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An Ecological Framework for Counsellor-in-Training Well-Being: Integrating Individual Developmental Resources and the Professional Learning Ecosystem

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ABSTRACT

Counsellors-in-training (CITs) are students, supervisees, and developing professionals. Their well-being needs to be understood in relation to both their personal development and the conditions in which they train. This concept paper uses a targeted narrative synthesis of psychological well-being, holistic wellness, student well-being, supervision, and ecological perspectives to propose two interconnected dimensions: individual developmental resources and the professional learning ecosystem. The four subdimensions of individual developmental resources are professional capability, personal and reflective development, professional functioning and adaptability, and personal wellness and self-regulation, while those of the professional learning ecosystem are the practice-based learning context, the training and supervisory context, the organisational and practice environment, and relational and practical supports. The framework considers not only the abilities CITs develop but also the training conditions that help them apply these abilities, including cooperation between universities, supervisors and placement organisations. Hence, the paper presents three propositions on training alignment, disclosure of difficulties and practical access to training. Practical examples show how the framework may guide supervisors and institutions in supporting CIT well-being. The framework provides a guide for counsellor education and a basis for future empirical research on its proposed dimensions, relationships and practical effectiveness.

1. Introduction

Counsellors-in-training (CITs) are students in counselling-related programmes who go through supervised training to develop professional competence. They learn to meet ethical and professional responsibilities while fulfilling their academic requirements [1–3]. During training, CITs apply counselling knowledge and skills while developing their professional identity [4,5]. They may also face challenges related to transport, accommodation, finances, workplace relationships and access to

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suitable resources. Similar challenges have been reported among psychology internship applicants, college interns, commuter students and medical students [6–9]. However, differences in training arrangements should be considered when applying these findings to CIT well-being.

Psychological well-being perspectives focus on positive functioning and personal development [10], while student well-being perspectives consider the role of individuals and their learning environments [11]. Holistic wellness perspectives recognise the links between different areas of functioning [12,13]. Supervision theory focuses on professional learning and developmental support [3]. Perspectives from the helping professions address emotional competence, relationships and professional quality of life [14,15]. Although these perspectives help explain different aspects of CIT development and training, it remains unclear how training conditions influence the relationship between CITs' developing abilities and well-being.

An ecological perspective brings these views together by examining how individuals and their environments interact to shape well-being [16–18]. In counsellor training, this involves examining both the abilities CITs develop and the conditions under which they learn and practise. For example, opportunities to apply counselling skills may depend on the guidance, resources and support available in different training settings.

Based on this ecological perspective, this concept paper proposes a literature-informed framework for CIT well-being that brings together individual developmental resources and the professional learning ecosystem. The framework considers the relationship between the abilities CITs develop and their opportunities to use them during supervised practice. It also examines how cooperation between universities, supervisors and placement organisations may shape this relationship.

2. CIT Well-Being in Professional Practice

CITs undertake supervised professional practice as part of their preparation to become registered counsellors [19,20]. During professional practice, such as practicum and internship, they apply counselling theories, develop practical skills, and adhere to ethical principles in their work with clients. In Malaysia, professional practice standards outline requirements for counselling practice, supervision, facilities, and resources [21]. In addition to meeting these training requirements, CITs need guidance, feedback, and learning opportunities from their supervisors to build confidence, self-awareness, professional identity, and independence [1–3]. Managing client responsibilities while continuing to learn may affect their well-being.

CIT well-being shares characteristics with student well-being and the occupational well-being of registered counsellors. What distinguishes CIT well-being is that CITs continue to learn while providing counselling services under supervision. In this paper, CIT well-being encompasses psychological and physical wellness, positive functioning, a sense of meaning, and the quality of relationships during professional preparation [10–13,15]. Although professional competence is relevant to CIT well-being, it should not be treated as a measure of well-being itself. Accordingly, the framework distinguishes well-being from the capacities, practices, and training conditions that may sustain or undermine it.

2.1 Approach to the Conceptual Synthesis

This paper uses a targeted narrative synthesis of key theories and research on CIT development, well-being, supervision and training conditions. Sources were reviewed for relevance to the proposed framework. For empirical studies, the review considered the study population, research design,

findings and limitations. Studies involving CITs were examined separately from those involving practising counsellors, school pupils and other professional groups.

The synthesis focused on two areas: a) the abilities and practices CITs develop during training, and b) the conditions that support or limit their development and use. This distinction helped organise the proposed dimensions and subdimensions. The conceptual review did not aim to cover all available literature, and no statistical methods were used to develop or validate the proposed subdimensions.

