



Received: 03 October 2018  
Accepted: 21 January 2019  
First Published: 20 February 2019

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Reviewing editor:  
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## SOCIOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Counselor perceived barriers and supports to employment

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**Abstract:** This study seeks to understand how counselors perceive barriers and supports to employment in their clients' lives. For the purposes of this research, a descriptive comparative (causal comparative) design was used. In this study, the two groups compared were rural versus urban counselors. Perceptions of barriers and supports to employment among these two groups (i.e., rural versus urban counselors) were compared. In this sample of counselors, there was not a statistically significant difference between rural versus urban counselors' perceived barriers to employment. Similarly, among this sample, urban and rural counselors seemed to endorse approximately an even amount of perceived supports to employment among their clients. While this research showed no statistically significant difference in counselor *perceived* barriers and supports to employment among clients, this does not necessarily mean that actual barriers and supports in rural versus urban areas are equal. Rather, this research simply shows that counselors did not report *perceiving* this to be true. It is important for counselors to be able to understand specific barriers and supports in order to efficaciously work with their clients in their career development.

**Subjects:** Career & Lifestyle Development; Counseling Techniques & Intervention; Mental Health; Rural Social Work

**Keywords:** Employment; barriers; supports; rural; urban

Employment provides structure, organization, and meaning to the use of time in society. Employment can impact overall life satisfaction and also provides vital economic and social benefits (Olney & Lyle, 2011). The importance of meaningful work should not be undervalued. Conversely, research has shown that unemployment can negatively impact life satisfaction (Bockerman & Ilmakunnas, 2006), oftentimes producing varying hardships (Eichengreen, 2004) on individuals and their families (Evans-Lacko, Knapp, McCrone, Thornicroft, & Mojtabai, 2013; Goldman-Mellor, Saton, & Catalano, 2010). Since employment is so vital to human life satisfaction,

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### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This research seeks to understand how counselors perceive barriers and supports to employment in their clients' lives. While it is known that there are differences in barriers and supports to employment relative to location, investigation of counselor perception into this phenomenon has not been investigated. This is important, as only through such an understanding can efficacious interventions be used.

understanding barriers and supports to employment is imperative, especially amongst counselors working with employment needs.

### **1. Barriers and supports to employment**

Barriers to employment can include both intrapersonal and environmental factors, and these factors can occur together and be intertwined, compounding upon each other (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000). Swanson and Woitke (1997) consider barriers to be “events or conditions, either within the person or in his or her environment, that make career progress difficult” (p. 434). In Social Cognitive Career Theory, barriers generally refer to “negative contextual influences, with the understanding that contextual barriers are often functionally related to, yet conceptually different from, detrimental person factors” (Lent et al., 2000, p. 39). Oppositely, supports can be defined as specific infrastructure intended to promote employability and employment (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994).

Availability of opportunity includes not only the job market but also the number and quality of employment opportunities in a given area (Steel & Landon, 2010). For many in rural areas, opportunity is limited because of geographic location (Joassart-Marcelli & Giordano, 2006). Of those rural residents who are looking for work, most often find marginal jobs (not earning enough income to make a decent living), thus continuing the cycle of poverty and hindering future opportunities (Findeis & Jensen, 1999).

Potential barriers to employment rural residents may face include: poor health, functioning that limits ability to work, inadequate education, insufficient experience, lack of specific work enabling supports, lack of reliable transportation, inaccessible workplace, inflexible employment situations, discrimination and employer misconceptions of disability, and/or insufficient wages or benefits offered with employment (Livermore, 2011). Rural areas most often suffer from lack of transportation, lack of support, and inaccessibility (Hawes, Phillips, Holan, Sherman, & Hutchison, 2006). Rural culture is also different in terms of supports to employment (close-knit family, proximity neighbors, and local support through organizations) when compared to urban culture (Seiger & Wiese, 2011).

In contrast, in urban areas, industrialization and overall growth are higher (Northridge & Freeman, 2011; Zylstra, 2013). Health, education, employment opportunities, development, transportation, and healthcare access are far better when compared to rural locations (Collegeboard, 2016; Levy, 2009). Overall, there are more available job opportunities, as well as increased employment options in urban areas (Population Reference Bureau, 2016; The Borgen Project, 2016). Clearly, rural and urban areas differ in their barriers and supports to employment. Career counseling should exist to help these individuals overcome barriers and highlight existing supports associated with employment. Thus, the importance of understanding counselor perception of supports and barriers to employment relative to location should not be undervalued.

