning-from-home period changed the way in which you operate?

About half of participants reported upskilling in telehealth platforms. One participant explained "I am now proficient in using Zoom, but it is much easier to engage kids in the physical context" (P2). Whilst another participant noted "We have more team meetings using Zoom. Telehealth is the new way of doing psychology and counselling. [We're] even using it to engage with parents as well" (P9). Two participants reported no change in their operation. A representative comment here was "Things just got put on hold for a little bit, but nothing really changed how I do my job..." (P8).

One participant reported that she was now more vigilant to the needs of students. She had spent time while away from schools to become more organised. She also now used Zoom with parents and for third-party interviews. She noted "I became more organised and created a database system that allows my team to monitor students at risk" (P9).

In summary, the majority of school counsellors have upskilled in telehealth and are keeping abreast of evolving telehealth policies and procedures, looking at ways of being creative whilst using telehealth platforms whilst others reported no change to their counselling operation.

Question 12: What advice would you give to a beginning school counsellor in light of the COVID-19 learning-from-home period?

The most frequent response to this question was that beginning school counsellors should practice selfcare, engage in hobbies, look for silver linings in their days and know when to shut off from work. Three sample comments included "... taking care of yourself is important, make sure you engage with regular hobbies,

exercise and social events. [Learn to] make time for you time because your job is never done...” (P3). “You need to reflect on your week or day and look at what you have done well and just sit with that, and learn from opportunities ...” (P7). “... actively engage in the things you enjoy the hobbies and relaxation, and stay flexible” (P6).

The next most frequent response from about half of the participants was that beginning school counsellors should familiarise themselves with telehealth and its functions. As P2 explained “...from what I can tell, there seems to be a big push for telehealth. It is good to be proficient in that.”

While one participant advised beginning counsellors to practice communicating, be organised and be proactive with supervision. This school counsellor put it in this way “... communication is king. Not just with your students but also teachers, parents and other team members. Senior psychologist education are the people that you are going to rely so much on” (P1).

In summary, and in light of the COVID-19 learning-from-home period, the majority of school counsellors placed great emphasis on creating and maintaining their personal wellbeing and selfcare, updating their telehealth skills, and practising communication skills, especially when using telehealth.

Findings

During the interview transcript analysis, four main themes emerged (Table 2). These emergent themes related to how school counsellors engaged with students during the COVID-19 learning-from-home period. Table 2 shows which of the nine participants addressed each of the four main themes during the interviews. Each theme will be discussed in turn below.

Table 2*Table of Main Themes*

Themes	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9
The Unexpectedness of Learning-From-Home Hindered Counsellors' Preparedness		x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Contact With Students Was Minimal or Not at All		x	x	x	x	x			
Students from Disadvantaged Backgrounds Were More Disadvantaged in a Learning-From-Home Environment	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
An Opportunity to Attend to a Backlog of Administration Tasks		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Note. P1 to P9 are pseudonyms for each of the nine school-counsellor participants. An x in the table denotes when a participant addressed the particular theme during the interview responses.

The Unexpectedness of Learning-From-Home Hindered Counsellors'

Preparedness

A central theme for the participants was that they felt unprepared for the COVID-19 learning-from-home occurrence. Previously, all but one school counsellor had only worked with their students in a school environment. The government's directive for learning-from-home meant that, with only days' notice, most parents kept their children at home, and most teaching and axillary staff were now working from their residence. The critical difference almost all counsellors reported was the way they now needed to do their work which previously had comprised one-on-one sessions with students in a school office.

As a result, school counsellors felt underprepared with events as they unfolded and how they could support their caseload in this unknown environment. The main issues that participants revealed were that: preparation time for the looming learning-from-home period was cut short due to its implementation speed; when the Department decided that telehealth platforms would be used for counselling, there was a lag in the training; initially, there were no clear policies or procedures around the use by counsellors of telehealth video platforms, nor how appropriate it would be for school counsellors to communicate with students using other communication methods (e.g. by phone, email).

As well, most counsellors revealed their continual uncertainty regarding communicating with their often quite vulnerable students outside a school setting—that is, in the students’ personal environment. Counsellors were unaware of how, when and how often they should consult with their students during the learning-from-home period.

Contact With Students Was Minimal or Not at All

A second emergent theme was that most school counsellors had difficulty contacting students during the five-week learning-from-home period. Therefore, their contact with students was minimal or not at all. A minority of participants who had contact advised that they were proficient using telehealth platforms and had set up counselling sessions with students before the learning-from-home period. Of the participants who had difficulty contacting students, several explained that they had attempted to check in with students via email and phone calls. However, when students did not respond to emails or phone calls rang out, the participants reported that they discontinued contact as they did not want to be viewed as harassing students. Most participants reported that all communication lines fell silent for them. However, they were always at the ready to engage with students who wanted to use their service.

Students from Disadvantaged Backgrounds Were More Disadvantaged in a Learning-From-Home Environment

A third theme to emerge was that school counsellors found that their clients from disadvantaged backgrounds were even more disadvantaged in the learning-from-home environment than at school. Participants consistently reported that disadvantage (technological and communicative) was a barrier for engagement, this was in the form of minimal or no internet connectivity, no access to technological devices or limited data availability on smart phones, no privacy in the home environment and in rural areas one phone for the whole family. Some participants commonly reported that disadvantage was mainly connected to low socioeconomic households, whilst other participants advised that it was common for them to rely on ancillary staff and teachers to keep them updated on the status of at-risk students. Most of the participants reported that disadvantage in their school communities was a precursor to disengagement during the COVID-19 learning-from-home period, primarily due to the lack of basic services in

the home. Although some schools handed out loan computers and dongles, participants reported that the level of engagement still did not increase.