3. Conceptual Foundations of CIT Well-Being

3.1 Psychological and Holistic Well-Being

Ryff's formulation [22] and the subsequent study by Ryff and Keyes [10] identify six dimensions of psychological well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. These dimensions are relevant to CITs as they make decisions, manage academic and practice responsibilities, and grow personally and professionally. However, the six-factor structure was examined using a national sample of 1,108 adults aged 25 and older [10], rather than a sample of CITs. Their work provides a theoretical basis for understanding positive functioning among CITs, but the eight subdimensions proposed in this paper require separate empirical validation.

While Ryff's model focuses on psychological functioning, the Wheel of Wellness [12] offers a broader view of well-being by considering personal, relational, physical, spiritual and work-related areas of life. Wellness is also viewed as multidimensional in the Indivisible Self Model [13]. Both models view wellness as more than the absence of stress or burnout. The Indivisible Self Model also recognises the influence of local, institutional, global and chronometrical contexts. Although these contextual elements were drawn from the literature, they were not examined in the reported factor analyses [13]. Drawing on these holistic perspectives, the present framework considers CIT well-being in relation to both individual functioning and the environments in which CITs learn and practise.

3.2 Student Well-Being and Professional Learning

The Student Well-Being Model places well-being within the educational setting and considers students' resources and relationships, their interpretations and emotions, and their engagement and goals [11]. Its seven domains are grouped as assets, appraisals, and actions. The model was informed by literature and applied to curriculum analysis and a qualitative case study in a New Zealand secondary school [11]. Although the model provides a useful perspective on well-being in education, applying it to CITs requires attention to additional aspects of professional practice, including their responsibilities to clients, the assessment of their practice, and the relationship between university-based learning and placement experiences.

Supervision plays an important role in helping CITs apply their knowledge and skills in professional practice. In Bernard's Discrimination Model, as described by Bernard and Goodyear [3], supervisors may take the roles of teacher, counsellor, or consultant while focusing on intervention, conceptualisation, and personalisation. These roles help supervisors respond to CITs' learning needs and support the development of counselling skills, reflection, emotional awareness, and professional independence. The relationship between supervision and well-being is further addressed in integrative wellness supervision, which combines developmental support with wellness [23]. The present framework considers supervision within a broader training environment that includes curriculum, placement arrangements, and access to training opportunities.

3.3 Counselling and Helping-Profession Well-Being Perspectives

Jennings and Greenberg's Prosocial Classroom model [14] examines the relationship between teachers' social and emotional competence and classroom relationships. Although developed for teachers, the model provides a useful perspective on the importance of emotional competence and interpersonal relationships in counselling training. The Professional Quality of Life framework addresses compassion satisfaction, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress in helping work [15]. Alongside counselling wellness models, these perspectives help explain both the emotional demands and positive experiences associated with counselling practice. However, understanding CIT well-being also requires consideration of their experiences as students, including academic participation, personal development, and access to training opportunities.

The dual roles of CITs as students and developing professionals are important when examining their well-being throughout training. Competence, self-reported confidence, and well-being can follow different patterns during training. For example, Mullen et al. [24] found increasing self-efficacy over the course of training in one programme. In a separate cross-sectional study, Roach and Young [25] found no significant differences in wellness among CITs at the beginning, middle, and end of training. As these studies used different research designs and examined different outcomes, their findings cannot be directly compared. An increase in counselling self-efficacy should not be interpreted as evidence of improved well-being as CITs progress through training.

4. An Ecological Perspective on CIT Well-Being

The theoretical perspectives discussed in the previous section offer complementary insights into CIT well-being, including positive functioning [10] and the relationship between students' assets, appraisals, and actions [11]. Holistic wellness perspectives broaden this understanding by considering interrelated areas of life and their contexts [12,13], while supervision theory focuses on professional learning and developmental support [3]. An ecological perspective brings these accounts together to examine the conditions in which CITs can use the capacities they develop.

Several aspects of well-being relevant to counsellor training have been examined in previous research, including burnout among CITs [26,27], coping and self-care [28,29], psychological well-being and personal development [30–32], and supervision [33,34]. Research involving multilingual therapists and trainees highlights another consideration: the role of language and practice context [35]. These studies support examining emotional functioning, development, relationships, and training conditions together. Because they cover different populations and outcomes, they provide different types of evidence. The causal relationships between these factors and CIT well-being remain to be tested.