### **2. Professional counseling**

Professional counselors are persons “who hold their highest graduate degree in counselor education, preferably from a nationally accredited preparation program, are credentialed by authorized state or national agencies, and adhere to competency standards on the matters of ethics, diversity, and behavior in order to contribute to the realization of a healthy society by fostering wellness and human dignity. Counseling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals.” (Chang et al., 2012, p. 5). The graduate education of members of the counseling profession is defined by the national standards of the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs also known as CACREP (Chang et al., 2012).

The American Counseling Association defines professional counseling in a similar way, referring to professional counseling as a relationship that empowers individuals, families, and groups to accomplish goals regarding their mental health, wellness, education, and careers (American

Counseling Association, 2016). Counselors work collaboratively with clients in an effort to strategize routes to overcome obstacles and personal challenges that they identify (American Counseling Association, 2016). Counselors, oftentimes, work with a wide variety of clientele. Professional counseling includes the fields of Rehabilitation Counseling, Clinical Mental Health Counseling, and School Counseling (American Counseling Association, 2016).

### **2.1. Career counseling**

A main function of counseling is to assist clients to overcome barriers and capitalize on supports; In the career realm, such services are frequently aligned so that employment needs can be targeted (Mullins & Roessler, 1998). Therefore, career counseling is important for both those in the workforce and those looking to enter/re-enter the workforce. Career counselors assess an individual holistically (family, work, personal concerns, and leisure) and consider how all factors impact career development; career counseling interventions can include activities that target work maladjustment, stress, mental health, enhancement of work skills, enhancement of interpersonal skills and communication, adaptability, flexibility, and all other developments that lead to self-agency (Zunker, 2012). Many professional counselors miss the fact that career development is a core component of their counselor education, which is unique to the counseling profession (Chang et al., 2012).

### **2.2. Counselor perceptions**

While rural-specific supports to employment (Cochran et al., 2002) as well as rural-specific barriers to employment (Livermore, 2011; Skivington, Benzeval, & Bond, 2014) have been researched, *counselor perceptions* of clients' barriers and supports to employment and how these perceptions may differ based upon location has not been examined. Career development is a task of all professional counselors (American Counseling Association, 2016), and although rehabilitation counselors may be accustomed to working on employment goals due to the nature of their job tasks (Mullins & Roessler, 1998), all counselors will likely face the task of working on employment goals.

### **3. Purpose statement**

This establishes the need to study how all counselors perceive clients' barriers and supports to employment in rural versus urban areas. The purpose of this study is to examine if perceptions of client barriers and supports to employment differ between rural and urban counselors. This was achieved by including counselors from rural and urban areas as participants in the study. Specifically, the research questions were:

R<sub>1</sub>: Is there a difference between rural and urban counselor perceptions regarding barriers to employment among their clients?

R<sub>2</sub>: Is there a difference between rural and urban counselor perceptions regarding supports to employment among their clients?

### **4. Methodology**

For the purposes of this research, a descriptive comparative (causal comparative) design was used (Stevens, 2009). In this study, the two groups compared were rural versus urban counselors. Perceptions of barriers and supports to employment among these two groups (i.e., rural versus urban counselors) were compared.

#### **4.1. Instrumentation**

The Demographic Data Sheet (see Appendix) asked participants to indicate: age, race, gender, job classification/counselor specification, years of experience, state, county, rural/urban classification, and highest level of education. The Contextual Barriers and Supports to Employment as Perceived by Counselors instrument was utilized for the purposes of this research. This instrument sought to

address the research question: What are various barriers and supports to employment that exist among rural residents from the perception of counselors? The counselors were instructed to answer the questions based on their professional work and opinions about their clients' barriers and supports to employment.

The *Contextual Barriers and Supports to Employment as Perceived by Counselors* utilizes a Likert scale, with responses ranging from “not at all” to “all of the time” (i.e., 1 = not at all, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = most of the time, and 5 = strongly agree). The Likert scale in this instrument was treated at an interval, due to the latent factor being continuous (i.e., counselor perception). Counselor perception can be represented by an infinite number of values, as required by continuous variables (Stevens, 2009). Using interval-scaled data allows for use of both descriptive and inferential statistics (Brown, 2011).