An Opportunity to Attend to a Backlog of Administration Tasks

A fourth theme to arise was that the learning-from-home period allowed more than half of the participants to attend to their administrative backlog. The nature of school counsellors' work means that they are often inundated with administration as part of the counselling processes. This work includes notes from client meetings, letters to third party services, mandatory reporting, engagement with school staff and assessment reporting. Due to the short space between client appointments, most school counsellors pushed the much of the administration (writing up case notes and reports) to the end of the day or even week. Most participants reported that they prioritise the talking process when in counselling sessions. Therefore, in the pre-learning-from-home time it was not uncommon for school counsellors to work late into the evening or block off time at work to complete administrative duties. Participants advised that they rarely took home client files because of i) student confidentiality and ii) the school counsellors' need for self-care. Due to the stressful, emotionally taxing conversations a school counsellor experiences, their self-care and the ability to detach from the counselling role is essential. Thus, taking client files home is strongly discouraged. Most participants reported that to clear the backlog of administration meant a clean slate would follow once the learning-from-home period was over.

Discussion

While this study was qualitative, small scale, and confined to regional and rural pockets of New South Wales, it provides insights into the impact of the 2020 COVID-19 learning-from-home period from the perspective of nine New South Wales Department of Education school counsellors. Their schools are all in regional and rural areas of New South Wales—in the Riverina, Snowy Mountains, Hunter region, mid-West and Far Western areas.

The first theme to emerge was that the COVID-19 learning-from-home period was unexpected and disruptive to the school counselling process. School counsellors were unprepared for their changed working environment. This theme aligns with the research of Pincus et al. (2020) who determined that, whilst the COVID-19 learning-from-home period contributed to increased depression and anxiety and declined

wellbeing in students, nothing could have prepared school counsellors for this pandemic. O'Connor (2020) noted that school counsellors were required to adapt to telehealth platforms and other communication methods in order to communicate with students. This finding aligns with the experience of most participants who had to learn and implement telehealth platforms. Only three of the study's participants had previously used a telehealth platform to connect with their students. Nevertheless, delays in the training and rollout of the telehealth platforms stalled the ability for some school counsellors to be fully prepared to engage and communicate with students.

An associated issue was that the onus to engage in counselling, or respond to counselling invitations, was on the student, many who did not take up this invitation. Despite this, all school counsellors reported that they were at the ready. Regarding this, school counsellors felt uneasy and a sense that they could be perceived as potentially harassing their students if they persisted in trying to make contact when communication from the student was not reciprocated. Many school counsellors reported feeling deflated that engagement with their caseloads of students had ceased and without forewarning.

Primarily school counselling is a one-on-one confidential service where the counsellor can observe cues projected from the client's body language (O'Connor, 2020). It was rare for a school counsellor to carry out counselling via telehealth video before the 2020 learning-from-home period. School counsellors who were trained and prepared for the transition into telehealth video counselling were the minority. They were proficient using various telehealth video platforms, used other communication methods (phone, email) or, by sheer luck, had students willing and able to engage in counselling sessions.

The study's second theme was that most school counsellors had minimal or no contact with their students during the learning-from-home period. The exception was the one participant who had used the telehealth platform for counselling prior to the lockdown period. Not surprisingly, the majority of school counsellors were caught off guard by the learning from home period. Although having the training in a telehealth video platform was no guarantee engagement with students was probable as the student had to be willing and able to engage in counselling. Telehealth was a predominantly new and untested concept at the time for some school counsellors. Whilst some external counselling services successfully utilised telehealth platforms during the learning-from-home period (Headspace, 2020), students who use school counselling services more than likely engage with an outside service as well. This appears to align with the Kids

Helpline (Nicolson et al., 2020) and Headspace (2020) data that they, as third party mental health providers, experienced a significant increase in the use of their telehealth services. For young people, access to third-party providers was important for their mental health and wellbeing during this time.

The third theme to emerge was that disadvantage played a role in the engagement with students. The study's participants described disadvantage as students who had little to no access to technology which included: no or limited access to a computer or online device, no internet connection or inadequate data allowance, and little to no access to privacy at home. This finding aligns with the study of Chaseling et al. (2020) who determined that not all students in regional and rural New South Wales secondary schools had ready access to a computer at home or were dependent on a family computer or parent's device for daily access to engagement with their school. The finding also aligns to Paredes et al. (2020) study of rural and disadvantaged New South Wales primary schools where all school principals reported a percentage of families where computer access was an issue "due to low device ownership, poor or no network coverage, or insufficient data" (p. 186). These researchers also found that a percentage of primary school parents did not want their children to have access to electronic devices: in two of the six schools in the Paredes et. al. study, parents returned their school-loaned devices. During the learning-from-home period, students with little or no online access therefore lost engagement with their schools, class, friends and their school counsellor (O'Connor, 2020).

While this study determined that the majority of school counsellors were unable to engage with their students despite a school counsellor's attempts at contact, in many cases the issue in these regional and rural communities may have been a lack of online access. Drane et al. (2020) also determined that students plagued by disadvantage were most vulnerable. Those students who did access and engage with school counsellors during this time were able to have longer consultation sessions through telehealth provisions. Despite this, Pincus et al. (2020) report that many already disengaged young people declined mental health services from school counsellors as avoidance behaviours were easier during this time (Pincus et al., 2020).