Um and Bardhoshi [34] examined demands and resources together in a cross-sectional survey of 243 CITs. Demands and resources were associated with burnout, but meaningful work did not mediate the relationship between resources and burnout. The self-report design limits causal inference, and data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic limits the extent to which the findings can be applied to other training conditions. Blount and Mullen's Integrative Wellness Model [23] already combines wellness, supervisee development, and supervisory responses. The present framework connects these accounts with the way client work, curriculum, supervision, placement conditions, and practical support are organised across CITs' learning and practice roles.

The supervision studies also differ in what they can establish. Thompson, Frick, and Trice-Black [33] used consensual qualitative research with 14 CITs to explore experiences of self-care and

burnout in supervision. The CITs described support and unmet needs. Reliance on participant recall and a predominantly White female sample limits the transferability of these accounts. In Malaysia, Arifin et al. [5] reported associations between supervision frequency and aspects of competence. In their related study of role difficulties, role ambiguity contributed to the regression model, while role conflict did not [36]. Both Malaysian studies examined competence. They provide a basis for examining how supervisory expectations and training relationships may affect the use of CITs' capacities, while the implications for well-being remain to be tested.

An ecological view considers the relationships between people and their environments [16–18]. In this paper, individual developmental resources refer to the capacities and practices that CITs develop and use. The professional learning ecosystem includes the conditions that support or limit the development and use of these capacities and practices. Although the two dimensions are conceptually well-defined, they overlap in practice. For example, a supervisory relationship can support personal reflection while also being part of the organised learning environment.

Alternative classifications serve different purposes. Ecological levels identify where influences operate and where interventions can take place [16]. Wellness domains describe interconnected aspects of functioning [12,13], while developmental stages describe changes in learning needs [3]. The present framework complements these classifications by focusing on how capacities relate to the conditions in which CITs use them. Although broader contextual influences such as policy, culture, and changes over time may affect both dimensions, they are not represented as separate categories within the framework. The proposed reciprocal relationships between the two dimensions have yet to be examined empirically.

5. Literature-Informed Dimensions of CIT Well-Being

The framework is organised around two interconnected dimensions and eight literature-informed subdimensions. The four resource areas cover counselling skills, self-understanding and development, professional conduct and adaptation, and wellness practices and regulation. The four ecosystem areas cover client work, teaching and supervision, institutional and practice conditions, and support for participation. Each concept is grouped by its primary role, with some overlap between areas. Table 1 outlines the theoretical basis of each subdimension, its relevance to CITs, and its conceptual boundaries. The eight areas guide the analysis and remain open to empirical evaluation and refinement.

Table 1
Theoretical rationale and boundaries of the eight subdimensions

Dimension and subdimension	Theoretical and empirical anchors	Reason for placement and CIT focus	Boundary or overlap
Individual developmental resources **Professional capability**	Supervision intervention and conceptualisation [3]; competence assessment [5,37]; developmental self-efficacy [24].	Knowledge, skills and judgement enacted by the CIT in counselling tasks. This distinguishes developing capability from the conditions for practice.	Reflection on clinical tasks falls under professional capability. Self-understanding falls under personal and reflective development. Confidence alone is not competence.
Individual developmental resources **Personal and reflective development**	Ryff's growth, purpose and self-acceptance [10,22]; supervision personalisation [3]; reflective and	Understanding personal values, reactions, and sources of meaning, and developing a professional identity during training.	Reflection may also improve capability. Immediate emotional regulation is considered

