YOUTH EMPLOYMENT & MENTAL HEALTH IN NORTHERN ONTARIO

EXPLORING THE SUPPORT NEEDS OF YOUTH WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES WHO ARE SEEKING EMPLOYMENT IN NORTHERN ONTARIO

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Lay Abstract

This study explores the support needs of youth with mental health issues who are seeking employment in Northern Ontario. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with eight youth and seven employment counsellor participants from Sudbury, Parry Sound and Thunder Bay. The analysis found that youth support needs extend beyond the realms of employment and mental health. Other major findings include: (1) youth experience a number of complex, intersecting vulnerabilities that interfere with their employment success, (2) employment counsellors play a critical role in supporting youth both inside and outside the workplace, and (3) both youth and employment counsellors have ideas about the types of programs that would be helpful for young people experiencing barriers to employment, as well as how those programs should be organized/delivered. The finding of this study suggest a need to re-evaluate the way health and social services are delivered to youth with complex, intersecting vulnerabilities in Northern Ontario.

Abstract

Introduction: Young people in northern communities experience several vulnerabilities related to employment and mental health. Although these vulnerabilities have been studied separately, very little research has been published on how they intersect. The present study focuses on youth aged 16-29 years who have experienced a self-identified mental health issue and are seeking employment in Northern Ontario. The purpose is to explore the interaction of employment and mental health challenges for youth living in northern communities, with a particular focus on youth support needs and youth service delivery preferences. **Methods:** Fifteen participants (eight youth and seven employment counsellors) were purposively sampled from a provincial youth employment program. Participants completed audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews about employment histories, mental health experiences and locally available services and supports. Transcripts were coded and analyzed using interpretive description methodology. **Results:** Three themes emerged from the analysis, conceptualized using the metaphor of an employment journey. The first theme, "roadblocks", captures the challenging life circumstances experienced by youth, including complexities related to geography, and describes how both can interfere with a young person's employment success. The second theme, "pit stops", describes the different ways youth come into contact with employment counsellors, and the critical role these individuals play in supporting young people in and out of the workplace. The final theme, "maps for success", outlines what would be helpful for youth and for the employment counsellors that support them. **Discussion & Conclusions:** Two key messages were elucidated from the results. First,

the support needs of youth are complex, multi-layered and interdependent. Second, youth employment services are inadequately resourced to support young job seekers with complex needs. Findings are limited in their transferability to other service delivery contexts. Recommendations on how to respond to the complex, intersecting vulnerabilities of youth in Northern Ontario are provided.

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List of Abbreviations

ADHD:	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
CAS:	Children's Aid Society
CMHA:	Canadian Mental Health Association
EO:	Employment Ontario
ICES:	Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences
ID:	Interpretive Description
ILO:	International Labour Organization
IPS:	Individual Placement and Support
JDC:	Job Demand-Control
JDCS:	Job Demand-Control-Support
JDR:	Job Demand-Resources
MAESD:	Ontario Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development
NEET:	Neither in education, employment or training
NOHFC:	Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation
OATC:	Ontario Addiction Treatment Centres
ODSP:	Ontario Disability Support Program
OECD:	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OW:	Ontario Works
OYJS:	Ontario Youth Jobs Strategy
Y-BEAT:	Youth Breakthrough to Employment and Training
YEF:	Youth Employment Fund

YJC:	Youth Job Connection
YMCA:	Young Men's Christian Association

Declaration of Academic Achievement

The following is a declaration that the content of the research in this document has been completed by Katrina Aguiar, and recognizes the contributions of Dr. Sandra Moll, Dr. Rebecca Gewurtz, Dr. Patty Solomon and Dr. Cheryl Missiuna. Katrina Aguiar contributed to the study conceptualization and design, completed and submitted the ethics application, and was responsible for data collection, data analysis and writing the contents of this thesis. Dr. Sandra Moll contributed to the study design and conceptualization, and assisted with the ethics application, data collection and analysis, writing and editing. Dr. Rebecca Gewurtz, Dr. Patty Solomon and Dr. Cheryl Missuna contributed to the study design and conceptualization, and provided critique and comments on the chapters of this thesis.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

The life phase "youth" is distinguished from the life phase "adulthood" as a time of transition; beginning in adolescence, young people experience changes in their biology, social status, roles and responsibilities, and institutional context (Arnett, 2000; Durkin, 1995; Hardgrove, Pells, Boyden & Dornan, 2014). For example, it is during this life phase that young people typically transition from education to employment (Hardgrove et al., 2014). It is also during this life phase that major decisions are made about identities, careers and relationships, often with enduring ramifications (Arnett, 2000). Given the profound changes and decisions that occur during "youth", it is not surprising that this life phase has been described as inherently vulnerable.

The term vulnerable denotes "susceptibility to adversities of one form or another" (Hardgrove et al., 2014, p. 2). There are a number of common vulnerabilities that youth experience. For example, their position in the labour market is often precarious, with youth unemployment rates well above the national average in high-, middle- and low-income countries (Hardgrove et al., 2014). Youth are also vulnerable to a range of mental health issues. In Ontario, approximately one in five youth are living with a mental health issue (Ontario Ministry of Children & Youth Services, 2014). Youth living in northern communities face additional vulnerabilities related to both mental health and employment (Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2014). Not only are youth who live in Northern Ontario at a disadvantage with respect to employment opportunities, they also face barriers to accessing health and human services, including lack of transportation and

limited availability of service providers (Boydell et al., 2006; Government of Canada, 2017c; Ward et al., 2005). Moreover, the number of youth who identify as Indigenous is higher in Northern Ontario (Abele & Delic, 2014; Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2014; Tilleczek, 2008). According to Menzies (2007), Indigenous youth continue to experience the trauma of Canada's residential school system. They also experience higher rates of homelessness, and are over-represented in the justice and child welfare systems (Nichols et al., 2017; Statistics Canada, 2016).

The paragraphs that follow provide a brief overview of the different ways that youth are vulnerable with respect to employment, mental health and geographic location.

Youth employment. According to the Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities (2014), young people in Ontario were disproportionately affected by the 2008 financial crisis. In fact, "in 2013, Ontario's youth unemployment rate was [as high as] 16 percent, more than double the general rate and well above the national youth unemployment rate" (Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities, 2014, p. 1). The situation does not appear to be much better for youth who find work, as young people are often forced into part-time or contract jobs for which they are overqualified based on their level of education (Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities, 2014). An added challenge for youth seeking employment relates to the growth of precarious work in the economy as a whole. Since youth are relatively new to the workforce, they tend to be employed in jobs that are poorly paid, insecure and unprotected (Foster, 2012; Vosko, Zukewich & Cranford, 2003). These non-standard, precarious jobs give youth little control over their job demands, with many frequently assigned the least desirable or most dangerous job tasks

(Breslin et al., 2006; McCloskey, 2008). Youth also tend to be unfamiliar with their employment rights and their ability to refuse unsafe work (Breslin, Polzer, MacEachen, Morrongiello & Shannon, 2007), with many choosing not to exercise such rights in fear of retribution or job loss (McCloskey, 2008; Tucker, Diekrager, Turner & Kelloway, 2014). As a result, they are vulnerable to a range of physical and psychosocial risks that can lead to chronic occupational stress and poor mental health (Law Commission of Ontario, 2012; Loughlin & Lang, 2005).

Youth mental health. An added source of vulnerability for youth relates to their risk for mental health and addiction issues. According to the World Health Organization (2005), mental ill health is the single most common cause of disability in young people. This holds true for the Canadian population in which 15-25% of residents will experience at least one mental health issue before the age of 19 (Butler & Pang, 2014). Furthermore, about 70% of all mental health issues begin in childhood or adolescence (Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2016).