The final theme to emerge centred on school counsellors' focus on the clearance of their administrative backlog during the five-week learning-from-home period. The nature of school counsellor work means that they provide counselling services for students, but also have a great deal of associated administrative tasks (e.g. write-ups from counselling sessions, disability confirmations, reports, filing). The COVID-19

learning-from-home period proved a valuable time to attend to administration once school counsellors found difficulty in connecting with their students. School counsellors explained that during the pre-COVID working week, administration required them to remain at school on many days well beyond school hours to undertake administrative tasks. This was against the advice from their supervisors that they needed to implement self-care and should not take work home (Rodd, 2017).

Conclusion

This study examined the perceptions of nine New South Wales Department of Education school counsellors located in various regions around New South Wales, Australia. While this study was unapologetically small scale, it engaged with and exposed the seldom-heard voices of school counsellors from regional, rural, in some instances, remote geographical areas. From this study, four main conclusions were drawn about the impact the pandemic had on the school counsellors, the counselling process and the ability of school counsellors to engage with their students. First, there was little time to prepare for the unexpected learning-from-home period due to the speed at which it was enacted, lack of training in telehealth on offer and the unknown element of COVID-19 transmission and how it may affect family members. Second, the COVID-19 learning-from-home period demonstrated that school counsellors are limited in what they can do if students have inadequate technology and internet and/or are unwilling to engage in counselling despite the emails and phone calls made by school counsellors. Third, disadvantage impacted the way in which some students engaged with their school, peers and school counsellors. This finding affirms that some of those students who had little to no access to technology, internet connection or had a lack of private spaces within the home had declines to their mental health as they struggled to connect with any telehealth services. Finally, as the student communication lines fell silent during the learning-from-home period, most school counsellors attempted to clear their backlog of administrative tasks. School counsellors attended to write-ups from counselling sessions, disability confirmations, reports, filing and other personal development training sessions.

The findings of this study indicate that pre-planning for a major disruption to schooling in New South Wales was inadequate when COVID-19 learning-from-home requirements emerged. The Government's assumption that learning and communication with students in their homes would be online (NSW Government, 2020b) was flawed in

terms of many regional and rural students who were already suffering from disadvantage in comparison to the State's metropolitan students (Piccoli, 2014). For those students where online communication was not feasible, it is not surprising that school counsellors had problems engaging such students in an already stressful and disruptive time. Fortunately, the increase in the use of third-party telehealth may have filled the gap that school counsellors might otherwise have undertaken. For those students who did not engage in either their school counsellor sessions or seek support from third-party providers were likely at risk of their wellbeing decreasing and increases in mental health issues (Long et al., 2020).

The study concluded that the majority of school counsellors in regional and rural New South Wales were unable to engage with their students during the 2020 COVID-19 learning-from-home period. However, the take-up by young people of third-party telehealth suggests this was the mental health service of choice during this time.

The main limitations of this study were its small sample size and lack of balance between regional and rural school counsellors. Additionally, although the researcher did not directly have a relationship with any of the participants, a number of the participants knew about the researcher due to their former job as a teacher and their intent to retrain as a school counsellor. This may have skewed responses. However, the researcher believes there is no conclusive evidence of this as he was careful to ensure professionalism during the interview process. Future research may avoid this limitation by using a more indirect recruitment method and so sourcing participants who were not known to the researcher. Future studies should examine engagement from the student's perspective and report on student experiences with telehealth.

Reference List

- Ahmed, A., & Firdous, H. (2020). The transformational effects of COVID-19 pandemic on guidance and counseling. *IJARIE*, 6, 172–179.
- AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare). (2019). Australia welfare 2019: In brief. In *Australian Government*.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.25816/5d5e1912778e0>
- AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare). (2021). Australia's youth: COVID-19 and the impact on young people. In Australian Government.
<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/covid-19-and-young-people>
- Al-Ababneh, M. M. (2020). Linking ontology, epistemology and research methodology. *Science & Philosophy*, 8(1), 75–91. <https://doi.org/10.23756/sp.v8i1.500>
- Al-Saadi, H. (2014). Demystifying ontology and epistemology in research methods. [PhD research student]. *ResearchGate*, 1–11.
- Arlinghaus, K. R., & Johnston, C. A. (2019). The importance of creating habits and routine. *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine*, 13(2), 142–144.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1559827618818044>
- Armour, D., Blackmore, H., Brown, N., Clinton, J., Geelan, D., Martin, A., & Miller, J. (2020). Differential learning outcomes for online versus in-class education. In *Encyclopedia of Education and Information Technologies*. https://acola.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/rrif-005_covid19-education-online-vs-classroom_1may20.pdf
- Ary, D., Cheser Jacobs, L., Sorensen Irvine, C., & Walker, D. (2019). *Introduction to research in education* (10th ed.). CENGAGE.
- Australian Digital Health Agency. (2021). *What is telehealth?*
<https://www.digitalhealth.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/telehealth>
- Australian Government. (2018). *The Australian code for the responsible conduct of research*. <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/australian-code-responsible-conduct-research-2018>
- Basilaia, G., & Kvavadze, D. (2020). Transition to online education in schools during a SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in Georgia. *Pedagogical Research*, 5(4). <https://doi.org/10.29333/pr/7937>
- Bell, H. D., & McKenzie, V. (2013). Perceptions and realities: The role of school psychologists in Melbourne, Australia. *Australian Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, 30(1), 54–73. <https://doi.org/10.1017/edp.2013.1>
- Blattner, J. F., Karmia, W. P., & Walter, T. J. (2021). How culture, leadership and engagement helped a small business survive during the pandemic. *Emerald Publishing Limited*, 20(3), 88–93. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SHR-11-2020-0096>
- Borghi, A. M., & Barsalou, L. (2021). Perspective in the conceptualization of categories. *Psychological Research*, 85(2), 697–719.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00426-019-01269-0>
- Brown, N., Te Riele, K., Shelley, B., & Woodroffe, J. (2020). Learning at home during COVID-19: Effects on vulnerable young Australians independent rapid response report. *Icponline.Org*, 1–84.
- Campbell, M., & Colmar, S. (2014). Current status and future trends in school counselling in Australia. *Queensland University of Technology*, 4, 181–197.
- Chanana, N. (2020). Employee engagement practices during COVID-19 lockdown. *J. Public Affairs*, e2508. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.2508>
- Chaseling, M., & Boyd, W. E. (2020). Schooling in a time of disruption: The impact of COVID-19 from the perspective of five New South Wales (Australia) secondary principals. *Education in the North*, 27(2), 152–174.

