



Mental health and access to meaningful employment are inextricably linked. In fact, career counselling and development are mental health interventions. Our sense of identity, meaning, purpose, and livelihood, are directly connected to the contributions we make to our families and our communities.

Developing career resilience, connecting work to life goals, and accessing career opportunities are all part of the relational and contextual influences on individuals' career-life development. Career counselling addresses these elements that support the well-being of individuals and families.

Career Development and Career Counselling

Work and career are central to living a satisfying, productive life, whether that work is at home, in the community, across the country, or around the globe. Career development is "the lifelong process of managing learning, work, leisure, and transitions in order to move toward a personally determined and evolving preferred future" (CCCD 2012, p. 2). Career counselling is a specialization at the intersection of career development and personal counselling. It responds to a full range of clients' career-life concerns.

Because work includes both paid and unpaid work (such as parenting and elder care) that can be both in and outside the home, work, leisure and family roles often overlap and sometimes conflict. Addressing the multiple life roles that individuals hold is integral to understanding the contexts of individuals' concerns and addressing mental health concerns. Work holds a central role in individual's lives, and the intersection of work with mental and physical health means that work-related concerns may be felt across work-life roles and settings, and across the lifespan. Given the importance of work in maintaining health and wellbeing, career development, education and counselling serve as primary prevention and mental health promotion interventions.

It is vital that governments, employers, post-secondary education and the general public recognize the value of career counselling services. Understanding that careers are relational and developmental processes that are part of all life roles helps to understand why it is that mental health and access to work and career satisfaction are so important.



Work that is "fair, dignified, stable, and secure" (Blustein et al., 2016, p. 2) is overwhelmingly linked to good mental health and wellbeing, and is recognized as a social determinant of overall health (Benach et al., 2014). Access to decent work has been prioritized as a fundamental human right by the UN and the International Labour Organization.

INVESTMENT IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT IS AN INVESTMENT IN THE WELLBEING OF INDIVIDUALS, THEIR FAMILIES AND THEIR COMMUNITIES.



Social Justice, Mental Health, and Career Development

The global community is rapidly changing and increasingly volatile. In striving for a more just society, career development and career counselling provide a direct means of social justice action. Present day social justice issues are profound. Women, youth, racialized groups, newcomers, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, and individuals with disabilities disproportionately experience unemployment, underemployment, inequality, and instability. Understanding how multiple dimensions of marginalization interact to magnify discrimination is critical to understanding the linkages between career insecurity, the social determinants of health, and mental health. Any combination of marginalizing factors significantly affects the wellbeing of individuals. For instance, an individual identifying as both a member of the LGBTQ2+ community and as a person with a physical disability would experience compounded social justice issues.

Emerging adults who are not in employment, education or training face economic as well as mental health concerns.

Unemployment and job loss are related to depression and anxiety, while work stressors, including underemployment and precarious work also contribute to mental illness (Artazcoz et al., 2011).

Unemployment threatens mental health and wellbeing and impacts productive resources and social cohesion (Brada, Marelli, & Signorelli, 2014).

Supporting Career Development Across the Lifespan

Career development, mental health, and social justice are also affected by life transition stages. Career development and counselling support and assist individuals as they move through the career-life stages. Career-life comprises all life roles, beginning in childhood. The United Nations estimates that 65% of the jobs that will be available to children born today do not yet exist. For children, career development includes foundational skills such as self-understanding, ability to adapt to change, decision making, and problem solving (Cahill & Furey, 2017). Career development support has the potential to significantly improve the nature and quality of individuals' lives: the person they become, their sense of meaning and purpose, as well as income and social and economic contributions they make (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2014).

LGBTQ2+ youth remain underserved in the education system. These individuals are navigating the complexity of identity development and hidden minority status while exploring career-life options (Chen & Keats, 2016). Career counsellors can support LGBTQ2+ youth in exploring perceptions of available career options, concerns about safety and discrimination, and developing career-related coping strategies and social supports (Chen & Keats, 2016).

Canada has the greatest proportion of degree holders earning poverty-rate incomes in the OECD (Bell et al. 2016). Young adults face conflicting messages about the world of work, pressures from parents and community, and financial challenges. Emerging adulthood is a time of change, growth, self-discovery and development.

In recent surveys, post-secondary students stated that career-related concerns are one of the major stressors they are facing (NCHA, 2016 & 2018). Students feel the weight of making the "right" decision and are looking for some way to validate or confirm their choices. Some students struggle with the belief that they "should" know what they want to do. They often feel isolated and left behind in their uncertainty about their future. Some feel hopeless and helpless about their futures. These factors contribute to less than optimal mental health.