Dimension and subdimension	Theoretical and empirical anchors	Reason for placement and CIT focus	Boundary or overlap
	contemplative learning [38,39].		under personal wellness and self-regulation.
Individual developmental resources Professional functioning and adaptability	Counsellor development [2]; professional behaviour distinguished from counselling skills [5]; role difficulties [36].	Responsibility, professional conduct, organisation and adjustment enacted in everyday practice. This captures functioning across student and practitioner roles.	Behaviour is considered here; the expectations and policies that shape it are contextual. Separate attention does not imply an independent factor.
Individual developmental resources Personal wellness and self-regulation	Holistic wellness [12,13]; coping and support [28,29,40]; counsellor wellness competencies [41].	Regulatory capacities and practices, including help-seeking and self-care, through which CITs try to sustain functioning.	The analytic focus is practices and capacities. Experienced wellness is part of the outcome, not a duplicate explanatory variable.
Professional learning ecosystem Practice-based learning context	Supervised client work [3,4]; CIT accounts [33]; multilingual practice experiences [35].	Client demands, therapeutic relationships and opportunities to apply knowledge. These conditions situate learning rather than describe the CIT's skill.	A case can involve both capability and contextual demands. The classification identifies the primary question being examined.
Professional learning ecosystem Training and supervisory context	Supervisory roles [3]; assets and learning experience [11]; integrative wellness supervision [23]; comparative studies [42–44].	Curriculum, teaching, feedback and supervision are grouped as organised professional learning and evaluation.	A supervisory relationship also supplies relational support. Institutional rules governing access are considered under organisational conditions.
Professional learning ecosystem Organisational and practice environment	Institutional and inter-organisational influences [16]; ecological perspectives on psychology trainee competence [45]; organisational self-care context [46].	Programme and placement arrangements, coordination, expectations and material conditions for practice. These shape opportunities to use capacities.	Policies can affect several areas at once. This is not a complete classification of all ecological levels.
Professional learning ecosystem Relational and practical supports	Student assets and relationships [11]; CIT resources and financial strain [34]; practical internship barriers [7–9,47].	Interpersonal and material supports are grouped by their role in sustaining participation, including belonging, time, transport and financial access.	Relational and material supports remain distinct and are not interchangeable. Supervision may contribute support as well as formal teaching.

5.1 Individual Developmental Resources

Individual developmental resources are the personal and professional capacities and practices that CITs bring to training and continue to develop. The term brings together ideas from several theories. It extends beyond psychological well-being to cover CITs' development as individuals and as professionals. The literature informs four subdimensions: professional capability, personal and

reflective development, professional functioning and adaptability, and personal wellness and self-regulation.

Professional practice gives CITs opportunities to apply counselling theories and techniques in their work with clients. The literature on counsellor development describes changes in confidence, self-awareness, and professional identity [1,2]. Here, professional capability concerns counselling knowledge, skills, ethical judgement, communication, and case conceptualisation. Reflection on clinical tasks is included under professional capability, while reflection on personal values and professional identity is addressed in the next subdimension. These professional capabilities are further developed through supervised practice and feedback [3,5]. Self-confidence alone is an insufficient basis for judging competence. Swank [37] found differences between supervisor ratings and supervisee self-ratings, while Mullen et al. [24] examined self-efficacy rather than demonstrated competence.

Personal and reflective development refers to how CITs understand themselves and grow through training. Self-awareness is important because personal reactions, values, emotions, and experiences may affect the counselling process. Research on spiritual competence and spirituality in counselling education [48–50] informs the discussion of meaning and values, which are only part of readiness for practice. Among Malaysian CITs, Mazila et al. [31] examined relationships among well-being, emotional intelligence, spiritual intelligence, counselling self-efficacy, and personal development. Reflective and contemplative approaches also offer ways to examine self-awareness and emotional experience [38,39]. In this framework, this subdimension concerns self-understanding and developing professional identity. The immediate management of emotional reactions is considered part of self-regulation.

Professional functioning and adaptability describe how CITs learn to work in professional settings as their responsibilities increase. This includes learning to act responsibly, manage their time and workload, adapt to organisational expectations, and remain open to learning. Managing these responsibilities is closely related to the development of CITs' professional identity [1,2]. Malaysian research on counselling competence identifies differences between professional behaviour and counselling skills [5]. This supports treating professional capability as separate from, but related to, professional functioning and adaptability. Role clarity and organisational expectations are part of the professional learning ecosystem. However, how CITs behave and respond to these expectations falls under professional functioning and adaptability.

Personal wellness and self-regulation include the abilities and practices that help CITs manage their emotions, seek help, get sufficient rest and maintain physical and psychological functioning. Burnout and emotional strain are common concerns identified in CIT research [26,27]. Studies on coping describe emotional, religious, social and problem-focused responses to training pressures [28,29]. Research on compassion fatigue and social support [40,51] also shows the importance of understanding how CITs manage emotional demands and use the support available to them. Research involving practising counsellors [52,53] and evaluations of interventions with broader student populations [54] offer relevant insights, although the findings may not be directly applicable to CITs. This subdimension draws on perspectives on holistic wellness, regulation and self-care [12,13,41]. It focuses on how CITs support their well-being rather than the level of wellness they experience. CITs develop and use these resources within the wider professional learning ecosystem.