- Chesters, J., & Watson, L. (2013). Understanding the persistence of inequality in higher education: Evidence from Australia. *Journal of Education Policy*, 28(2), 198–215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2012.694481>
- Clinton, J. (2020). Supporting vulnerable children in the face of a pandemic. *Centre for Program Evaluation, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne*.
- Collins, C. S., & Stockton, C. M. (2018). The central role of theory in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918797475>
- COVID-19 and the impact on young people. In *Australian Government*. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/covid-19-and-young-people>
- Coviu. (2021). Telehealth: Your comprehensive guide. <https://www.coviu.com/en-au/video-telehealth>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Creswell, J. W. & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Crone, E. A., & Dahl, R. E. (2012). Understanding adolescence as a period of social-affective engagement and goal flexibility. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 13(9), 636–650. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nrn3313>
- Crotty, M. (1998). Introduction: The research process. In M. Crotty (Ed), *The foundations of social research* (pp. 1–17). Allen and Unwin. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003115700>
- Crown Employees (Teachers in Schools and Related Employees) Salaries and Conditions Award 2020. (2020). <http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/irc/ircgazette.nsf/LUPublications/9699B81A9B7A7DEFCA25856C0024D4AF?OpenDocument>
- de la Fuente, J., Kauffman, D. F., Dempsy, M. S., & Kauffman, Y. (2021). Analysis and psychoeducational implications of the behavior factor during the COVID-19 emergency. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.613881>
- Ding, N., & Swalwell, J. (2018). School psychology and supervision in Australia. *Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, 35(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1017/edp.2018.2>
- Dodgson, J. E. (2019). Reflexivity in qualitative research. *Journal of Human Lactation*, 35(2), 220–222. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0890334419830990>
- Drane, C., Vernon, L., & Shea, S. O. (2020). The impact of learning at home on the educational outcomes of vulnerable children in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Curtin University*.
- Eatough, V., & Smith, J. (2017). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In C. Willig & W. Stainton-Rogers. (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 193–211). SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Ford-Jones, A., & Nieman, P. (2003). Impact of media use on children and youth. *Paediatrics and Child Health*, 8(5), 301–306. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pch/8.5.301>
- Fraenkel, J., Wallen, N., & Hyun, H. (2015). *How to design and evaluate research in education* (9th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.
- Frier, A., & Devine, S. (2020). Poverty and inequality in Australia. *Australian Journal of Rural Health*, 28(1), 94–95. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajr.12571>
- Gibson, S., & Hugh-Jones, S. (2014). Analysing your data. *Doing Your Qualitative Psychology Project*, 127–153. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473914209.n7>

