
Employment Opportunities for Counsellors in British Columbia

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As the graduate advisor for counselling degree programs at the University of Victoria, I am frequently asked by prospective applicants, "What types of jobs can a person get with a degree in counselling?" Typically I would respond by describing the general types of employment held by our graduates in agencies, non-profit societies, private practice, and school or college counselling. At the same time I am also frequently asked, "Are there any counselling jobs available in British Columbia?" and I would typically answer by recalling the job announcements I had received from various organizations across the province. However, I began to notice that my answers to these career questions were relying on something that I seemed to have less access to in recent years—my memory! In addition my answers were restricted to the graduates I knew or the notices I had seen. I decided to broaden the base of my knowledge, develop an empirical approach to these questions and increase the validity of my answers. This brief report describes how I found the appropriate data and presents the results of that data search.

The Bathrobe and Slippers Methodology to Job Hunting

On Sunday mornings from August of 1989 to June of 1991, I read the classified advertising and employment opportunities sections of every Saturday edition of a major British Columbia newspaper, *The Vancouver Sun*. My primary targets were the classified headings, "Professions," and "Teachers Wanted," as well as the several pages where large box advertisements appeared usually recruiting professionals, executives, or consultants. Each week I cut the ads from the newspaper and glued them into a display binder, which was attached to the bulletin board outside my office.

In order to determine which ads to cut and display, I developed a set of criteria for inclusion and exclusion. I included a job in my display collection if the ad (a) mentioned the word "counsellor," or "counselling" in the job title or description; or (b) described job duties which were similar to those duties performed in a typical counselling position, but the words "counselling" or "counsellor" did not appear in the ad; or (c) requested graduate work or training in counselling; or (d) included job duties which could be performed by persons who had been trained in our University of Victoria counselling graduate program such as skills in program evaluation, conflict resolution, adult learning, consultation, or working with other particular client groups.

I excluded any classified ads which (a) mentioned specifically that graduation from high school was required even though "counselling" or "counsellor" was used in the job title or description; or (b) mentioned that duties included roles which contradicted the role of a professional counsellor such as claim investigator or (c) used the term "counsellor" in a different context such as travel counsellor, investment counsellor, or legal counsellor.

Characteristics of Counselling Positions Available in British Columbia

During this two-year time period I identified 730 separate listings for counselling positions. Although some listings were repeated from week to week, they were only counted once; however, repeat listings which occurred more than 3 months apart were included as a new listing. Of the 730 jobs, 657 required replies to British Columbia addresses, 30 required replies to a newspaper box address, and 43 required replies to addresses outside of British Columbia.

Four hundred and twenty-three of the total jobs listed were for positions in the Greater Vancouver and Fraser Valley area; 23 positions were located in the Greater Victoria region; 61 positions were available on Vancouver Island outside of the Greater Victoria area; 31 positions were identified as being in the Okanagan Valley area; 25 positions were listed as being in the Kootenay region; 36 positions were available in North-western British Columbia; 19 positions were available in Northeastern British Columbia; and 28 positions were available in the British Columbia Interior. The remaining listings were associated with newspaper box numbers and their geographic location could not be determined.

Sixty percent of all jobs listed were for full-time positions; 11% were for part-time positions; 6% were associated with time-limited or specific projects; and 23% did not provide enough information to determine time requirements.

Salaries for full-time positions ranged from \$21,000 to \$73,000 per year. Forty-four percent of full-time positions provided salaries between \$21,000 and \$30,000 per year. Twenty-eight percent of the full-time positions which provided salary information were in the range of \$31,000 to \$40,000. Eighteen percent of the full-time positions provided a salary in the range of \$41,000 to \$50,000; and 10% listed salaries above \$51,000 per year. Salaries for part-time positions ranged from a low of \$5,000 to a high of \$21,000 with the average listed part-time or project salary being \$13,500.

Of the positions which listed degree or special training requirements, one hundred and ninety-seven jobs required a Master's degree either in counselling, counselling psychology or social work. One hundred and sixty jobs required a Bachelor's degree; 21 positions required a docto-

rate; and 29 listings required a certificate, specialist diploma, specialist registration or licensing.