5.2 Professional Learning Ecosystem

The professional learning ecosystem refers to the interconnected conditions that shape CIT development and well-being. Difficulties during training may be associated with both individual

factors, such as capabilities, coping strategies and resilience, and contextual factors, such as the learning environment, supervisory relationships and available resources. Based on the literature, the training conditions are organised into four subdimensions: the practice-based learning context, the training and supervisory context, the organisational and practice environment, and relational and practical supports.

The practice-based learning context allows CITs to apply counselling knowledge and skills when working with clients. Although client work is important for counsellor development, it may also involve emotional and professional demands. CITs' accounts of supervision [33] and studies involving multilingual therapists and trainees [35] show how client work may create uncertainty and new learning needs. These studies differ in research designs and populations. Further research is therefore needed to understand how client demands affect CIT well-being. In the proposed framework, the practice-based learning context includes case demands, access to clients, therapeutic relationships and opportunities to apply knowledge. The ability to perform counselling tasks, however, falls under professional capability.

The training and supervisory context includes the curriculum, learning activities and supervision that prepare CITs for professional practice. These components are grouped because they provide structured opportunities for learning, feedback and evaluation. Studies on the integration of theory and practice in teacher and social work education [55] and curriculum alignment in language teaching [56] provide useful comparisons. However, neither study directly examines strain among CITs. Research on wellness-related learning activities in counselling education [57] is more relevant to CIT training. When evaluating these activities, psychological well-being and perceived wellness should be treated as separate outcomes [30]. Academic resilience and clinical readiness also need to be examined separately.

Supervision is another essential part of professional learning. It allows CITs to discuss their practice and the emotional demands they face [33]. Studies on triadic and group supervision have also examined reflection and supervisory experiences [58,59]. Research involving practising mental health counsellors [60] highlights the role of personal and contextual factors, although its findings may not apply directly to CITs. Wellness-focused supervision combines personal and professional development [23], but research findings on its effectiveness remain mixed. For instance, Lenz et al. [43] reported an increase in wellness scores among interns receiving wellness-focused supervision and a decline among those receiving alternative supervision. Although the interaction between supervision type and time was statistically significant, the overall between-group effect was not. Of the 44 interns recruited through convenience sampling, 32 completed the study, and the two groups completed their internships in different placement settings. Meany-Walen et al. [44] reported improvements in wellness during the intervention, with three of the four participants maintaining these gains during follow-up. However, no control group was included in this single-case study. In contrast, Blount et al. [42] found no significant between-group differences in wellness or professional quality of life among 15 interns from one programme. Overall wellness declined in both groups, but neither decline was statistically significant. Compassion satisfaction increased within the wellness group. Differences in study design, sample size, and findings indicate the need for further research on the relative effectiveness of wellness-focused supervision.

The organisational and practice environment includes institutional arrangements, workplace expectations, coordination, and material conditions for practice. Studies in social work education [61,62] provide insights into field learning and the relationship between theory and practice, although their relevance to counsellor education is indirect. Research on the therapeutic use of physical space [63] shows why physical conditions are important in professional practice. However, further research is needed to understand how these conditions affect CIT well-being. Ecological

studies of psychology trainees' competence [45] and professional resilience in social work [46] also consider organisational and interpersonal contexts. These perspectives help explain the importance of institutional and workplace arrangements in CIT training. In the proposed framework, formal supervision falls under the training and supervisory context, while policies that determine access to supervision fall under the organisational and practice environment.

Relational and practical supports refer to the relationships and resources that help CITs participate in professional practice. Family members, peers and others may help CITs manage training demands [29,51]. At the same time, counselling training can affect their personal relationships [64]. Um and Bardhoshi [34] examined support from faculty and peers, professional development opportunities, workload and financial strain. Peer support in managing emotional distress has also been studied among medical interns [65], although these findings may not directly apply to CITs. CITs may also need practical assistance during training. Studies on college internships, commuting and unpaid placements [7–9,47] identify practical barriers that require further study among CITs. Within this subdimension, relational support helps CITs manage training demands, while practical support helps them overcome barriers to participation in training. For example, encouragement may help CITs manage training demands, whereas transport or financial assistance can reduce barriers to participation. Supportive relationships with supervisors are also included in this subdimension, while their formal teaching and assessment responsibilities fall under the training and supervisory context.

Conditions across the professional learning ecosystem can either support CIT development or add to the demands CITs face. Section 6 sets out how these conditions and individual developmental resources may interact.