Prior to this study, the *Contextual Barriers and Supports to Employment as Perceived by Counselors* was tested for content validity. An expert panel reviewed the instrument initially to help construct/revise the instrument by making suggestions regarding each item. Each item that had a least 70% agreement was kept. Test-retest reliability was also used to test the instrument on a practicing group of counselors. In order to calculate test-retest reliability, Pearson correlation was used to measure the degree of strength between administration one and administration two of the instrument. The scores from both administrations were consistent, with a test-retest reliability coefficient at  $r = 0.97$  at the 0.01 significance level. Lastly, instrument validation occurred through exploratory factor analysis principle components analysis. Initially a 40-item instrument, through the use of such instrument validation, a two-factor solution emerged and eight items were eliminated in the revised CBSE-PC instrument. Please see the appendix for the final instrument.

#### **4.2. Participants**

This research utilized purposive sampling. Participant criteria included being a professional counselor. Although the survey showed a total of 310 recorded responses, data were filtered according to completeness. A total of 241 completed the survey through the end (to the Contextual Barriers and Supports to Employment as Perceived by Counselors Scale) which became the final sample size.

Although technically, purposive sampling was used, randomization was also strengthened due to the variety of counseling listservs accessed. The following listservs were used: Proctor Hall Professionals webpage (235 members), ACA COUNSGRADS (1,000–1,500 subscribers at any given time), Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRC) listserv (random sample of 1,000), American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Scene webpage (approximately 30,000 followers), Counselor Education and Supervision (CES Net) listserv (3,381 subscribers), ACA DIVERSE GRAD listserv (580 subscribers), and National Council of Rehabilitation Education (NCRE) listserv (1,399 subscribers). Therefore, more than 600 invitations were sent out and/or be available for viewing, due to the reasoning that hundreds (and possibly thousands) of counselors are members of each of these listservs. These professional counseling listservs targeted certified and licensed professional counselors in various counseling specialties (i.e., rehabilitation, clinical, and school counselors). This research project has also been supported with data from the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) (Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification, 2016). CRCC approved this research to be sent out to a random sample of 1,000 Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRCs). This research project has also been supported with data from the National Council on Rehabilitation Education (NCRE). NCRE approved the email invitation for this research to be sent out to Individual and New Career Members as well as the program coordinator of each institutional member of NCRE for a total of 1,408 people who were emailed the invitation to participate.

Participants were professional counselors practicing in both rural and urban areas of the United States. Participants indicated (on the demographic data sheet) if they currently served in a rural or

urban area. For the purposes of this research, “rural” areas were classified as those areas with populations of less than 2,500 (United States Census Bureau, 2013). An urban area, then, was classified as any area with populations of at least 2,500 (United States Census Bureau, 2013). Since this is a causal-comparative descriptive design, participants’ responses were compared according to the “group” they identified with (rural, urban).

Participants also indicated their “counselor orientation”. According to the American Counseling Association (2016), professional counseling is a “professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, and career goals”. Although there are a number of certificates and specialty areas of counseling (e.g., Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, Addictions Counselor, Military Counseling.), for the purposes of this research, counselor orientation was not related directly to area of specialty, but rather, the area in which one held a degree, certification, and/or license. Thus, counselor orientation options included: rehabilitation counseling, clinical mental health counseling, school counseling, and other.

#### **4.3. Procedures**

Invitations to complete the instruments were sent out via the professional counseling listservs. The link to Qualtrics (a web-based software that allows the electronic administration of instruments and surveys) was sent to these individuals via the listservs, or posted to the respective web pages, to recruit participants. The link was sent out once a week for three weeks. After three weeks, the link to participate was closed and data analysis ensued.

#### **4.4. Data analysis**

Descriptive statistics were to provide information regarding participant demographics (Table 1). Independent samples t-test were to be used to describe any difference between rural and urban counselor perceptions regarding barriers to employment among their clients. It was hypothesized that counselors working in rural areas would endorse, overall, more barriers to employment among their clients than counselors working in urban areas. It was also hypothesized that counselors working in rural areas would endorse, overall, fewer supports to employment for their clients than counselors working in urban areas. There was not a statistical difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level in reported barriers for urban ( $M = 3.13$ ,  $SD = .54$ ) and rural ( $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = .51$ ) serving counselors;  $t(239) = .936$ ,  $p = .356$  (Table 2).