- González-Valero, G., Zurita-Ortega, F., Lindell-Postigo, D., Conde-Pipó, J., Grosz, W. R., & Badicu, G. (2020). Analysis of self-concept in adolescents before and during COVID-19 lockdown: Differences by gender and sports activity. *Sustainability*, *12*(18). <https://doi.org/10.3390/SU12187792>
- Google. (n.d.). Where teaching and learning come together: Save time and simplify everyday tasks. https://edu.google.com/intl/ALL_au/products/classroom/
- Gore, J., Fray, L., Miller, A., Harris, J., & Taggart, W. (2021). The impact of COVID-19 on student learning in New South Wales primary schools: An empirical study. *Australian Educational Researcher*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-021-00436-w>
- Headspace. (2020). Young people's experience of telehealth during COVID-19 (Issue July). <https://headspace.org.au/assets/Uploads/Telehealth-Client-Experience-FINAL-8-10-20.pdf>
- Homel, J., & Ryan, C. (2014). Educational outcomes: The impact of aspirations and the role of student background characteristics. In *National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER)*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-805198-6.15001-7>
- Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, *33*(4), 692–724. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1108/SHR-11-2020-0096/full/html>
- Karaman, M. A., Eşici, H., Tomar, İ. H., & Aliyev, R. (2021). COVID-19: Are school counseling services ready? Students' psychological symptoms, school counselors' views, and solutions. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.647740>
- King, C., Subotic-Kerry, M., & O'Dea, B. (2018). An exploration of the factors associated with burnout among NSW secondary school counsellors. *Journal of Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools*, *28*(2), 131–142. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jgc.2018.5>
- King, R., Bambling, M., Lloyd, C., Gomurra, R., Smith, S., Reid, W., & Wegner, K. (2006). Online counselling: The motives and experiences of young people who choose the internet instead of face to face or telephone counselling. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, *6*(3), 169–174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733140600848179>
- Lamb, S., Jackson, J., & Noble, K. (2020). Impact of learning from home for disadvantaged children: Brief assessment. *Centre for International Research on Education Systems*.
- Larkin, M., Shaw, R., & Flowers, P. (2019). Multiperspectival designs and processes in interpretative phenomenological analysis research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *16*(2), 182–198. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2018.1540655>
- Lee, J. (2020). Mental health effects of school closures during COVID-19. *The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health*, *4*(6), 421. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642\(20\)30109-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(20)30109-7)
- Leedy, P., & Ormrod, J. (2015). *Practical research: Planning and Design* (11th ed.). Pearson.
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE.
- Long, E., Gardani, M., McCann, M., Sweeting, H., Tranmer, M., & Moore, L. (2020). Mental health disorders and adolescent peer relationships. *Social Science and Medicine*, *253*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2020.112973>
- Maple, M., Pearce, T., Gartshore, S., MacFarlane, F., & Wayland, S. (2019). Social work in rural New South Wales school settings: Addressing inequalities beyond the school gate. *Australian Social Work*, *72*(2), 219–232. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2018.1557229>

- Maslen, H., Hunt, C., & Savulescu, J. (2020). Adolescence during a pandemic: Examining US adolescents' time use and family and peer relationships during COVID-19. *PsyArXiv Preprints*. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/7vab6>
- McAnally, H. M., Iosua, E., Sligo, J. L., Belsky, J., Spry, E., Letcher, P., Macdonald, J. A., Thomson, K. C., Olsson, C. A., Williams, S., McGee, R., Bolton, A. E., & Hancox, R. J. (2021). Childhood disadvantage and adolescent socioemotional wellbeing as predictors of future parenting behaviour. *Journal of Adolescence*, *86*, 90–100. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2020.12.005>
- McKenna, L., & Gray, R. (2018). The importance of ethics in research publications. *Collegian*, *25*(2), 147–148. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.colegn.2018.02.006>
- McLachlan, R., Gilfillan, G., & Gordon, J. (2013). Deep and persistent disadvantage in Australia. *Productivity Commission Staff Working Paper*. <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/supporting/deep-persistent-disadvantage/deep-persistent-disadvantage.pdf>
- McMahon, G., Creaven, A. M., & Gallagher, S. (2020). Stressful life events and adolescent well-being: The role of parent and peer relationships. *Stress and Health*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.2923>
- Nagarajan, M., & Yuvaraj, S. (2021). Mental health counsellors' perceptions on use of technology in counselling. *Current Psychology*, *40*(4), 1760–1766. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-018-0104-4>
- Nicolson, S., Newell, S., & Collyer, B. (2020). Impacts of COVID-19 on children and young people who contact kids' helpline (Issue September). <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2020-09/apo-nid308369.pdf>
- NSW Government (2021e). School counselling service: Student wellbeing. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/student-wellbeing/counselling-and-psychology-services/school-counselling>
- NSW Government. (2019). *NSW Productivity Commission Discussion paper: Kickstarting the productivity conversation: NSW Department of Education submission*. https://www.productivity.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-01/Department%20of%20Education_0.pdf
- NSW Government. (2020a). Every student is known: Ensuring a response that was equitable was a key priority in responding to COVID-19. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/lessons-from-the-covid-19-pandemic/every-student-is-known>
- NSW Government. (2020b, March 23). New COVID-19 restrictions begin as schools move towards online learning. <https://www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/new-covid-19-restrictions-begin-as-schools-move-towards-online-learning>
- NSW Government. (2020c). Teaching and learning: Getting started – useful professional planning. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/learning-from-home/teaching-at-home/learning-on-demand/technology>
- NSW Government. (2021d). School counselling service: Roles of school-based school counselling staff. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/student-wellbeing/counselling-and-psychology-services/school-counselling>
- NSW Government. (n.d.). NSW state education research applications process (SERAP) and research repository. <https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/serap/>
- O'Connor, M. (2020). School counselling during COVID-19: An initial examination of school counselling use during a 5-week remote learning period. *Pastoral Care in Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2020.1855674>
- O'Dea, B., King, C., Subotic-Kerry, M., O'Moore, K., & Christensen, H. (2017). School Counsellors' Perspectives of a web-based stepped care mental health service for schools: Cross-sectional online survey. *JMIR Mental Health*, *4*(4), e55. <https://doi.org/10.2196/mental.8369>