The onset of a mental health issue can negatively impact how a young person functions at school and at work (Brown, 2011; Moll & Tregunno, 2014). The onset of first episode psychosis, for example, is frequently associated with declines in education and employment (Goulding, Chien & Compton, 2010). Moreover, approximately 50% of young people with psychosis have less than 10 years of education, thereby limiting their employment opportunities (Killackey, Jackson, & McGorry, 2008). Concerns have also been raised about the potential stress of work, and whether it might increase the risk of relapse among youth with mental health issues (Mortimer, 2010; Rinaldi et al., 2010).

Youth in Northern Ontario. Youth in Northern Ontario face additional challenges related to mental health and employment. The research examining the influence of place/geography on mental health and mental illness is emerging (DesMeules et al., 2006; Matsumoto et al., 2016; Rebeiro Gruhl, 2010; Rebeiro Gruhl, Kauppi, Montgomery & James, 2012). The Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES, 2015), for example, found rates of suicide to be six times higher among youth in Northern Ontario. The prevalence of alcohol and drug problems was also reported to be much higher (ICES, 2015). These challenges have important implications for youth with mental health issues who are transitioning to adulthood and seeking employment in Northern Ontario (Stewart et al., 2014).

Youth in northern communities are also limited in their access to health and human services (Canadian Mental Health Association [CMHA], 2009). For example, in comparison with large urban centres, very few occupational therapists work in Northern Ontario (Pitblado, 2007). There are also fewer physicians and community-based mental health professionals who work in northern communities (CMHA, 2009; Roberts, Hu, Axas & Repetti, 2017). These gaps highlight the need for creative service delivery strategies.

Youth employment centers and youth employment counsellors are one type of service designed to address the support needs of vulnerable youth in Northern Ontario. Although employment counsellors may not have any specialized mental health training, they have a mandate to support youth in search of meaningful employment (Siddiqui, 2009). From a cost perspective, youth employment counsellors are more accessible than

other community-based mental health professionals (British Columbia Integrated Youth Services Initiative, 2015). Similarly, youth are unlikely to seek professional help for their mental health and addiction issues but will seek help finding a job (Balin & Hirschi, 2010; Barman-Ashikari & Rice, 2014; Staiger, Waldmann, Rusch & Krumm, 2017). Thus, employment counsellors are in an ideal position to provide youth with proactive information and resources related to work and mental health. Partnering mental health providers with youth employment counsellors may also remove the stigma related to accessing a mental health-related resource and/or service (Bergeron, Poirier, Fournier, Roberge, & Barrette, 2005; Clement et al., 2015; Cometto, 2014; Gulliver, Griffiths & Christensen, 2010). However, prior to forming such a partnership, it is essential that the perspectives of young people seeking employment services and employment counsellors be thoroughly explored to understand how this relationship can be further leveraged.

1.2 Research Purpose & Question

This study focuses on youth aged 16-29 years who have experienced a self-identified mental health issue and are seeking employment in Northern Ontario. The purpose is to explore the interaction of employment and mental health challenges for youth living in northern communities, with a particular focus on youth support needs and youth service delivery preferences. The central research question is: "what are the support needs of youth with mental health issues who are seeking employment in Northern Ontario?"

1.3 Service Delivery Context

In order to examine the service delivery preferences of youth who are seeking

employment in Northern Ontario, an understanding of the youth employment services context is required. The sections that follow provide an overview of the Youth Job Connection Program, including a discussion on the program's history, delivery, components, and eligibility/suitability.

Program history. In 2013, the Government of Ontario announced the Ontario Youth Jobs Strategy (OYJS) (Ontario Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development [MAESD], 2016). The OYJS's principal aim was to create employment opportunities for youth aged 15-29, with an investment of 295 million dollars over two years (MAESD, 2016). Communication materials cited the recession as one of the major reasons for developing the strategy. According to the Ontario Ministry of Finance (2013), "despite job gains in Ontario since the end of the recession, Ontario's youth face persistently high unemployment… in 2012, the youth employment rate stood at 50 per cent, compared to 57 per cent in 2007" (p. 63).

The OYJS was made up of four major initiatives: the Youth Employment Fund (YEF), the Ontario Youth Entrepreneurship Fund, the Ontario Youth Innovation Fund, and the Business-Labour Connectivity and Training Fund (Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2013). The YEF was the largest of the four initiatives, investing 195 million dollars over two years. The other three initiatives invested 45 million, 30 million and 25 million, respectively (Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2013). The focus of the YEF was on creating opportunities for youth who experience multiple barriers to employment by providing four to six month job placements, as well as financial incentives to help offset employer

and employee expenses. The YEF is credited with creating over 26,000 job opportunities for youth between 2013 and 2015 (MAESD, 2016).

Building on the success of the YEF, the Ontario government announced a two-year extension of the OYJS in 2015 (MAESD, 2016). As part of the renewed strategy, two new youth employment programs were launched: the Youth Job Connection (YJC) Program and the Youth Job Link Program (MAESD, 2017). The former was developed to support young people who experience multiple and complex barriers to employment, while the latter provides youth with fewer barriers opportunities for career exploration (to increase knowledge of career options), career management (to improve job readiness), and job search/matching assistance services (MAESD, 2017).

Program overview. The YJC was designed to provide youth who experience barriers to employment an opportunity to learn about jobs and gain working experience (MAESD, 2015). The following are a few examples of employment barriers, as defined by YJC program guidelines: living in poverty or being homeless, having low levels of education and literacy, having limited labour market experience, having low motivation, and experiencing stigma and discrimination (MAESD, 2016). According to the MAESD (2016), the YJC fills the gap in youth employment programming for young people who are neither in education, employment or training (NEET).

The program consists of two components: (1) a year-round component for NEET youth aged 15-29 who experience significant barriers to employment, and (2) a summer component for youth aged 15-18 who are experiencing challenging life circumstances and require support transitioning between school and work (MAESD, 2017).

Program delivery. Third-party service providers who are part of the Employment Ontario (EO) network deliver the YJC program. EO is the province's employment, training and labour market services delivery system (MAESD, 2016). An example of a third-party service provider is the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA).

Within third-party service providers such as the YMCA are employment counsellors who are responsible for the facilitation of the YJC program. According to the National Occupational Classification of 2011, "employment counsellors provide assistance and information to job seeker clients on all aspects of employment search and career planning… they also provide information to employer clients regarding employment issues and human resources" (Government of Canada, 2017b, pp. 1). Employment counsellors are also responsible for completing initial client assessments (to obtain employment/education history and career goals); for identifying barriers to employment and assisting with such things as job readiness skills and resume writing; for assessing clients' need for rehabilitation, financial aid, and further training; and for consulting with community groups, agencies and other organizations involved in providing community-based career planning support (Government of Canada, 2017b). Essentially, employment counsellors are the gatekeepers to the EO system, identifying what path youth might take within the system, and directing their access to services.

It should be noted that different third-party service providers use different job titles to refer to the role of an employment counsellor, including: career development counsellors, labour market information consultants, employment outreach counsellors, workforce adjustment officers and career counsellors (Government of Canada, 2017b).

For consistency and for the purpose of this report, the term employment counsellor will be used.

Program components. The YJC program is made up of four components: (1) client service planning & coordination, (2) pre-employment services, (3) job matching, placement & incentives, and (4) education & work transitions support (MAESD, 2015). A brief discussion of each component is provided below.

Figure 1. YJC program components (adapted from the MAESD, 2015)

Client service planning & coordination. Client service planning and coordination is the initial point of contact for youth seeking employment services. As part of this component, third-party service providers explore youth career, employment and training goals. Service providers also work with youth to develop individualized employment plans, and provide case management and mentoring services (MAESD, 2016).