The items in the personal and environmental barriers subscale were entered into SPSS and then analyzed via the independent samples t-test function. Although overall, there was not a statistically significant difference in rural versus urban counselor perceived barriers overall, this analysis was done in an effort to see if there were statistically significant differences when analyzing the subscales, separately. SPSS results showed that there was not a statistical difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level in reported barriers for urban ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = .60$ ) and rural ( $M = 3.15$ ,  $SD = .61$ ) serving counselors;  $t(239) = .89$ ,  $p = .422$ .

An independent samples t-test was also utilized to analyze if there was a difference between rural and urban counselors in their endorsement of discriminatory barriers subscale (subscale of barriers). SPSS results showed that there was not a statistical difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level in reported barriers for urban ( $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = .76$ ) and rural ( $M = 2.66$ ,  $SD = .73$ ) serving counselors;  $t(239) = .67$ ,  $p = .53$ . There was not a statistically observed difference in endorsed discriminatory barriers between rural and urban serving counselors.

An independent samples t-test was used to examine research question three in order to analyze the differences in means between two separate groups (i.e., urban and rural) and supports to employment among their clients (Rietveld & Hout, 2015). It was hypothesized that counselors working in rural areas would endorse, overall, less supports to employment among their clients than counselors working in urban areas. There was not a statistical difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level in reported barriers for urban ( $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = .76$ ) and rural ( $M = 3.13$ ,  $SD = .76$ ) serving counselors;  $t(239) = .658$ ,  $p = .511$  (Table 3).

**Table 1. Demographics**

		Count	%
Age	18–24	7	3%
	25–39	115	44%
	40–64	120	46%
	64 and above	17	7%
Race	Caucasian	180	69%
	African America	40	15%
	Hispanic	14	5%
	Am. Indian/Alaska Native	3	1%
	Asian	8	3%
	Native American or Pac. Islander	5	2%
	Other	9	3%
Gender	Male	79	31%
	Female	180	69%
Counselor Orientation	Clinical	89	34%
	Rehabilitation	118	46%
	School	24	9%
	Other	28	11%
Years of Experience	0–2	39	15%
	3–5	60	23%
	6–8	38	15%
	9–11	26	10%
	12 or more	96	37%
Area Served	Urban	156	60%
	Rural	109	42%
Highest Level of Education	Professionals	3	1%
	Associations	1	0%
	Bachelors	9	3%
	Masters	190	73%
	Doctoral	56	22%

Note. These demographics are reported for n = 259.

**Table 2. Independent samples T-test and descriptive statistics for barriers**

N	M	SD	95% CI for mean difference	
142	3.13	0.54		T
99	3.07	0.50	-.07, .30	0.936

Note. Levene's test significance = .105; equal variances assumed.  
 Test was not statistically significant.  $p < .05$ .

An independent samples t-test was also utilized to analyze if there was a difference between rural and urban counselors in their endorsement of personal supports subscale (subscale of supports). Although overall, there was not a statistically significant difference in rural versus urban counselor perceived supports overall, this analysis was done in an effort to see if there were statistically significant differences when analyzing the subscales, separately. SPSS results showed that there was a statistically significant difference at the  $p < .05$  level in reported supports for urban ( $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = .84$ ) and rural ( $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = .83$ ) serving counselors;  $t(239) = 2.56$ ,  $p = .011$  ( $p < .05$ ). These results suggest that there was a statistically significant difference

**Table 3. Independent samples T-test and descriptive statistics for supports**

	N	M	SD	95% CI for mean difference		
				T	df	
Urban	142	3.20	0.77			
Rural	99	3.13	0.77	-.13, .26	0.658	239

Note. Levene's test significance = .809; equal variances assumed.  
 Test was not statistically significant.  $p < .05$ .

between the two groups. This suggests that there was a statistically significant difference in endorsed personal supports between rural and urban serving counselors, with urban counselors endorsing more personal supports to employment among their clients than rural counselors.

An independent samples t-test was also utilized to analyze if there was a difference between rural and urban counselors in their endorsement of items in the environmental supports subscale (subscale of supports). There was not a statistical difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level in reported barriers for urban ( $M = 2.98$ ,  $SD = .84$ ) and rural ( $M = 2.92$ ,  $SD = .89$ ) serving counselors;  $t(239) = .50$ ,  $p = .596$ . There was not a statistically observed difference in endorsed environmental supports between rural and urban serving counselors.