While no specific statistical analysis was conducted, it appeared that as the education requirement increased, salary also increased. When salaries were listed, jobs with government agencies paid higher salaries than jobs with non-profit or local service organizations. Time-limited projects and part-time positions appeared to pay much less even adjusting for the hours than full-time positions. In addition, benefit packages, when mentioned, were generally associated with jobs which required more education, training, and experience.

Areas of Focus Most Likely to be Advertised

A majority of the advertisements provided information about the focus area, target client group, or job setting. When multiple areas were listed such as in an advertisement that called for an applicant who could work in a residential treatment facility and specialize in drug and alcohol counselling with women, the job focus was placed in more than one category. Therefore, the frequencies listed in Table 1 add up to slightly more than the total number of jobs listed in the two-year period.

The Job Title Challenge

Another source of useful information was the approximately 100 different job titles associated with the 730 positions. Some advertisements did not include a title, possibly leaving the choice to the applicant or reflecting some ambiguity about the role of a counsellor. Table II lists the different titles as specified in their advertisements and the corresponding number of times such a job title appeared in the newspaper. Titles which varied only slightly from each other were combined. For example, in Table II, the job titles "child and youth counsellor," and "child care counsellor," were combined as "child and youth/child care counsellor". Similarly, the individually listed titles which appeared in the newspaper, "sexual abuse counsellor," "sexual abuse therapist," "sexual abuse clinician," "sexual assault counsellor," "sexual assault therapist," and "sexual assault clinician" were combined into "sexual abuse/sexual assault counsellor/therapist/clinician."

The Value of Advertising

The newspaper ads collected over a two-year period revealed that there was a larger number of employment opportunities in counselling than had been expected. The 730 classified ads appearing in just one newspaper over a two-year period probably under represented the total number of positions available. Local newspapers, for example, may have

TABLE 1
Frequency of Listings in Identified Focus Areas

| <i>Focus or Setting</i> | <i>Number of jobs</i> |
|--|-----------------------|
| Drug and Alcohol (Treatment) | 97 |
| School Counsellor (Teaching Certificate Required) | 94 |
| Marriage, Parenting, Family, Couples | 72 |
| Residential Treatment (Including incarceration) | 66 |
| Mental Health, Community, Hospital, Clinical Agency | 61 |
| Program Supervisor, Administrator, Director, Coordinator | 58 |
| Employment, Career and Vocational (Non-school) | 54 |
| Feminist, Sexual Assault, Sexual Abuse | 42 |
| Disabled, Special Needs | 35 |
| School and Non-School Psychologist | 25 |
| Post-Secondary Institution | 24 |
| Native Organization | 21 |
| Rehabilitation | 16 |
| New Canadian or E.S.L. | 16 |
| Street Work, Wilderness, Recreation | 16 |
| Employee Assistance | 11 |
| School Related Counsellor (Rehabilitation or Alternate Programs) | 10 |
| Weight and Eating Disorders | 7 |
| Group and Workshop | 6 |
| School Related Career and Vocational | 5 |
| Suicide Intervention | 5 |
| Drug and Alcohol (Prevention) | 5 |
| Young Parents, Pregnant Teens | 3 |
| Grief | 3 |
| AIDS | 2 |
| Research | 2 |
| Art Therapy | 1 |
| Family Life Education (Non-School) | 1 |
| Seniors | 1 |

carried advertisements from organizations which did not consider the Vancouver paper a place to advertise, and the majority of government civil service positions (except for high profile administrative positions) are more typically found only in government postings documents. The data support the conclusion that there is considerable opportunity in British Columbia for employment in the counselling field. (In May of 1991 while on holidays, my habit of reading the classified ads was extended to the Saturday edition of *The San Francisco Chronicle*, in which I counted 31 advertisements for counselling positions!)