Pre-employment services. Participants must complete 60 hours of pre-employment workshops. Third-party service providers are required to organize and facilitate these workshops. All participants receive an hourly stipend at the provincial minimum wage while enrolled in pre-employment workshops. The stipend is intended to act as an incentive for youth to complete the pre-employment program (MAESD, 2016).

Job matching, placement & incentives. The program's third component focuses on providing the youth with job experience and with exposure to workplaces. All

participants must take part in at least one job placement. Job placements can only begin once the participant has completed 60 hours of pre-employment training. The maximum period for a single job placement is 26 weeks. However, multiple placements can be arranged. Approximately $7,500 is available per youth participant; these funds are used to incentivize employers, as well as offer individual training and employment supports to youth. For example, third party service providers can use the funds to cover the cost of the youth participant's wages while in a job placement. The funds can also be used to assist youth with childcare, transportation costs and purchasing work-appropriate clothing (MAESD, 2016).

Education & work transitions support. The program's last component provides youth with education and work transitions support; these supports bridge any early, critical transitions from the YJC to employment or further education. It is important to note that not all participants will require education and work transitions support. However, those who do, must have completed the workshop and job placement component, and have exited their YJC service plan. Examples of the supports and activities provided at this stage include one-on-one career counselling, creating/organizing networking events or activities, and recruiting/engaging mentors from the community (MAESD, 2016).

Eligibility and suitability. In order to be eligible for the YJC program, individuals must be:

- Between 15 and 29 years of age;
- A resident of Ontario;

- Eligible to work in Canada;
- Unemployed; and
- Not participating in full-time training or education (MAESD, 2016).

There are a few exceptions to the above listed criteria. For example, third-party service providers have the option to serve up to 10% of individuals who do not meet the last two criteria. However, exceptions must be considered reasonable and in line with the program's aim of serving youth with multiple employment barriers. It should also be noted that the Education Act requires individuals less than 18 years of age to be enrolled in school, unless legally excused. Therefore, individuals between 15 and 18 years of age must have graduated or be participating in a Supervised Alternative Learning Program (MAESD, 2016).

Although the YJC program is open to all eligible youth, the intention is to serve youth who are experiencing serious employment barriers, such as: youth that are racialized, who identify as lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/two-spirit/queer, who identify as Indigenous, youth living with disabilities or mental health issues, and/or recent immigrants (MAESD, 2016).

1.4 Terminology

There are several core concepts in this study that require discussion since these define the scope of the project, including: "youth", "mental health issue", "Northern Ontario", and "employment".

Youth. There is no clear consensus about how to define the term youth (Franke, 2010; Gaudet, 2007; Marshall 2012). Canadian statistics tend to define "youth" as

individuals between the ages of 15 and 24, while the African Youth Charter defines "youth" as individuals between the ages of 15 and 35 (Franke, 2010; United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization, 2017). An argument has also been made against using age criterion alone to define the term youth (Gaudet, 2007). For the purpose of this research study, "youth" is defined as individuals between the ages of 16 and 29 years. Although this differs from the definition used by Canadian statistics, it is in line with the definition used by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) when discussing NEET youth, and mirrors the definition used by the YJC program (Marshall 2012; MAESD, 2015).

Mental health issue. The Public Health Agency of Canada (2006) defines mental illness as "alterations in thinking, mood or behavior – or some combination thereof – that are associated with significant distress and impaired functioning" (p. 2). Interestingly, there is little agreement on the most respectful language to use when discussing issues related to mental health, mental illness and addiction (The Standing Senate Committee of Social Affairs, Science and Technology, 2006). This research used "mental health issue" rather than "mental illness" in an effort to remove the stigma that is sometimes associated with the term mental illness (Moll, 2010). It should be noted that addictions were included in the definition of a mental health issue. Although the academic literature sometimes discusses mental health and addiction issues as separate issues (Attridge & Wallace, 2009), they frequently co-occur, particularly among the youth population (Cappelli et al., 2016; Lubman, Allen, Rogers, Cementon & Bonomo, 2007; Priester et al., 2016; Skogen et al., 2014), and therefore were considered together for this research

study. Similarly, rather than set parameters for what constitutes a mental health issue (i.e., receiving a formal diagnosis), this research adopted the participants' self-definition. Lastly, there were no restrictions with respect to timing of experience; both current and past mental health experiences were considered for the purpose of this research study.

Northern Ontario. This research used the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC) definition of Northern Ontario. The NOHFC (2011) defines Northern Ontario as, "all areas north of, and including, the districts of Parry Sound and Nippising" (pp. 1). Comprised of 145 municipalities, 106 First Nations, and 10 territorial districts, this region covers 90% of Ontario's total land area (CMHA, 2009). A map demonstrating the Northern/Southern Ontario boundary is shown below.

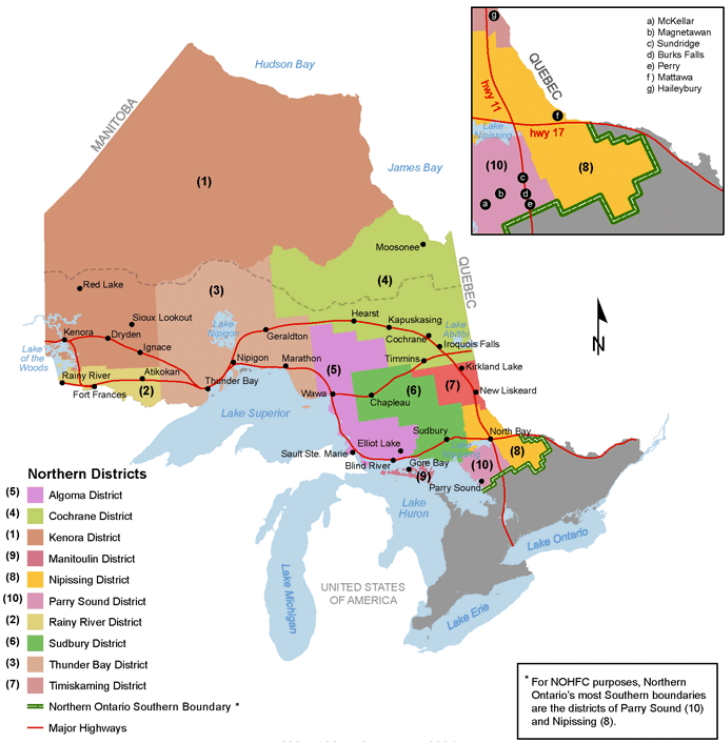

Figure 2. Map of Northern Ontario (adapted from the NOHFC, 2011)

Employment. This research used the definition of employment adopted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) at the 13th International Conference of Labour Statisticians. According to the ILO (1982), persons in employment include those who, for a specified period of time – either one week, one day or one hour – were in one of the following two categories: paid employment or self-employment. Paid employment refers to "persons who, by agreement, work for another resident institutional unit and receive a remuneration" (OECD, 2002, pp. 6), while self-employment refers to persons who are the sole or joint owners of the enterprises in which they work (ILO, 1982).

For the purpose of this thesis, "employment" also includes formal and informal work. Formal work is described as being employed by one company, having some type of work contract and/or agreement, having a set pay and/or benefits, having regular hours, and having a stable work location (Jokela, 2017). Informal work scenarios are those that have little to no job security, low wages, and limited working hours (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2006). Informal work can also refer to economic activities that are illegal or underground; "generally, the informal labour market refers to [the] production, distribution and consumption of goods and services that are not accounted for in formal measurements of the economy" (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2017, pp. 1). According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2006), individuals who live in deprived areas or in poverty are more likely to occupy informal jobs. Given that the youth who participated in this study experienced multiple barriers to employment (i.e., housing insecurity, mental health issues, low levels of education, etc.), this research expanded its definition of employment to include informal work.