### 5. Discussion

This research examined if perceptions of client barriers and supports to employment differ between rural and urban counselors. First, results showed that the perceived average number of barriers endorsed among rural and urban counselors in this sample were quite similar. In this sample of counselors, there was not a statistically significant difference between rural versus urban counselors' perceived barriers to employment, although literature in the past suggests that many barriers tend to be higher in rural versus urban areas (American Public Transportation Association, 2010; Bryson, 2004; Center for Rural Affairs, 2013; Child Health, 2014; Cochran et al., 2002; Collegeboard, 2016; Disability Benefits Center, 2012; Goode, Freburger, & Carey, 2012; Huaynate et al., 2015; Kneebone & Garr, 2009; Levy, 2009; Livermore, 2011; Miller & Rowley, 2005; Mamun, O'Leary, Wittenburg, & Gregory, 2011; Murry, McNair, Myers, Chen, & Brody, 2014; National Alliance of Mental Illness, 2016; Northridge & Freeman, 2011; Probst et al., 2002; Rural Health Information Hub, 2016; Seiger & Wiese, 2011; Skivington et al., 2014; Taylor, 2001; The World Bank, 2016; United States Census Bureau, 2014; United States Department of Agriculture, 2014, 2015; United States Department of Agricultural and Economic Research, 2005; United States Department of Agriculture and Economic Research, 2014; United States Department of Labor, n.d.; United States Census Bureau, 2013; Warner & Lukefeld, 2001; Zylstra, 2013) This was true when looking at the barriers scale overall, and also with the subscales of the barriers scale independently (i.e., personal/environmental barriers and discriminatory barriers). It was hypothesized that barriers would be perceived to be higher in rural versus urban areas, but counselors in this sample did not report to perceive this.

Similarly, among this sample, urban and rural counselors seemed to endorse approximately an even amount of perceived supports to employment among their clients. This was true when looking at the supports scale overall, and also the subscales of the supports scale independently (i.e., personal supports and environmental supports). Specific perceived individual supports such as self-efficacy (Guay, Ratelle, Senecal, Larose, & Deschenes, 2006), education, job training (Kalil, Schweingruber, & Seefeldt, 2001), positive health (Edin & Lein, 2007), rehabilitation services such as benefits counseling (Tremblay, Smith, Xie, & Drake, 2006) and supported employment (Kregel, 2007; McInnes, Ozturk, McDermot, & Mann, 2010), managed stress, and psychiatric stability (Kalil et al., 2001) were hypothesized to be lower in rural areas, due numerous previous literature that references lack of education, job training opportunities (United States Department of Agriculture, 2015), and increased rates of individuals with disability/ies with little access to services (Reichart, Greiman & Myers, 2014) in rural areas. While past literature references such supports to be lower in rural areas, counselors in this sample did

not perceive this in their responses.

### **5.1. Conclusions**

It is unclear why in this sample, urban and rural counselors reported, on average, a similar number of barriers to employment. This could suggest that counselors may underestimate the barriers to employment experienced by their clients in rural areas. This could mean counselors living in the same context as their clients might not be aware of the advantages and disadvantages inherent to their geographic location. Therefore, barriers could be present but counselors did not recognize them as such. This would be a significant limitation in the career counseling process as counselors should be the catalyst to help clients overcome all barriers that hinder career development.

In an alternative explanation, it could be that counselors do not perceive these barriers because they have been reduced through improved rural infrastructure to target these challenges. Perhaps the economic landscape in the rural areas has changed, which has dramatically reduced the number and severity of barriers that rural clients experience. This explanation carries positive implications for rural areas, seemingly suggesting that clients are facing decreased barriers to employment and wellbeing than before. This would have a positive implication for these populations and the counselors working with them.

A final possibility is that the challenges associated with rural and urban areas have equalized which would account for the lack of perceived differences. This would mean that the perceived number and frequency of barriers from rural and urban serving counselors was roughly equivalent. While variance in the type of barriers, such as access to childcare and transportation, might have been present, counselors did not perceive their clients as being negatively impacted by them.