6. Proposed Ecological Framework for CIT Well-Being

The framework brings these perspectives together around CITs' roles as learners, supervisees, and developing practitioners. Psychological well-being and holistic wellness perspectives provide a basis for understanding positive functioning. Student well-being and supervision perspectives inform learning and development, while ecological perspectives highlight the conditions in which training takes place. A central distinction in the framework is between the capacities CITs develop and the opportunities available to apply them. For example, a CIT may know how to seek feedback but have limited access to supervision or face different expectations at the university and placement site.

The framework comprises two dimensions, individual developmental resources and the professional learning ecosystem, each consisting of four literature-informed subdimensions described in Section 5. Although these eight subdimensions draw on existing theoretical and empirical literature, their validity remains to be examined among CITs.

A reciprocal relationship is proposed between the two dimensions. A CIT's resources may shape how they understand and manage training demands, while the training environment may shape how they develop and use those resources. For example, opportunities to demonstrate professional capability depend partly on access to feedback and suitable practice experiences. Similarly, workload, relationships, supervision, financial demands, and organisational conditions may influence how CITs use personal resources such as coping and self-regulation.

Figure 1 shows how CIT well-being may be shaped by the ongoing interaction between individual developmental resources and the professional learning ecosystem, indicating an ecological understanding of well-being [16–18]. The two-way arrows show the proposed links between each dimension and well-being.

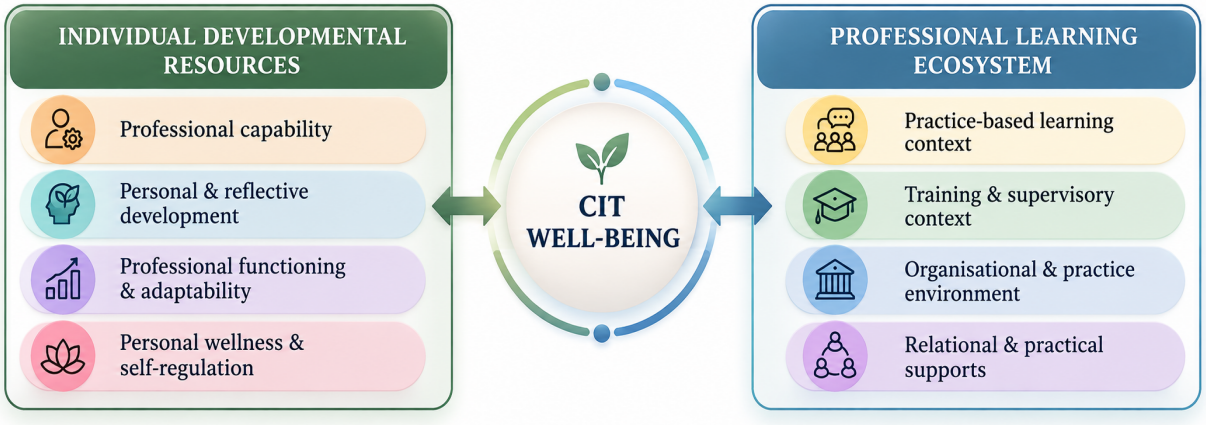

Fig. 1. Proposed ecological framework for CIT well-being

The following three propositions explain how the two dimensions may interact during counsellor training.

Proposition 1 focuses on alignment across training settings. The framework proposes that the relationship between a CIT's professional capability and well-being may partly depend on how well client demands, supervisory guidance and university expectations are aligned. CITs with similar abilities may apply them differently depending on how well these conditions are coordinated. Research on role ambiguity among Malaysian CITs [36] and ecological approaches to psychology trainee competence [45] supports the need to examine this relationship. This proposition connects professional capability and professional functioning and adaptability to the practice-based learning context, the training and supervisory context, and the organisational and practice environment.

Proposition 2 focuses on the disclosure of difficulties during supervision. The value of supervision for CIT well-being may partly depend on whether CITs are willing to discuss learning and personal difficulties and understand how their competence is assessed. Supervisors provide developmental support while also assessing competence [3,37]. Accounts of burnout and self-care [33] highlight the importance of having opportunities to discuss these difficulties. Having access to a supervisor may not be enough if CITs feel unable to discuss their concerns. However, these studies do not directly show whether disclosing difficulties during supervision involving competence assessment affects CIT well-being. This proposition connects personal and reflective development and personal wellness and self-regulation to the training and supervisory context and relational and practical supports.