1.5 Significance

This study will explore the barriers that youth in northern communities experience with respect to employment and mental health, as well as provide a starting point for understanding their unique support needs. It will fill a gap in research on the intersecting vulnerabilities of youth with mental health issues who are seeking employment in Northern Ontario, and a gap regarding youth service delivery preferences. The proposed research study is timely given the current focus and significant government investment (approximately $330 million annually) in youth employment programming (Government of Canada, 2017a). There are costs associated with not addressing mental illness and youth unemployment in Northern Ontario. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (2012), for example, has estimated the economic burden of mental illness in Canada to be approximately $51 billion annually. With respect to earnings lost, the rise in youth unemployment is equivalent to approximately $23 billion over the next 18 years, not including "the foregone value added that would have been generated by the production of goods and services by those who are not at work" (Schwerdtfeger, 2013, p. 4). Other losses include those that stem from the increase in crime and deterioration of health associated with higher unemployment (Schwerdtfeger, 2013). Lastly, employment is an important developmental milestone for young people (Moll & Tregunno, 2014); not being able to achieve this milestone can negatively affect self-esteem and motivation, "leaving some youth permanently disadvantaged" (Hardgrove et al., 2014, p. 19). It is well documented that youth in Northern Ontario are at a disadvantage with respect to employment opportunities and mental health outcomes; thus, beginning to understand

their unique support needs makes sense both from a societal cost and individual development perspective.

1.6 Organization of Thesis

This thesis is organized and presented in five chapters. The present chapter serves as an introduction to the phenomenon of interest and the research question. The present chapter also includes a thorough discussion of the policy context of the YJC program, reviews the terminology that will be used throughout this report, and outlines the study's significance. The second chapter reviews literature in the areas of: youth employment, occupational stress models, the interconnections of employment and mental health, vocational rehabilitation, and the influence of place on employment and mental health. The third chapter presents an overview of the theoretical framework, methodology, and methods used to guide and conduct this research study. Key findings are reviewed in the fourth chapter; a total of three themes are presented. The fifth and final chapter offers a discussion of the research findings, implications of the research study, as well as study strengths, limitations and future research directions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Overview

In order to situate this study within the current research and theoretical literature, an overview will be provided of youth employment trends and theories that inform our understanding of stress, work and health. Next, the linkages between employment and mental health will be discussed, followed by a review of employment support models for individuals with mental health issues. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of how place/geography influences employment and mental health.

2.2 Youth Employment

Unemployment & underemployment. Since the economic downtown of 2008, youth unemployment rates have risen significantly in Canada and abroad (Bell & Blanchflower, 2011; Foster, 2012; Hollywood, Edgell & McQuiad, 2012). In fact, in 2012, the Canadian unemployment rate for individuals aged 15 to 24 was 2.4 times higher than the rate for individuals aged 25 to 54 (Bernard, 2013). According to Bernard (2013), this was the biggest age-related unemployment gap observed since 1977, a trend he credits to youth unemployment rates not returning to their pre-recession levels. Youth living in Ontario appear to be at a particular disadvantage. In a report prepared by the Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities in 2014, the youth employment rate in Ontario was said to be hovering around the 50 percent mark. These authors state that in order to return to pre-recession levels, approximately 90,000 jobs would need to be created for youth in Ontario. Ontario's youth job market has been described as "the worst in the country outside of Atlantic Canada" (Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities, 2014, p.

1). It should be noted, however, that the labour force participation of youth has always been lower than that of adults, in part due to youth being more likely to be laid off, and youth periodically leaving the workforce to attend school full-time (Bernard, 2013).

Having a job does not necessarily mean that an individual is paid well or that the job matches their competencies. An added challenge for young people seeking employment is the frequency with which they have to occupy jobs for which they are overqualified, with estimates suggesting that more than one in four young workers in Canada are underemployed (Foster, 2012). With respect to post-secondary graduates, approximately 33 percent move into low-skilled jobs, while half of all youth work in the retail and hospitality sectors – jobs characterized by part-time hours, low pay, high demands, low control, lack of security, and inadequate training (Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities, 2014). Moreover, the number of young people that hold onto these jobs for extended periods of time appears to be growing, as youth continue to struggle to find meaningful, full-time employment (Casey, 2016; Foster, 2012; Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities, 2014). There are also significant inequalities observed among youth seeking employment (Foster, 2012; Hollywood et al., 2012). For example, although young people with a post-secondary education are more likely to be in the labour force than older workers with a post-secondary education, they are also more likely to be precariously employed (Foster, 2012). Young people without a post-secondary education are further disadvantaged; less than one quarter will obtain full-time, permanent employment, compared to one-third of older workers with comparable qualifications (Foster, 2012).

The consequences of youth unemployment and underemployment are not a temporary problem. Studies have shown that long-spells of youth unemployment and underemployment result in persistently lower earnings and negatively impact career development, self-esteem, and overall health and well-being (Dieckhoff, 2011; Hardgrove et al., 2014). At the macroeconomic level, youth unemployment and underemployment reduces gross domestic product growth through loss of human capital and lowered productivity (Casey, 2016). Addressing youth unemployment and underemployment thus makes sense from a decent work, human rights and economic perspective (Hollywood et al., 2012; International Labour Office, 2005).

Precarious & hazardous employment. The ILO (2011) defines precarious employment as jobs that lack security, protection and basic employee rights. Different terms have been used to refer to precarious jobs (Cranford, Vosko & Zukewich, 2003). For example, some researchers use the term non-standard work. However, the term non-standard work focuses solely on employment that is part-time, temporary or seasonal in nature (Cranford et al., 2003). Cranford et al. (2003) argue that researchers should examine the dimensions of insecure employment, rather than focus on the different forms of employment (i.e. part-time, temporary and/or self-employment). This was the approach taken by the Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario study (Lewchuk et al., 2014). As part of this study, researchers developed an index that included both direct and indirect measures of employment insecurity. Examples of some of the measures used include: (a) income level and variability, (b) scheduling and hours of work, and (c) periods without employment (Lewchuk et al., 2014).

As mentioned previously, youth have been disproportionately affected by the growth of precarious employment in Canada. According to Foster (2012), youth are increasingly employed in jobs that are low-wage, non-unionized, and temporary or part-time in nature. LaRochelle-Côté (2013) provides further support for the precarious employment situation experienced by youth in Canada, noting that in 2007, 23 percent of non-student employees (aged 16-29) were involved in some type of employment instability. A Broadbent Institute survey reported that millennials believed their futures would be characterized by precarious and short-term work contracts (Friesen, 2014). These and other accounts of rising youth employment precarity reveal the gravity of the situation. As stated by Bedard (2015), "to young workers, stability and security in employment seem like nostalgic memories of previous generations" (p. 13).

Youth are also at a disadvantage with respect to hazardous employment. Not only are young people employed in jobs within which they have very little control, they are also frequently assigned the most hazardous job tasks (Breslin et al., 2006; McCloskey, 2008). Even more worrisome is the "part-of-the-job" mentality that many youth demonstrate with respect to workplace injuries (Breslin et al., 2007). Breslin et al. (2007) related this mentality to youths' subordinate status and the perceived inability to improve working conditions. This same group of authors reported that when youth do voice their concerns about hazardous work, their concerns "are effectively silenced, and [that] this silencing… has gendered dimensions" (p. 790). For example, female complaints tend to be dismissed or minimized, whereas males stifle their complaints in an effort to appear

mature and capable. Other reasons for not reporting unsafe or hazardous work include fear of retribution and job loss (Tucker et al., 2014).