Career counselling during emerging adulthood can assist in developing hope, support, and meaning, and in clarifying career choices, values, preferences, strengths, and direction (Domene, Landine & Stewart, 2015). This can lead to improvements in mental health and wellbeing. When young people understand themselves better and feel clearer about their purpose in life, they are more engaged, energized and excited about work, academics, and life.

Career development continues across the lifespan, and in the context of current socio-economic change and instability, many adults at mid-life experience career transition, often involuntarily. The impact of job loss can be substantial, and the effects profound (Harris & Isenor, 2011). Career counsellors can help adults process the grief, multiple losses and stress resulting from unexpected or unwanted career change and explore related questions of identity and self-worth. At the same time, they can expand perceptions of available options and support individuals in identifying prior learning, strengths, resources and transferable skills to support movement towards a preferred future. Even when career change is voluntary, mid-career adults can benefit from the support of a career counsellor to navigate this significant transition.

STUDENTS FROM DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS ARE MORE LIKELY TO GO TO SCHOOLS WITH FEWER RESOURCES, AND HAVE FAMILIES WHO ARE LESS LIKELY TO HAVE THE CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CAPITAL TO HELP THEM GAIN ACCESS TO AND MAKE THE MOST OF THE EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER OPTIONS (ARCHER, 2010 AS CITED IN POLVERE AND LIM, 2015).

Supporting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Career Development

First Nations, Inuit and Métis populations in Canada are growing rapidly, and career-life counselling must recognize the unique tragic and traumatic history, present-day echoes of that history, and ongoing experiences of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples and their communities to engage in respectful and supportive work. Career counselling for these populations must honour traditional knowledges and worldviews that are essential to support mental health and wellbeing. The current socio-economic realities for many First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples often include limited access to education and training, employment, and other services that many Canadians take for granted. Career counselling focuses on work, other life roles, relationships, and responsibilities (Offet-Gartner, 2018) to promote mental health and wellness.

Culturally sensitive career counselling with Indigenous communities recognizes their unique traditional teachings about

wellbeing, which may include the Medicine Wheel or other traditional symbols that represent a holistic understanding of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of wellbeing, which are interconnected and mutually influencing (Chansonneuve, 2005, Twigg & Hengen, 2009). Specific to individuals identifying as members of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis cultures is a Career-Life Planning model which supplements conventional career counselling concepts with Indigenous values and core beliefs of connectedness, sharing of personal gifts, work/life roles and responsibilities, balance and core values to provide culturally appropriate career counselling support (McCormick & Amundson, 1997; McCormick, Amundson & Poehnell, 2002). Such culturally responsive career-life planning also considers the impact and influence beyond the client to include that of family and community (Offet-Gartner, 2018).

Supporting Career Development for Newcomers and International Students

Canada welcomes a substantial number of newcomers and international students each year. Entry into the workforce is a central part of many newcomers' successful transition to life in Canada. It is a task for which career development practitioners and counsellors are well equipped to assist. Newcomers have career concerns that are distinct from their Canadian-born neighbours, and that span issues of mental health and wellness related to traumatic experiences and transitions, social justice, accessibility, and unfamiliar workplace lifestyles, among others (Arthur & Domene, 2017).

Newcomers may have limited fluency in English or French and although the Federal government funds language training for refugees and immigrants, many newcomers face financial pressure to obtain employment before they are fluent in the language of their province of residence. Even newcomers who are fluent in English or French encounter numerous acculturation difficulties as they adjust to life in a country that may be very different from what they are used to in terms of familial, social, political and religious values.

The career concerns of newcomers are exacerbated by professional fields that may not recognize their education and credentials in Canada. Newcomers are often given a difficult choice between investing substantial time and resources to complete additional training or to pass equivalency examinations and pursuing employment outside their preferred field to address immediate financial needs. Many newcomers find that prospective employers and workplace supervisors also minimize the value of prior international work experience. Some encounter discrimination and racism as they pursue careers. These problems, combined with the loss of family and community support networks from their prior countries, make newcomers and international student populations that benefit substantially from career services provided by culturally sensitive practitioners.



Conclusions

The Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association recognizes the critical role career development and career counselling plays in enhancing the lives of Canadians across the lifespan and urges governments, employers and the public to support the use of counselling to increase the mental health and wellbeing of all Canadians, particularly those individuals who have less than optimal social determinants of health and who face social justice issues, such as people identifying as First Nations, Inuit and Métis, newcomers, and those in poverty.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **Increased support and funding (public and private sectors) for Career Development and Career Counselling Services, including increased awareness of career services, and the important link between career satisfaction and mental health.**
2. **Support funding for and access to training of culturally competent career counsellors and career development professionals.**
3. **Support funding of career counsellors and counselling for all public and post-secondary institutions, particularly those with student populations considered vulnerable to socio-economic stressors such as those identifying as newcomers, and First Nations, Inuit and Métis students and/or having lower socio-economic backgrounds.**

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