Proposition 3 focuses on how practical access to training may affect CITs' ability to maintain wellness practices and take part in learning opportunities. Research on demands and resources among CITs considers factors such as time, financial strain and support [34]. Ecological health promotion also recognises the importance of institutional and policy action alongside individual change [16,66]. Support for self-regulation alone may not be enough if placement or access barriers continue to limit CITs' participation. This proposition connects personal wellness and self-regulation and professional functioning and adaptability to relational and practical supports and the organisational and practice environment. Further research is needed to determine whether coordinated support offers advantages over existing approaches.

7. Relationship to Existing Ecological and Integrative Perspectives

The proposed framework draws on established ideas about the interaction between individuals and their environments, shared responsibility, and the integration of wellness with supervision [13,16–18,23]. In applying these ideas to counsellor education, the framework focuses on the relationship between the capacities CITs develop and the opportunities available to use them. Table 2 compares the proposed framework with broader ecological approaches and models specific to professional practice in terms of their purpose, unit of analysis, and treatment of context and interaction. The comparison also identifies their contributions to the proposed framework and areas of difference.

The three propositions make these differences more specific. While Forrest et al. [45] focused on competence problems among psychology trainees, Proposition 1 asks whether alignment across training settings shapes how CITs use their professional capabilities and how that use relates to well-being. The Integrative Wellness Model [23] incorporates wellness into developmental supervision. Proposition 2 identifies the ability to disclose difficulties and clarity about competence assessment as conditions that may shape the value of supervision for CIT well-being. Um and Bardhoshi [34] examined associations among demands, resources, and burnout in CITs. Proposition 3 considers whether practical access to training enables CITs to maintain wellness practices and participate in learning. These are specific relationships to be tested, rather than established explanations of CIT well-being.

Although the framework is organised into two dimensions, broader influences such as policy, community, and institutional arrangements remain relevant to both dimensions. Funding arrangements, for example, may affect institutional resources and a CIT's ability to participate in training, while cultural expectations may shape help-seeking and supervisory relationships. These influences can operate across several subdimensions. The order and strength of the proposed relationships remain unspecified. The synthesis may help educators connect CIT development with decisions about how training is organised. Its explanatory value relative to existing models and its practical effectiveness remain empirical questions.

Table 2
Comparison with ecological and integrative approaches

Approach and purpose	Unit and contextual scope	Treatment of interaction	Relationship to the present synthesis
Ecological health promotion [16,66]	Individuals, interpersonal networks, institutions, community and policy; Golden et al. emphasise structural change.	Behaviour and environments are connected; action may target conditions beyond the individual.	Shared responsibility is already established. The present domains organise CIT training functions; they do not replace these ecological levels.
Indivisible Self [13]	Holistic wellness across local, institutional, global, and chronometric contexts.	The self affects and is affected by context. Contextual elements were literature-informed rather than tested in the reported factor analyses.	Provides wellness and contextual foundations. The present synthesis specifies training relationships without claiming to introduce context for the first time.
Reupert's socio-ecological perspective [17]	Mental health across family, school, community and services; an editorial perspective.	Highlights reciprocal relationships and coordination across sectors.	Supports coordination as a rationale. It is not a validation study, and neither it nor this paper establishes the

Approach and purpose	Unit and contextual scope	Treatment of interaction	Relationship to the present synthesis
			effectiveness of the CIT framework.
Positive education and Personal Projects Analysis [18]	Students' meaningful projects within school, at home, and in the community.	Connects personal characteristics, daily action and environments.	Already integrates person and context. The CIT synthesis focuses on supervised service, evaluation and placement participation rather than projects as its organising unit.
Ecological analysis of psychology trainee competence [45]	Psychology trainees and competence problems across micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chronosystems.	Interconnections among training settings and institutional arrangements influence development and responses to difficulties.	A close training precedent for coordination. The present focus is broader well-being during routine counsellor preparation, not primarily competence remediation.
Professional resilience in social work [46]	Self-care across biological, interpersonal, organisational, familial, peer, spiritual and recreational domains.	Situates professional resilience and self-care within multiple personal and contextual domains.	Social work offers an established contextual account of self-care. The CIT synthesis makes educational and evaluative roles explicit. Its use of social work research is conceptual.
Integrative Wellness Model [23]	CIT wellness and development within supervision.	Matches developmental needs and supervisory roles while incorporating wellness.	Already integrates wellness and supervision. The present synthesis also examines curriculum, placement coordination, and access. Its relative effectiveness remains untested.
CIT demands–resources study [34]	Demands, resources, meaningful work and burnout among 243 CITs.	Tests associations among demands, resources, and burnout; the hypothesised meaningful-work mediation was not supported for the relationship between resources and burnout.	Provides direct evidence about CITs. The present framework broadens the questions about training and well-being. Its proposed relationships require separate testing.
Present CIT framework	Two analytical domains with eight areas spanning CIT development and professional learning conditions.	Proposes that training alignment, disclosure and access affect the use of capacities and support.	A contextual synthesis with explicit propositions and coordinated applications. Category validity, cultural applicability, explanatory value and effectiveness remain untested.