Little is known about how precarious and hazardous employment affects a young person's stress level and overall mental health and well-being. While evolving research reveals that a number of youth seeking employment experience moderate to high mental distress (Moll, Aguiar & Vasilevska, 2017), the most effective supports for youth in search of meaningful employment remains unknown. Moreover, while a lack of employment supports is said to interfere with employment success (Moll et al., 2017), youth perspectives on what supports would be most helpful still needs to be explored.

2.3 Theoretical Models

There are several theoretical models that attempt to explain the relationship between stress, work and health. The Job Demand-Control (JDC) model, proposed by Robert Karasek in 1979, is widely cited and supported by considerable research evidence. Despite being narrower in focus than a theory (Carpiano & Daley, 2005), Karasek's model has dominated research in the occupational stress literature (de Jonge, van Vegchel, Shimazu, Schaufeli & Dormann, 2010). The sections that follow provide an in-depth review of the JDC model, including alternate/expanded versions.

The Job Demand-Control Model. Karasek's (1979) JDC model focuses primarily on two psychosocial job characteristics: job demands and job control. The former includes time pressures and heavy workloads, while the latter refers to an employee's ability to control what happens in the workplace (de Jonge, Bosma, Peter & Siegrist, 2000). Job control is sometimes referred to as decision latitude, and is made up

of the following sub-components: decision authority (i.e., control over a situation) and skill discretion (i.e., the ability to use different skills while at work) (Landsbergis, 1988).

The interaction of demands and control results in four types of jobs: low-strain, high-strain, passive and active (Huang, Feuerstein & Sauter, 2002). Low-strain jobs are characterized by low demands and high decision latitude, while high-strain jobs are characterized by high demands and low decision latitude. Similarly, passive jobs involve the combination of low demands and low decision latitude, while active jobs involve the combination of high demands and high decision latitude. Of the four job types possible, it is hypothesized that high-strain situations place workers at the greatest risk for illness (Huang et al., 2002; Karasek, 1979). This prediction is known as the strain hypothesis. The second hypothesis, known as the buffer hypothesis, predicts that demands and control combine multiplicatively, with high control compensating for the negative impact of high work demands on employee health (Hausser, Mojzisch & Schulz-Hardt, 2011).

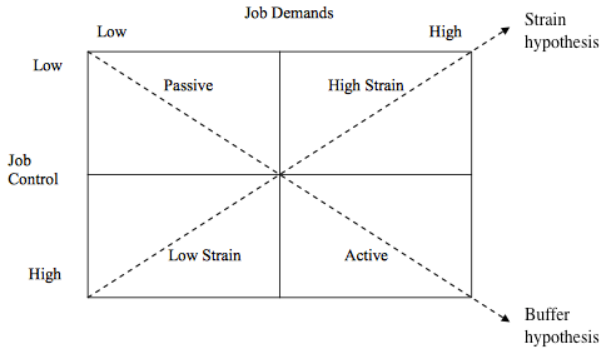

Figure 3. Karasek's JDC model (adapted from Karasek, 1979)

There are a number of strengths associated with using the JDC model. The most widely cited strength is its simplicity. According to Korver (2008), "it does not explode

the complex world of work in an endless series of factors…" (p. 91). This simplicity makes the JDC model easy to use, easy to test, and increases the practical implications that can be gleaned from it (Kain & Jex, 2010). There is also strong empirical support for the model's core assumption (Notelaers, Baillien, de Witte, Einarsen, & Vermunt, 2013). According to Van der Doef and Maes (1999), who reviewed over 20 years of empirical research, there is considerable evidence for the strain hypothesis. Lastly, the model has been used extensively over the past 30 years. The JDC model has been applied in a number of countries, across both genders and within different age groups (Schaubroeck, Lam & Xie, 2000; Schultz, Wang, Crimmins & Fisher, 2010).

While some researchers have identified the model's simplicity as a strength, others view it as a weakness. Johnson and Hall (1988) argue that there are additional resources for coping with job stress beyond job control. Bakker, van Veldhoven and Xanthopoulou (2010) support this view, highlighting the model's inability to capture the complexity of work environments. It is also unclear "whether the effects of demands and control are additive or multiplicative" (Dewe, O'Driscoll & Cooper, 2012, p. 33); researchers appear to be split on this issue, and there is evidence for both viewpoints. The definition of control has also been raised as an area of concern by some researchers. For example, Kasl (1996) questions whether job control refers to objective control over the work situation, or whether it is more subjective in nature. It is also not clear whether objective or subjective control is the crucial variable in regulating work stress reactions (Dewe et al., 2012; Kasl, 1996).

In an effort to address some of these weaknesses, alternate/expanded versions of

the JDC model have been proposed. Two of the more well-known alternate/expanded versions are briefly described below.

The Job Demand-Control-Support Model. The most well-known expanded version is the Job Demand-Control-Support (JDCS) model, proposed by Johnson and Hall in 1988 and Karasek and Theorell in 1990. This model added social support to the list of variables that affect a person's psychosocial well-being at work (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). The addition of this variable was based on extensive research outlining the role that social support can play in alleviating occupational stress (de Lange, Taris, Kompier, Houtman & Bongers, 2003; Sargent & Terry, 2000). This expanded model also led to a third hypothesis, the iso-strain hypothesis, which states that psychosocial strain will occur when control and support are low and demands are high (Van der Doef & Maes, 1999).

It is important to note that Johnson and Hall (1988) focused primarily on support provided by colleagues and supervisors. However, the workplace is often not a source of strong social relations for youth and adolescents (Eiken & Saksvik, 2010). There are several possible explanations for this finding. With respect to youth who are working and going to school, the school environment may be their primary source of social support. Additionally, given that youth tend to be employed in precarious jobs, their inconsistent work schedule may prevent them from developing close relationships with their colleagues and supervisors (Eiken & Saksvik, 2010). Thus, in order to better understand how the strain and buffer hypotheses apply to youth, the social support variable needs to be further developed. One way to do this is to consider how peer support influences the

experience of stress and ill mental health among young workers. According to Helsen, Vollebergh and Meeus (2000), peer relationships assume increasing importance during the course of adolescence.

The Job Demand-Resources Model. A fair amount of research has also been published using the Job Demand-Resources (JDR) model, proposed by Bakker and Demerouti in 2006. The JDR model attempts to integrate the stress and motivation research traditions (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). The model's main assumption is that every job has its own unique risk factors associated with occupational stress (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). These risk factors can be divided into two categories: job demands and job resources. Job demands refer to the aspects of work that require continued effort and skills and are thus associated with certain costs. Job resources, on the other hand, refer to the aspects of work that help employees attain goals, decrease demands and stimulate growth and development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Simply put, "job demands are initiators of a health impairment process and job resources are initiators of a motivational process" (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011, p. 1). The model's second core assumption is that stress will occur when specific job demands are high and specific job resources are low (Bakker, Demerouti & Euwema, 2005). Thus, whereas Karasek's (1979) model states that control may reduce the impact of work stress, the JDR model states that demands and control may interact in predicting job stress (Bakker et al., 2005).

Although the consideration of available resources is important, Bakker and Demerouti (2007) focused exclusively on resources available within the workplace. However, these authors paid little attention to the personal resources that employees

bring with them to work, overlooking the mediating role of self-esteem on stress (Mäkikangas & Kinnunen, 2003). According to Lee, Joo and Choi (2012), individuals with low self-esteem tend to view their work environments as uncontrollable, increasing their risk for depression and other mental health issues. The mediating role of self-esteem on stress in youth has also been investigated (Dumont & Provost, 1999; Friedlander, Reid, Shupak & Cribbie, 2007). Numerous studies have found that disturbances in self-esteem contribute to psychosomatic symptoms and high levels of stress (Birndorf, Ryan, Auinger & Aten, 2005; Schraml, Perski, Grossi & Simonsson-Sarnecki, 2011). The moderating role of young worker resilience on job stress should also be considered. Kinman and Grant (2005), who explored stress resilience in trainee social workers, support this view. These authors found a significant negative relationship between resilience and job stress among early career social workers.