- OECD. (2021). OECD policy responses to coronavirus (COVID-19): Supporting young people's mental health through the COVID-19 crisis. <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/supporting-young-people-s-mental-health-through-the-covid-19-crisis-84e143e5/>
- Palaganas, E. C., & Estacio, J. C. (2018). Reflexivity and research methodology: A second glance. *International journal of qualitative methods* 17(1) 87–96. SAGE.
- Paredes, J.-A., Chaseling, M., & Boyd, W. E. (2020). Online learning in a time of COVID disruption? The experiences of principals from New South Wales rural and disadvantaged primary schools. *Education in the North* 27(2), 175–195.
- Parliament of Australia. (2020). COVID-19 Australian government roles and responsibilities: An overview. https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1920/COVID19AustralianGovernmentRoles
- Patil, Namita. P. (2012). Role of education in social change. *International Educational E-Journal*, 1(2), 205–210. <https://www.oijrj.org/ejournal/Jan-Feb-Mar2012IEEJ/38.pdf>
- Peoples, K. (2021). How to write a phenomenological dissertation. SAGE.
- Perry, L., & McConney, A. (2010). Student outcomes in Australia: Implications for educational policy. *Australian Journal of Education*, 54(1), 72–85.
- Phillips, B., Gray, M., & Biddle, N. (2020). COVID-19 jobkeeper and jobseeker impacts on poverty and housing stress under current and alternative economic and policy scenarios. *Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods*.
- Piccoli, A. (2014). *Transforming education: The New South Wales reform journey*. Paper delivered at the Education World Forum, London, 12 January. Sydney, Australia: NSW Government. <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/34955508/world-edu-forum-paper-minister>
- Pincus, R., Hannor-Walker, T. S., Wright, L., & Justice, J. (2020). COVID-19's effect on students: How school counselors rise to the rescue. *NASSP Bulletin*, 104(4), 241–256. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636520975866>
- Prime Minister of Australia. (2020a, March 18). Update on coronavirus measures: Media statement. <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/update-coronavirus-measures>
- Prime Minister of Australia. (2020b, March 22). Update on coronavirus measures: Media statement. <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/update-coronavirus-measures-220320>
- Radwan, E., Radwan, A., & Radwan, W. (2020). The role of social media in spreading panic among primary and secondary school students during the COVID-19 pandemic: An online questionnaire study from the Gaza Strip, Palestine. *Heliyon*, 6(12), e05807. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2020.e05807>
- RAI (Regional Australia Institute). (2018). The indicators of, and impact of, regional inequality in Australia. <http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/home/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/180503-RAI-The-indicators-of-and-impact-of-regional-inequality-in-Australia.pdf>
- Rankl, F., Johnson, G. A., & Vindrola-Padros, C. (2021). Examining what we know in relation to how we know it: A team-based reflexivity model for rapid qualitative health research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 31(7), 1358–1370. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732321998062>
- Rodd, A. (2017). Burnout in NSW school counsellors: How do years of experience, career-sustaining behaviours and mindfulness affect burnout levels? *Journal of Student Engagement: Education Matters*, 7(1), 49-70.

- Rubin, K., Coplan, R., Chen, X., Buskirk, A., & Wojslawowicz, J. C. (2013). Peer relationships in childhood. *Social and Personality Development*.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4615-0195-4>
- Saladino, V., Algeri, D., & Auriemma, V. (2020). The psychological and social impact of Covid-19: New perspectives of well-being. *Frontiers in Psychology*.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.577684>
- Schleicher, A. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 on education: Insights from education at a glance 2020. *OECD Journal: Economic Studies*.
<https://www.oecd.org/education/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-education-insights-education-at-a-glance-2020.pdf>
- Sebastian, C., Burnett, S., & Blakemore, S. J. (2008). Development of the self-concept during adolescence. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 12(11), 441–446.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2008.07.008>
- Smith, E. B., & Luke, M. M. (2021). A call for radical Reflexivity in Counseling Qualitative Research. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 60(2), 164–172.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/ceas.12201>
- Storen, R., & Corrigan, N. (2021). COVID-19: A chronology of Australian Government announcements (up until 30 June 2020). *Department of Parliamentary Services*
<https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22library%2Fprspub%2F8027137%22>
- Subramani, S. (2019). Practicing reflexivity: Ethics, methodology and theory construction. *Methodological Innovations*, 12(2).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2059799119863276>
- Sullivan, K., McConney, A., & Perry, L. B. (2018). A comparison of rural educational disadvantage in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand using OECD's PISA. *SAGE Open*, 8(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018805791>
- The Smith Family. (2016). Improving the educational outcomes of disadvantaged young Australians. <https://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/-/media/files/research/reports/research-disadvantaged-young-australians-learning-for-life.pdf?la=en&hash=F7922F80DC8FFB0BE5429A9065664451>
- Thomas, J., Barraket, J., Wilson, C., Holcombe-James, I., Kennedy, J., Rennie, E., Ewing, S., & MacDonald, T. (2020). Measuring Australia's digital divide: Australian digital inclusion index. https://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Australian-Digital-Inclusion-Index-2017_v2.pdf
- Tuffour, I. (2017). A critical overview of interpretative phenomenological analysis: A contemporary qualitative research approach. *Journal of Healthcare Communications*, 2(4), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.4172/2472-1654.100093>
- United Nations. (2020). Coronavirus spread now a global emergency declares World Health Organization. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/01/1056372>
- Urban, J. B., & van Eeden-Moorefield, B. M. (2018). Establishing validity for qualitative studies. *Designing and Proposing Your Research Project.*, 119–127.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0000049-010>
- Vidyattama, Y., & Tanton, R. (2019). Mapping economic disadvantage in New South Wales. In report prepared for NSW council of social services.
<https://www.ncoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Web-Version-Mapping-Economic-Disadvantage-in-New-South-Wales-report1.pdf>
- Viner, R. M., Russell, S. J., Croker, H., Packer, J., Ward, J., Stansfield, C., Mytton, O., Bonell, C., & Booy, R. (2020). School closure and management practices during coronavirus outbreaks including COVID-19: A rapid systematic review. *The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health*, 4(5), 397–404.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642\(20\)30095-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(20)30095-X)
- Walliman, N. (2018). *Research methods: The basics* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

