

Personal trainers' perceptions of the UWorkItOut UWin program: An experiential learning opportunity for undergraduate Kinesiology students

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The UWorkItOut UWin program is a six-week exercise training and counselling intervention aimed to improve the mental health of university students. Previous research has demonstrated numerous benefits for those who participate in the program (e.g., decreased anxiety and depression symptoms; Muir et al., 2020, gained coping skills; Paré et al., 2023, increased physical activity levels; Paré et al., 2024). Given the vital role of the trainers in the UWorkItOut UWin program, it is important to understand their perspectives. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions and experiences of UWorkItOut UWin personal trainers. A phenomenological design was used to capture participants' individualized experiences of nine former trainers ($n = 6$ females, $M_{age} = 21.77$ years old, $SD = 2.11$ years, all undergraduate kinesiology students) through two sequential semi-structured interviews. Interviews focused on identifying skills trainers gained or developed while involved with the program and were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2019) reflexive thematic analysis. Trainers implemented behaviour change strategies to increase clients' motivation characterized through self-determination theory: 1) autonomy (e.g., individualization and adaptation of programming), 2) competence (e.g., increasing confidence, providing feedback), and 3) relatedness (e.g., communication skills, rapport building, and social support). In addition, trainers reported gaining "real-world" experience as a valuable asset of working in the program. Trainers gained a sense of professionalism through the development of leadership skills, patience, discipline, and the ability to apply knowledge in various settings. Furthermore, trainers had the opportunity to work with various populations (e.g., students with mental health challenges and international students). As such, trainers reported gaining a sense of cultural competence and mental health awareness. When designing interventions, researchers should consider incorporating undergraduate students into the process to enrich their academic learning and provide experiences to prepare students for their future careers.