Application to youth. The JDC model has been underutilized to understand the workplace experiences of youth; researchers in Europe, however, have recognized its applicability. In 2009, Verhofstadt, De Witte and Omey used the JDC to study job mobility among youth. These authors concluded that although high strain employment situations are only temporary for some young workers, there is a substantial segment of this working population that will remain in high stress work. Two years prior, this same group of researchers used the JDC to study the experience of occupational stress among youth transitioning into the workplace (De Witte, Verhofstadt & Omey, 2007). Findings from this study provide support for both the strain and buffer hypotheses. Although support for the buffer hypothesis is mixed in the adult literature (Van de Doef & Maes,

1999), these authors suggest that because young workers have limited employment experience, when confronted with demands, they adjust themselves to the characteristics of the job.

In summary, there are currently no existing occupational stress models that were developed specifically for use with young workers. However, the JDC model and its later revisions show promise for understanding the experiences of youth in the workplace. Karasek's 1979 model is sensitive to the environmental stressors commonly experienced by youth at work (de Bruin & Taylor, 2006; Peterson, 2009), while both the JDCS and JDR models have the potential to account for some of the factors that may help mediate the experience of occupational stress among youth. A gap remains, however, regarding how a preexisting mental health issue can influence the experience of occupational stress among youth. Similarly, the JDC model and its later revisions do not take into account the influence of place and how challenges related to geography impact workplace stress among youth. Nonetheless, and in the absence of an overarching occupational stress theory, the JDC is a useful model to understand the workplace stressors and by extension, support needs, of youth with mental health issues who are seeking employment in Northern Ontario.

2.4 Employment & Mental Health

Influence of employment on mental health. Employment has been shown to have a significant impact on an individual's physical, mental and social well-being (Dunn, Wewiorski & Rogers, 2008). Employment contributes to a person's identity, provides income, and can make a person feel that he or she is playing a useful role in

society (Razzano et al., 2005; World Health Organization, 2005). For individuals who are living with a mental health issue, employment can present unique challenges, but it is also considered important to the recovery process and to maintaining mental health and well-being (Modini et al., 2016; Rebeiro Gruhl, 2010; Walsh & Tickle, 2013). A study examining the meaning of employment for individuals in recovery from a severe mental health issue found that consumers considered employment to be an integral component of their recovery plan (Dunn et al., 2008). It also offers a way for consumers to participate in their community (Waghorn & Lloyd, 2005).

Although not the focus of the present study, this research acknowledges that there are certain work conditions that can contribute to poor mental health (i.e., organizational culture, workload management, engagement, etc.) (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, 2018). Not all work conditions are supportive, therefore it is important to consider both the positive and negative impact that work can have on mental health.

Influence of unemployment on mental health. The consequences of unemployment and job loss can be devastating. Research has shown that individuals experiencing unemployment have a reduced life expectancy and significantly more health concerns than those who are working (Public Health Agency of Canada, 1999). Milner, Page and LaMontagne (2014) found unemployment to be associated with a significantly higher relative risk of suicide prior to adjusting for existing mental health issues. These authors note that although the relative risk decreased after adjustment, it remained statistically significant (Milner et al., 2014). Mental health is thus both a consequence of and risk factor for unemployment (Olesen, Butterworth, Leach Kelaher & Pirkis, 2013).

With respect to youth, Strandh, Winefield, Nilsson and Hammarstrom (2014) reported a long-term relationship between unemployment and mental health. Using the Northern Swedish Cohort, a 27-year prospective cohort study, these authors found youth unemployment to be associated with poor mental health at age 21, 30 and 42. According to Thern, de Munter and Hemmingsson (2017), youth unemployment is associated with an increased risk for developing a mental health issue, independent of national unemployment rates. For all of these reasons, employment has been recognized as a fundamental social determinant of health (Public Health Agency of Canada, 1999).

Employment trajectories for youth with mental health issues. There have been few studies conducted regarding the employment trajectories of youth living with mental health issues. Instead, researchers have focused on school-to-work transitions for youth with mental health issues, with a well-accepted belief that the onset of a mental health issue can interfere with transition into employment (Moll & Tregunno, 2014; Vander Stoep et al., 2000; Woolsey & Katz-Leavy, 2008). For example, a study conducted by Veldman, Reijneveld, Verhulst, Ortiz and Bültmann (2017) found that, "among young adults who had a paid job at the age of 22 (and were not students or unemployed), those with a history of internalizing problems [were] less likely to transition successfully into the labor market" (p. 315). Goulding et al. (2010) reported a similar finding, noting that first episode psychosis is frequently associated with declines in education and employment. Killackey, Jackson, Gleeson, Hickie and McGorry (2006) explain that by the time youth with early onset psychosis come into contact with a mental health service provider, 50 to 70 percent are unemployed, with unemployment rates rising dramatically

during the first few years of treatment. According to Rinaldi et al. (2010), low expectations and lack of support from family and friends may also contribute to low unemployment numbers.

A similar employment situation is observed for youth with substance abuse issues. Huang, Evans, Hara, Weiss and Hser (2011) used data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth and found that early-initiation drug users were more likely to demonstrate consistently lower levels of employment. Richardson, DeBeck, Feng, Kerr and Wood (2014) reported a similar finding. These researchers used data from the At-Risk Youth Study, a longitudinal study that follows youth aged 14-26 who have experience with illicit drug use, and found a lack of employment among street-involved youth to be associated with initiation of injection drug use. Hara, Huang, Weiss and Hser (2013) provide further support, reporting "a negative correlation of marijuana-use with level of employment" at age 23 for both males and females. In general, uptake of best practices for successful youth trajectories into early adulthood has improved since the 1980s (Wagner & Davis, 2006). However, youth with mental health issues continue to perform poorly in school and experience low rates of post-school employment, which points to the need for "greater implementation of best practices and additional research regarding practice efficacy with this population" (Wagner & Davis, 2006, p. 96).

2.5 Vocational Rehabilitation Models

A number of different vocational rehabilitation models have been utilized to try to improve employment rates for individuals with mental health issues, including the clubhouse model, the sheltered work model, and the social firm model (Lloyd, 2010).

Traditional models such as the clubhouse model tend to be stepwise in nature, with a prevailing belief that it is necessary to train individuals prior to placing them in employment (Lloyd, 2010). However, there is now an extensive body of literature supporting an alternative approach (to place an individual and then provide the necessary training) (Bond & Drake, 2014; Bond, Drake & Becker, 2008; Druss, 2014). The Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model, first studied in 1996 by a group of researchers in New Hampshire, is now considered the gold standard with respect to vocational rehabilitation (Drake & Bond, 2011; Drake, McHugo, Becker, Anthony & Clark, 1996; Lloyd, 2010). The IPS model focuses on consumer preferences, rapid job search, the integration of mental health and employment services, and individualized job supports and counselling (Bond, 2004; Bond, McHugo, Becker, Rapp & Whitley, 2008).

In order to understand how to best support youth with mental health issues who are seeking employment in Northern Ontario, an exploration of existing vocational rehabilitation models is required. The sections that follow provide an in-depth review of the IPS model, including revised and hybrid versions. Vocational rehabilitation programs and models designed specifically for youth are also examined.

Individual placement and support. The IPS model, developed by Deborah Becker and Robert Drake, is an evidence-based vocational rehabilitation approach that focuses on helping individuals living with severe mental health issues find and maintain employment (Corbiere & Lecomte, 2009; Hoffman, Jackel, Glauser, Mueser & Kupper, 2014; Lloyd, 2010). The goal of the IPS is competitive employment, defined as jobs that pay at least minimum wage that anyone can apply for (Corbiere & Lecomte, 2009). The

IPS model has demonstrated superiority to alternative models and is currently considered a gold standard with respect to vocational rehabilitation (Lloyd, 2010).