In the same way, as with perceived barriers, there was not a statistically significant difference between rural versus urban counselors' perceived supports to employment. Possible negative implications from these results could suggest that the counselors sampled in this study overestimated supports available to their rural clients. If such is the case, this might represent a lack of understanding that could further hinder the obtaining and retaining of employment. Social Cognitive Career Theory emphasizes that career development is influenced by both objective and subjective environmental factors (Lent et al., 2000), thus it is not solely the variable that affects change, but the individuals' perception of the variable. Counselors could be the catalyst to also help clients recognize supports available to them, while also, helping them build supports in areas which are lacking. Without an adequate conceptualizing of lacking supports, such assistance may not occur in counseling. Such a lack of understanding could also further hinder the obtaining and sustaining of employment.

As with the perceived barriers, alternative explanations are that the supports to clients in rural areas have increased or, at least, match those supports experienced in urban areas. These explanations carry positive implications for rural areas which may no longer be at a disadvantage. It is possible that increased services and resources have created a lived experience for rural residents that are more similar, than different, to those in urban areas. Perhaps, when taken overall, rural areas now have specific infrastructure that helps and supports the obtaining and sustaining of employment for residents, thus buffering the effects of barriers on career development.

A final possible explanation for the lack of perceived difference in counselor perceived barriers and supports to employment in rural versus urban areas could be that challenges and supports associated with both contexts have equalized. This would suggest that the perceived barriers and supports to employment were similar. Although variances may in fact exist, the counselors did not seem to perceive that their clients were impacted by them. Counselors could perceive resilience and environmental adaptation among their clients.

Overall, Social Cognitive Career Theory traces how an individual may be affected by variables, which may ultimately become a support or barrier to employment, while stressing that some of the more

relevant influences are the environment and the availability of opportunity (Hudson & Broadnax, 1982). Environmental conditions have the possibility of being a barrier to career development, but at other times may act as a support (Lent et al., 2000). It is important for counselors to be able to understand specific barriers and supports in order to efficaciously work with their clients in their career development.

### 5.2. Limitations

Instrumentation bias speaks to the fact that no instrument is perfect and, therefore, measurements may lead to systematic deviations from true values. Such bias was taken into consideration in the creation and testing of the instrument created by the researcher. Efforts were made to reduce these limitations. Reliability and validity measurements were used to improve instrumentation, overall.

Sampling bias occurs when certain groups are omitted from the sample (Oommen, Baise, & Vogel, 2011). The research sought to account for sample bias by sampling professional counselors through the use of professional counselor listservs. This means that although purposive sampling was used to specifically sample professional counselors, every counselor on the listserv had an equal opportunity to participate, due to the non-exclusion of any members. Also, various types of professional counselor listservs were used, to try and obtain various subspecialties of counselors to maximize the results, allowing the comparison of rehabilitation counselors' career counseling self-efficacy with other types of counselors' career counseling self-efficacy. Although technically, purposive sampling was used in the sampling of professional counselors, the randomness inherent among the various professional counseling listservs accessed strengthens the sampling greatly and is a strength of this research. Even more specifically, for the CRCC and NCRE listservs, email addresses for random samples were utilized.

### 5.3. Future research

Future research needed to better understand counselors' perception of barriers and supports to employment. Although there was not a statistically significant difference (in this study) between perceived barriers and supports to employment among rural versus urban counselors, variances may in fact exist, but the counselors simply did not seem to perceive that their clients were impacted by them. Counselors could perceive resilience and environmental adaptation among their clients. Thus, perhaps qualitative research could be used to investigate such perceptions.

Additionally, future research is needed to investigate the present status of barriers and supports to employment in rural and urban areas (have they equalized?). While this research showed no statistically significant difference in counselor *perceived* barriers and supports to employment among clients, this does not necessarily mean that actual barriers and supports in rural versus urban areas are equal. Rather, this research simply shows that counselors did not report *perceiving* this to be true. Therefore, future research should explore if specific infrastructure associated with rural areas has increased and/or have such infrastructure decreased in urban areas to better clarify these findings. Quantitative research would be beneficial to gain a clearer understanding of the present status of barriers and supports to employment, as they actually exist.

On the other hand, if such is the case that counselors' in this sample underestimated the barriers to employment experienced by their clients in rural areas, this seemingly suggests that counselors living in the same context as their clients might not be cognizant of certain disadvantages inherent to their location. Thus, further research is needed to investigate this disconnect in the perceptions of counselors' and the realities of their clients.