8. Implications of an Ecological Approach to CIT Well-Being

An ecological approach encourages counsellor educators to examine both the development of capacities and the conditions under which they are used. Existing approaches already recommend wellness education, supportive supervision, and attention to context [23,41,43]. When a difficulty involves several subdimensions, the framework helps identify who can respond and what each party

can do. Educators and supervisors can use the framework to review CITs' learning needs and training arrangements together.

Table 3 illustrates this process through three examples of training problems. Each example connects the resource and ecosystem subdimensions, identifies who could respond and suggests indicators for later review. The examples focus on training alignment in case allocation (Proposition 1), practical barriers to attending supervision (Proposition 3) and disclosure of difficulties (Proposition 2). These hypothetical examples show how different parties could work together to strengthen existing supervision and student support.

Table 3
Illustrative applications and proposed indicators for review

Illustrative difficulty and connected areas	**Proposed coordinated response and responsibility**	**Indicators for later review**
Low confidence with complex cases Professional capability; personal and reflective development; practice-based learning context; training and supervisory context.	CIT and supervisors compare the learning need with case complexity and available feedback. Academic and placement supervisors agree suitable case allocation, guided practice and review points.	Access to feedback; perceived preparedness; supervisor-rated skill and CIT-reported well-being assessed separately.
Missed supervision and mounting exhaustion Professional functioning and adaptability; personal wellness and self-regulation; organisational and practice environment; relational and practical supports.	The CIT, university coordinator and placement supervisor review timetable conflicts, workload, travel and costs. They agree on a workable schedule and any appropriate workload adjustments, and identify available practical assistance.	Attendance and access to supervision; manageable workload; unresolved access barriers; CIT-reported exhaustion and well-being.
Reluctance to disclose difficulties Personal and reflective development; personal wellness and self-regulation; training and supervisory context; relational and practical supports.	Supervisor explains assessment criteria and the purpose and limits of well-being conversations. CIT and supervisor identify usable support and appropriate referral options; programme leaders review recurring barriers to help-seeking.	Clarity of evaluative expectations; perceived ability to discuss difficulties; access to support; CIT experience of the response.

Universities can use such a review before placement and when difficulties arise, bringing together the CIT, academic supervisor, and placement representative to clarify learning goals, responsibilities, and available support. Placement organisations can contribute information about case demands, schedules, resources, and workplace expectations. Educators and supervisors should select indicators with CITs and adapt them to the setting. The indicators are intended to guide the review. They have yet to be validated and serve a different purpose from competence assessment.

Supervisors should clarify the purpose and limits of well-being discussions, as well as their role in evaluating competence [3,33,37]. A CIT's report of strain should prompt a discussion of support needs and the training conditions that may be contributing to it. Competence should be assessed separately. This distinction matters when reluctance to disclose difficulties may limit access to useful support. Supervisors remain responsible for assessing competence and ensuring appropriate client care.

Future research should assess whether the eight subdimensions are clear and useful for CITs and supervisors across training settings, including those in Malaysia, before treating them as measurement dimensions. Longitudinal studies could examine whether changes in coordination,

access, and CIT capacities precede changes in well-being. Comparative studies could then examine whether reviews guided by the framework add value to existing support. They could assess well-being, access to learning, and training experience as distinct outcomes.

9. Conclusion

This paper examines CIT well-being during the transition from higher education to professional counselling practice. The proposed framework comprises individual developmental resources and the professional learning ecosystem, each with four subdimensions. It distinguishes what CITs develop and do from the training conditions that enable or constrain their use of these capacities and practices.

The paper applies established ecological ideas to counsellor education. Its three propositions on training alignment, disclosure of difficulties, and practical access to training identify relationships to investigate and show where universities, supervisors, and placement organisations could coordinate their decisions. The framework can guide research and discussion. Its explanatory value, practical usefulness and applicability across cultural and institutional settings remain open to empirical examination.

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