Unlike traditional models that utilize a train and place approach, the IPS encourages rapid job acquisition (Corbiere & Lecomte, 2009). According to Becker and Drake (2003), the key is to find an employment opportunity that matches an individual's interests, skills, and unique qualities rather than prepare and/or train an individual prior to placing them in employment. These authors provide the example of an individual who struggles with hygiene being placed in an outdoor job, rather than being instructed to bathe daily, apply deodorant and wear new clothes in preparation for an indoor job.

Within the IPS model, employment specialists join mental health teams and collaborate with clinicians to ensure that competitive employment is included in the treatment plan of clients that are interested in working. These same specialists have also been known to assist with supported education; however, the emphasis is usually on competitive employment, as this tends to be the primary goal of mental health clients (Becker & Drake, 2003). Bringing together employment and mental health specialists offers a number of practical advantages when compared to other ways of organizing vocational services (Drake, Bond, Goldman, Hogan & Karakus, 2016). For example, in many settings, issues such as lack of service integration, diversity of team approaches, and clinical/financial crisis undermine efforts to support competitive employment as the separation of employment and mental health services continues to be the norm (Becker & Drake, 2003). However, the academic literature has repeatedly shown that the separation of these services results in miscommunication, poor coordination, and high rates of

dropout (Drake et al., 2016; Harding, Strauss, Hafez, & Liberman, 1987; Hoffman et al., 2014; Marshall et al., 2014). The IPS approach has the ability to overcome these challenges through bringing together employment and mental health specialists in regularly scheduled meetings within the same programs (Becker & Drake, 2003).

There are some potential disadvantages associated with utilizing an IPS approach, particularly when working with youth. As previously discussed, the IPS model incorporates employment specialists into the mental health treatment team. However, studies have shown that young people are reluctant to seek professional mental health help; thus, youth may not reap the employment benefits because they might hesitate to access employment supports that are linked to mental health services (French, Reardon & Smith, 2003; Rickwood, Deane, Wilson & Ciarrochi, 2005; Vanheusden et al., 2008). In fact, researchers in Australia reported a youth mental health helping-seeking rate of only two percent in 1994 (French et al., 2003). Several other researchers have shown that young people forgo mental health treatment because they believe treatment will be ineffective and/or that people who seek treatment are weak (Corrigan, 2004; Curtis, 2010; Komiti, Judd, & Jackson, 2006). Youth engagement difficulties are also reflected in attrition rates. According to Armbruster and Kazdin (1994), between 30 and 60 percent of youth who present to a mental health treatment clinic do not complete treatment.

The situation is exacerbated for youth considered to be at-risk. French at al. (2003) explains that when at-risk youth are exposed to multiple risk factors (i.e. homelessness, contact with the justice system, substance abuse, etc.), they often experience a disconnection from "the key institutions of mainstream society" (p. 530).

Thus, while the IPS model is certainly preferred to earlier vocational rehabilitation models, exploring alternate delivery settings (other than within the mental health system) may be beneficial, particularly for the younger population who may not fully identify with the mental health service system.

Other models. Various hybrid and/or refined versions of the IPS model exist, including combining the IPS with motivational interviewing and refining the IPS so that it is time-limited (i.e. IPS-LITE) (Burns et al., 2015; Corbiere & Lecomte, 2009; Larson, 2008). These modifications are meant to address some challenges associated with utilizing an IPS approach. For example, Larson (2008) argues that although the IPS is effective in helping those determined to work secure a job, it lacks components to support individuals who are ambivalent about finding or continuing work. As such, he proposes a framework that integrates the IPS and motivational interviewing, favouring one approach over the other depending on the stages of change. For example, at the pre-contemplation stage, Larson (2008) encourages employment specialists to use motivational interviewing. At the determination, action and/or maintenance stage, however, supported employment is preferred. According to Hoskins (2017), youth are ambivalent about the fluid nature of the employment market; thus, combining the IPS with motivational interviewing shows promise for the young worker population.

Researchers have also looked at how to make the IPS less resource intensive. In a randomized controlled trial that compared standard IPS with a time-limited version, Burns et al. (2015) reported both versions to be equally effective, with standard IPS achieving minimal extra employment beyond the 9-month cutoff mark. Burns et al.

(2015) also calculated the potential impact of discharge on capacity over an 18-month period and found that two IPS-LITE workers would support 91 patients compared to 69 patients with standard IPS; "the two IPS-LITE workers would [thus] get 35.81 patients back into employment and the two IPS workers would achieve 30.64, equivalent to a 17% increase in efficiency" (p. 355). The potential increase in efficiency makes the IPS-LITE a model worthy of consideration for communities with severe resource restrictions such as those in Northern Ontario.

Supported employment for youth with mental health issues. Although there have been few studies published on the benefits of supported employment for youth with mental health issues, the benefits have certainly been recognized by employment service providers. An example of this recognition is the Lighthouse Project, a recently developed program designed to deliver enhanced employment services to youth living with mental health issues (British Columbia Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017). The Lighthouse Project was created at an employment centre in Toronto, Ontario, in partnership with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, and is delivered through small group workshops and one-on-one career counseling sessions. The following are some of the many services offered by the project/program: career exploration/planning, labour market research, resume/cover letter development, interview preparation, yoga/stress management, exploring disclosure/accommodations, and 12 weeks of paid employment placements (YES Employment Services, n.d.). In its pilot year, the Lighthouse Project provided over 55 youth with pre-employment training, supported over 40 youth in finding a full-time job placement, offered free mental wellness programming,

and had one of the highest success rates of all programs offered at the pilot centre location. In its second year, the project provided 60 youth with pre-employment training, supported over 48 youth in finding a full-time job placement, and continued to offer free weekly mental health programming (British Columbia Centre for Employment Excellence, 2017). However, the longer-term outcomes are unknown at this time.

A second example is the recently developed Youth Breakthrough to Employment and Training (Y-BEAT) model within the British Columbia Integrated Youth Services Initiative (Barbic et al., 2017). Y-BEAT is 16-week supported employment/education model targeting youth living with mental health issues. Barbic et al. (2017) used a pre-post design to evaluate the effectiveness of Y-BEAT in five cohorts of youth; a total of 52 youth completed the Y-BEAT program, 79 percent of which maintained improvements in employment and education at 16 weeks (Barbic et al., 2017). These researchers also observed improvements in symptomology, personal recovery, and quality of life at 16 weeks compared to baseline (Barbic et al., 2017). Although the longer-term outcomes are still under review, the program's completion and success rates were higher than the norm (S. Barbic, personal communication, February 5, 2018). Thus, this study provides preliminary evidence to support a community-based intervention that concurrently addresses the employment, education, and mental health support needs of youth within the employment services system.

2.6 Influence of Place

Influence of place on employment. The employment challenges experienced by residents of Northern Ontario are not new. A 2003 census research paper revealed that

between 1996 and 2001, employment in Northern Ontario decreased (Northern Ontario Training Boards, 2003). This same report revealed that while some areas fared better than others (i.e. the District of Kenora), in general, this decline has been occurring since 1991 (Northern Ontario Training Boards, 2003). A similar report, prepared by Chris Southcott, analyzed labour force participation trends between 2001 and 2006. According to Southcott (2007), although employment grew from 2001 to 2006, it continues to be lower than for Ontario as a whole. Additionally, the region has not completely recovered from the economic crisis of 2008/2009, effectively erasing any progress made in the 2001-2006 census period. In fact, a Fraser Institute study analyzing labour market performance in post-recession Ontario reported that average annual employment growth has been slightly negative from 2010-2015 in northern communities (Eisen & Emes, 2016). The recession has thus taken a further toll on an already struggling regional economy.