The results of calculating the high frequency focus areas should act as a catalyst for discussions regarding the relevance of university counsellor training curriculums, and the role of career placement in graduate training programs. For example, the extensive number of counselling positions available in the drug and alcohol field far exceeds the opportunities for professional training in this area; and an even greater discrepancy appears to exist between the high demand for persons to

TABLE 2
Frequency of Job Titles

| <i>Job Title</i> | <i>Frequency</i> |
|--|------------------|
| School/Special/Elementary/District Counsellor, Guidance Worker | 85 |
| Alcohol and Drug/Substance Abuse/Addictions Counsellor | 60 |
| Program Director/Coordinator/Supervisor, Executive Director | 58 |
| Family Therapist/Worker/Counsellor/Consultant, Parent Counsellor | 57 |
| Employment/Career/Vocational Counsellor, Job Club Instructor | 54 |
| Child and Youth/Child Care Counsellor, Youth Care Professional | 49 |
| Counsellor, Clinical Consultant | 35 |
| Sexual Abuse/Sexual Assault Counsellor/Therapist/Clinician | 24 |
| Mental Health Professional/Worker | 19 |
| School/Clinical/Pediatric/Licensed Psychologist | 18 |
| Vocational Rehabilitation Consultant, Rehabilitation Worker | 14 |
| Director/Supervisor Counselling Services | 14 |
| Employee Assistance Counsellor/Coordinator | 12 |
| College Counsellor | 9 |
| Career Education Helping Teacher | 8 |
| Youth and Family Counsellor, Family and Children's Worker | 8 |
| Residential Counsellor | 6 |
| Youth/Adolescent/Family Support Outreach Worker | 6 |
| Educational Psychologist | 5 |
| Family Enhancement Counsellor | 5 |
| Native Affairs Counsellor | 5 |
| Transition House Counsellor | 4 |
| Counsellor Educator | 4 |
| Counselling Psychologist | 3 |
| Life Skills Counsellor | 3 |
| Wilderness Counsellor | 3 |
| Suicide Prevention Specialist | 3 |
| Residential Resource/Clinical Consultant | 3 |
| Behavioural Counsellor | 3 |
| Social Development Worker | 2 |
| Social Worker | 2 |
| Prevention Officer, Addictions Prevention Officer | 2 |
| Outpatient Therapist | 2 |
| Grief Counsellor | 2 |
| Corporate Psychologist | 2 |
| Group Leaders/Facilitators | 2 |
| Client Services Worker | 1 |
| Children's Advocate | 1 |
| Clinical Child Psychologist | 1 |
| Youth Teen Programmer | 1 |
| Multicultural Mental Health Liaison Worker | 1 |
| Hospice Counsellor | 1 |
| Recreation Counsellor | 1 |
| Social Skills Facilitator | 1 |
| Personal Development Counsellor | 1 |
| Sexuality Counsellor | 1 |
| Special Services Consultant | 1 |

administer, direct or supervise helping services and the number of opportunities for education and training in these roles.

The data also should lead to discussions regarding the ethical dilemmas of services being provided by underskilled or underqualified persons. Many of the job responsibilities listed required workers to deal with significant client life issues, yet often required minimal training and experience. Many agencies in various parts of the province had reappearing classified ads, indicating potential difficulty attracting or retaining appropriate applicants. The variety of job titles and the expectation for counsellors to often work with such a wide scope of challenges may indicate confusion and ambiguity regarding the role of the counsellor. The data may be useful in helping both service and training organizations consider higher levels of cooperation and greater attention to counsellor career development. Readers are encouraged to conduct similar studies in other provinces and write to the author.

Résumé

Des annonces classées publiées au cours des années 1989 à 1991 dans les grands journaux ont été examinées pour déterminer les opportunités d'emploi pour les conseillers en Colombie-Britannique. Les données sont présentées selon le nombre et les types d'emplois disponibles, les salaires, les opportunités pour un travail à temps partiel et à temps plein, les situations géographiques, les différents champs d'intérêts ou les spécialités, les diplômes requis et un éventail des titres d'emplois.

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