By very nature of the profession, counselors should assist clients with their career development (American Counseling Association, 2016). While research has documented the need for positive self-efficacy among rural mental health clinicians in responding to the differing barriers sometimes associated with rural living (Breen & Drew, 2012), examination of ways in which rural counselors adapt to working in rural settings and the ways in which the counselor comes to understand how to overcome barriers associated with the rural community is needed.

### Funding

The authors received no direct funding for this research.

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### Citation information

Cite this article as: Counselor perceived barriers and supports to employment, Courtney Evans & Caroline Booth, *Cogent Social Sciences* (2019), 5: 1583049.

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**Appendix Contextual barriers and supports to employment as perceived by counselors**

This instrument seeks to address barriers and supports to employment among rural residents from the viewpoint of professional counselors. If you are not a counselor, please do not continue by taking this instrument. If you are a counselor, please proceed by answering the basic demographic questions and continue by indicating supports and barriers that you see as evident in your clients' lives that may affect their ability to obtain or maintain employment.

Please indicate if the following are supports and barriers to your clients' employment endeavors.

**\*The following items are supports and barriers to my clients' ability to gain or maintain employment:**

**(1-not at all, 2-rarely, 3-sometimes, 4-most of the time, and 5-all of the time)**

		Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time	All of the time
<b>Barriers</b>						
<b>Personal and environmental barriers</b>						
1	Past and/or current use of illegal drugs or alcohol	1	2	3	4	5
2	Criminal record	1	2	3	4	5
3	Sick child and/or family member who requires the care of your client	1	2	3	4	5
4	Lack of motivation and/or determination	1	2	3	4	5
5	Lack of belief in ability to succeed/Low opinion and value placed on self	1	2	3	4	5
6	Presence of mental illness (wide range of mental health conditions—disorders that affect your mood, thinking and behavior) that debilitates ability to work effectively	1	2	3	4	5
7	Presence of a learning disability/ies (a condition giving rise to difficulties in acquiring knowledge and skills to the level expected of those of the same age)	1	2	3	4	5
8	Chronic health problems and/or disability/ies that limit a person's ability to obtain/maintain employment	1	2	3	4	5
9	No access to transportation	1	2	3	4	5
10	Recipient of welfare and/or public assistance	1	2	3	4	5

(Continued)

		Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time	All of the time
11	<i>Receipt of disability compensation</i>	1	2	3	4	5
12	<i>Low basic skills (e.g., lack of computer/technical literacy)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
13	<i>Limited education</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Discriminatory barriers</b>						
14	<i>Employer misconception of disability and/or workplace discrimination</i>	1	2	3	4	5
15	<i>Discrimination against race and/or ethnic background (racism)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
16	<i>Gender discrimination (sexism)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
17	<i>Heterosexism (the assumption that heterosexuality is the normal sexual orientation)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
18	<i>Age discrimination (ageism)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Supports</b>						
<b>Personal supports</b>						
19	<i>Many supportive relationships (including that of family and friends)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
20	<i>Presence of motivation and/or determination for employment</i>	1	2	3	4	5
21	<i>High self-efficacy and/or self-determination</i>	1	2	3	4	5
22	<i>Physically healthy with no chronic health problems and/or disabilities that limit ability to maintain/obtain employment</i>	1	2	3	4	5
23	<i>Client shows self-sufficiency with finances</i>	1	2	3	4	5
24	<i>Current, up-to-date resume/knowledge of how to make a resume</i>	1	2	3	4	5
25	<i>Self-insight of personal work style (working alone, collaboratively, etc.)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
26	<i>Participates in continuing education/skills training</i>	1	2	3	4	5
27	<i>Post-high school education</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Environmental supports</b>						
28	<i>Supported employment opportunities are available to accommodate and encourage those with disabilities in their employment endeavors</i>	1	2	3	4	5

(Continued)

**(Continued)**

		Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time	All of the time
29	<i>Use of transition services to make the transition from high school to work (i.e., IEP or 504 plan)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
30	<i>There is adequate transportation in the area to support employment for those without personal vehicles</i>	1	2	3	4	5
31	<i>Employers in the area work cooperatively with rehabilitation counselors to employ persons with disabilities</i>	1	2	3	4	5
32	<i>My clients have access to affordable childcare</i>	1	2	3	4	5



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