- Wang, C., Hatzigianni, M., Shahaeian, A., Murray, E., & Harrison, L. J. (2016). The combined effects of teacher-child and peer relationships on children's social-emotional adjustment. *Journal of School Psychology, 59*, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2016.09.003>
- Wilkins, R. (2015). Measuring income inequality in Australia. *Australian Economic Review, 48*(1), 93–102. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8462.12098>
- Willig, C. (2019). Ontological and epistemological reflexivity: A core skill for therapists. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research, 19*(3), 186–194. <https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12204>
- Willis, S., & Tranter, B. (2006). Beyond the “digital divide”: Internet diffusion and inequality in Australia. *Journal of Sociology, 42*(1), 43–59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783306061352>
- Zainudin, Z. N., Hassan, S., Ahmad, N. A., Yusop, Y. M., Norhayati, W., Othman, W., & Alias, B. S. (2021). A comparison of a client's satisfaction between online and face-to-face counselling in a school setting. *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities, 29*(S1). <https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.29.s1.08>

Appendix A

Invitation to Participant in Research Study: Facebook Group

Hi all,

I am a Masters' student at Charles Sturt University in the midst of my thesis. Recently I received ethics approval to conduct interviews as part of my research question "*School Counselling During the New South Wales 2020 COVID-19 learning from home period*". Can you help me out?

Those I wish to interview need to have been working over the learning-from-home period (March to May 2020) and **must be rural or regional** school counsellors. Whether or not you engaged with your students, I wish to know your experience as part of my research.

If you can help or know someone who can, please either pm me or email me at cameron.granger4@det.nsw.edu.au

Thanks

Cameron Granger

Appendix B

Senior Psychologist Education Letter

[CSU letterhead]

Mr Simon Coyle, Ms Rebecca Jahn
Senior Psychologists
Wagga Wagga District Office
NSW Department of Education
76 Morgan Street
Wagga Wagga, NSW, 2650

Dear Simon, Rebecca

Thank you for taking the time to read this email for I appreciate how busy you must be.

To explain, for the past five years, I have been a teacher at Wagga Wagga High School. During 2021-2022, I am on a Department Sponsorship to retrain as a School Counsellor through Charles Sturt University. In relation to this, I am completing a thesis related to the experience of NSW Department of education school counsellors as they engaged with their students during the 2020 COVID-19 learning-from-home period.

In this regard, I am seeking to recruit approximately eight (8) school counsellors in the Wagga area who would be prepared to participate in a 30 to 40-minute interview related to my research. Their participation would be confidential.

I would appreciate if you would consider distributing the email/notice below to school counsellors in your area.

If you have any questions, please email or phone me on 0401 927 638.

Thank you for your time,

Cameron Granger

Email: cameron.granger4@det.nsw.edu.au

Chief Investigator:

Mr Cameron Granger
Master of Psychological Practice (School
Psychology)
Charles Sturt University
Bathurst, NSW, Australia
E: cameron.granger4@det.nsw.edu.au

Supervisor:

Dr Marilyn Chaseling
Research Supervisor
School of Psychology
M: 0437 259 185
E: mchaseling@csu.edu.au

Appendix C

Invitation to Participant in Research Study

Dear School Counsellor

Would you be prepared to participate in a study about your experience engaging with your students during the 2020 COVID-19 learning-from-home period?

To explain:

- For the past few years, I have been a teacher at Wagga Wagga High School.
- During 2021-2022, I entered into a Department Sponsorship to retrain as a School Counsellor through Charles Sturt University.
- As part of my retraining, I am completing a thesis related to the experience of NSW Department of education school counsellors as they engaged with their students during the 2020 COVID-19 learning-from-home period.

If you are interested in participating, what would this involve:

- You would email me, and I'll send you an Information Sheet and Consent form
- We would set up a time for a 30 to 40-minute interview
- Your participation would be voluntary
- Your participation would be confidential.

If you wish to proceed, please email or phone me on 0401 927 638.

Thank you for your time,

Cameron Granger

Email: cameron.granger4@det.nsw.edu.au

Chief Investigator:

Mr Cameron Granger
Master of Psychological Practice (School
Psychology)
Charles Sturt University

Bathurst, NSW, Australia
E: cameron.granger4@det.nsw.edu.au

Supervisor:

Dr Marilyn Chaseling
Research Supervisor
School of Psychology
Bathurst, NSW, Australia
NSW, Australia
M: 0437 259 185
E: mchaseling@csu.edu.au

Appendix D

Information Statement

[CSU letterhead]

PROJECT TITLE: School Counselling During the New South Wales 2020 COVID-19 learning from home period

Chief Investigator:

Mr Cameron Granger
Master of Psychological Practice (School
Psychology)
Charles Sturt University
Bathurst, NSW, Australia
E: cameron.granger4@det.nsw.edu.au

Supervisor:

Dr Marilyn Chaseling
Research Supervisor
School of Psychology

M: 0437 259 185
E: mchaseling@csu.edu.au

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating the challenges school counsellors faced accessing students during COVID-19 home based online schooling.

Participation should take 35-40 minutes and involves participating in a semi-structured interview about the positives and negatives of accessing students, barriers that were present, the readiness to provide counselling and access students had to school counsellors during the COVID-19 home based online schooling. You may also be asked some brief demographic questions, about your age range and employment status.

Should our interview take place in person, in consideration of COVID-19 social distancing practices, a hospital grade disposable mask and hand sanitiser will be provided to you by the student researcher. A safe distance of 1.5 metres will be maintained at all times during the interview. Should the interview take place in a public setting, such as a café, all checking-in protocols will be adhered to, and a well-ventilated location will be chosen.

There is no payment or reward for participating in this study.

The findings will be presented in Mr Cameron Granger's Masters Dissertation, and may also be presented at academic conferences and/or published in peer-reviewed journals. The researchers named on this Information Statement may also re-analyse your data later as part of future studies.

Your confidentiality is assured as your interview transcript will be stored without reference to your name or other identifying information. Your interview recording will be stored securely and identifying information kept confidential on password protected drives. It will be deleted after 5 years.

Should the findings of the study be published, your de-identified/anonymous interview transcripts or excerpts (allowing the reported findings to be verified) may be placed in a public data repository. No individual participant will be identified in, or could be identified from, any published report or published transcript or excerpt from this study.

Participation is anonymous and entirely voluntary. Whether or not you decide to participate is your decision and will not disadvantage you. If you do decide to

participate, you may withdraw yourself and your data from the study at any time up until two weeks after you receive your interview transcript without reason or consequence.

Due to the nature of the questions, this study could cause distress. Should you in any way become distressed, you are encouraged to discontinue participating. If you require support of any kind, please consider contacting your GP, use the EAP (1800 060 650), visiting SANE.org (sane.org/get-help), or calling Lifeline 131 114 (Lifeline should be used for urgent crisis support only).

If you wish to ask any questions prior to participating, please contact either of the named researchers above.

Warning - because of the small sample size participants may be identifiable, confidentiality shall be maintained by myself.

Note: Charles Sturt University's Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the Committee through the Ethics and Compliance Unit via the following contact details:

The Governance Officer
Human Research Ethics Committee
Ethics and Compliance Unit
Locked Bag 588
Wagga Wagga NSW 2678
Te: (02) 6933 4213
Email: ethics@csu.edu.au

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix E
Consent Form

[CSU letterhead]

PROJECT TITLE: School Counselling During the New South Wales 2020 COVID-19 learning from home period

Chief Investigator:

Mr Cameron Granger
Master of Psychological Practice (School
Psychology)
Charles Sturt University
Bathurst, NSW, Australia
E: cameron.granger4@det.nsw.edu.au

Supervisor:

Dr Marilyn Chaseling
Research Supervisor
School of Psychology
M: 0437 259 185
E: mchaseling@csu.edu.au

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating the challenges school counsellors faced accessing students during COVID-19 home based online schooling.

Participation should take 35-40 minutes and involves participating in a semi-structured interview about the positives and negatives of accessing students, barriers that were present, your readiness to provide counselling and your experience with lower socioeconomic access to school counselling during the COVID-19 home based online schooling. You may also be asked some brief demographic questions, about your age, gender, and employment status.

By signing this form, I hereby provide my informed consent to participate in the aforementioned study and confirm that:

- I have been provided with a copy of the Information Statement to keep.
- I have been provided with sufficient time to read this Information Statement.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions, and have had these answered to my satisfaction.
- I understand that my answers will be recorded
- I understand I will have 14 days to review the transcript
- I understand that participation is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw from this up to two weeks after receiving the transcript, without consequence or penalty, and without having to provide a reason.

Signed: _____ (electronic signature required for Zoom interview)

Date: _____

Note: Charles Sturt University's Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the Committee through the Ethics and Compliance Unit via the following contact details:

The Governance Officer
Human Research Ethics Committee
Ethics and Compliance Unit
Locked Bag 588
Wagga Wagga NSW 2678
Te: (02) 6933 4213
Email: ethics@csu.edu.au

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix F

Interview Questions

Interview questions	Type of Questions as per Fraenkel et al., 2015)
1. What is the student population of your school? 2. On average how many students would you see face-to-face for counselling a week?	Knowledge
3. Prior to COVID-19, what did your normal day look like?	Opinion
4. In what way were you prepared for the 2020 COVID-19 learning-from-home period? 5. What was your immediate response (to work/ students) when the COVID-19 restrictions were enacted?	Opinion
6. What contact did you have with students during the learning from home period? - Telephone? - Media platform (Zoom)? - Other?	Knowledge
7. As far as contacting students or them contacting you, what worked and what didn't work?	Opinion
8. What was a normal day like during the 2020 COVID-19 learning-from-home period?	Knowledge
9. How do you believe your students' mental health was impacted due to COVID-19 learning-from-home period?	Knowledge
10. What impact did the COVID-19 learning-from-home period have on you as a school counsellor?	Feelings
11. In what way were you prepared for the students return to school after the mandatory lockdown period had been lifted?	Knowledge
12. What percentage of students have continued to engage with counselling post COVID-19 restrictions?	Knowledge
13. Has the COVID-19 learning-from-home period changed the way in which you operate?	Opinion
14. What advice would you give to a beginning school counsellor in light of the COVID-19 learning-from-home period?	Opinion