Given these employment trends, it is not surprising that the out-migration rate of youth in Northern Ontario remains high (Northern Policy Institute, 2017). Researchers have speculated youth out-migration to be the result, at least in part, of the lack of employment opportunities for young people (Robichaud, 2013; Northern Policy Institute, 2017; Southcott, 2007). To address these trends, significant investments have been made in youth employment programming in Northern Ontario. For example, in March 2017, the federal government announced that 48 youth would participate in the Young Adults in Action Project (Government of Canada, 2017c). This project was designed to help youth in Geraldton and Longlac develop a wide range of job skills (Government of Canada, 2017c). A slightly different youth employment program was launched by the

Northern Ontario Research, Development, Ideas and Knowledge Institute at Algoma University in 2014 (Kelly, 2014). This pan-Northern Ontario program encourages youth to consider social entrepreneurship as a way to create employment opportunities in their communities (Kelly, 2014). However, despite recent efforts, youth who live in this geographic area continue to experience significant employment barriers (Government of Canada, 2017c).

Influence of place on mental health. Residents of Northern Ontario also experience a number of place-related mental health challenges (Al-Hamad & O'Gorman, 2015). For example, the CMHA (2009) describes the mental health service system in Northern Ontario as fragmented, less comprehensive and inaccessible. This is alarming given that, compared to the provincial average, residents of Northern Ontario report higher rates of fair or poor mental health (CMHA, 2009). Self-reported rates of depression and use of medications is also higher in northern communities (CMHA, 2009). Unfortunately, the situation does not appear to improve when considering the region's younger residents. The ICES (2015), for example, found suicide rates and the prevalence of alcohol and drug problems to be higher among youth in Northern Ontario. From a service provider perspective, both formal and informal, the greatest challenges relate to geographical and social isolation, and workload. Other service provider barriers/challenges include lack of self-care resources, lack of sustained funding, and high personnel and staff turnover (O'Neill, George & Sebok, 2013). Mental health challenges in Northern Ontario also intersect with culturally appropriate care, "as the legacy of colonization, oppression and cultural discontinuity have been linked to

increased rates of mental illness in many Aboriginal communities" (Al-Hamad & O'Gorman, 2015, p. 7). Taken together, these trends provide a cogent argument for the influence of place on mental health, as well as the need to improve mental health services in Northern Ontario.

Influence of place on employment & mental health. Studies analyzing the influence of place on access to employment for individuals living with a mental health issue are sparse (Rebeiro Gruhl, 2010). Recently, however, researchers in Sudbury have begun investigating this issue. Rebeiro Gruhl et al. (2012) examined the experience of access to competitive employment for individuals with severe mental health issues in two Northeastern Ontario communities. These researchers found place to influence access to employment in five different ways, including issues related to access to employment services, lack of evidence-based practices, lack of a local plan for employment supports, limited personnel dedicated to providing employment services, and inadequate financial supports for employment success. These authors thus provide a compelling argument for the need to take into account place when providing vocational rehabilitation services.

2.7 Summary of Existing Knowledge

In summary, youth are vulnerable within the employment realm in a number of different ways. Young people experience high levels of unemployment and underemployment, which research has demonstrated negatively impacts mental health. Young people are also at a disadvantage with respect to precarious and hazardous employment. However, there are gaps in the literature regarding how precarious and hazardous employment affects a young person's mental health. Preliminary findings have

shown that young people seeking employment experience moderate to high levels of mental distress, but how to best support youth who are experiencing mental distress in their search for meaningful employment remains unknown. Even less is known about youth experiencing similar circumstances who live in Northern Ontario, where employment prospects are poorer and mental health prevalence is higher compared to the province as a whole. Models of occupational stress point to the importance of exploring job demands, perceived controls, social support and resilience and its impact on job performance and health and well-being.

The employment trajectories of young people with mental health issues are understudied; instead, researchers have focused on school-to-work transitions. In terms of employment intervention approaches for individuals with mental illness, the IPS model has dominated the vocational rehabilitation literature in recent years; it is considered the gold standard. This model brings employment specialists to the mental health team in an effort to provide integrated, one-stop services. One of the challenges, however, is that this service is provided in the mental health service system, but very few young people access this system. In fact, it is well documented that young people have a negative perception of mental health treatment and that very few seek professional mental health support. This issue speaks to the importance of exploring alternative service delivery models to address their mental health and employment needs. Recent initiatives such as the Lighthouse Project and Y-BEAT show promise with respect to alternative employment models that can be used with this vulnerable youth population. These models differ from the IPS model in their approach to pre-employment and service integration; both include

a pre-employment training period, while the Y-BEAT incorporates employment and mental health specialists, as well as a peer support worker and an ongoing evaluation team.

The focus in this study is on the employment experiences of youth with mental health issues in Northern Ontario. As such, it is important to consider the influence of place on youth employment and youth mental health. Youth in Northern Ontario experience a number of challenges related to employment and mental health, but little is known about how these challenges interact. Similarly, we know that youth in Northern Ontario are at a disadvantage with respect to health and human services access, including vocational rehabilitation services, but we know very little about their service delivery preferences. The present study aims to begin to fill some of these gaps, focusing specifically on the support needs of youth with mental health issues who live in northern communities. The central research question is: "what are the support needs of youth with mental health issues who are seeking employment in Northern Ontario?" The present study also pays special attention to the intersecting vulnerabilities of youth, their experience of occupational stress and to the use and perceptions of employment counselling services in Northern Ontario.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents an overview of the methods used to conduct this research study. A summary of the principal investigator's philosophical assumptions will initially be provided, followed by a review of the research design, sampling and recruitment strategy, data collection, and analysis. Finally, ethical considerations and credibility strategies will be discussed.

3.2 Philosophical Assumptions

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), all research is based on underlying philosophical beliefs and/or assumptions about what constitutes knowledge. These assumptions are instilled during educational training, through advice dispensed by academic supervisors and/or mentors, and through the scholarly communities people engage in (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Since philosophical beliefs and/or assumptions shape the process of data collection and analysis, it is important to engage in reflexive analysis so that readers can track the impact of these beliefs on the research process.

The most important philosophical beliefs and/or assumptions are those that relate to ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (what constitutes knowledge), and axiology (values in research). My ontological assumption questions the nature of reality (Creswell, 2013); I believe that multiple realities exist and that truth can evolve and change over time. I used verbatim quotes in the construction of themes to acknowledge these multiple realities while also recognizing that what was produced is partial and will change over time. My epistemological assumption is that knowledge is subjective and co-

constructed; knowledge comes from understanding the perspectives and realities of people in context, and from interacting with those who have first-hand experience with the phenomenon under study. I acknowledged this co-construction by engaging with the participants in meaningful ways (i.e. empathizing with their life situations). A person's epistemology is also reflective of their axiology (Creswell, 2013). I believe that research is value-laden and that the researcher both influences and is influenced by the research context. To account for these influences, I kept both an analytical and reflexive journal to track my developing ideas and feelings as I moved back and forth between data collection and analysis. An example of a reflexive journal entry is offered below. This journal excerpt demonstrates my attempt to document personal reactions to the interview dialogue, to reflect on power imbalances within the research encounter, and to keep track of how my perspectives changed over time.

My first impression was that she was timid/shy, which I attributed to her anxiety, but as the interview progressed, I began to feel as though she was uninterested in my study. She also responded aggressively when I asked for clarification about a comment she repeated a few times throughout the interview (about not having enough work skills). At the end of the interview, she stated that she wasn't a very good person and only agreed to participate in my study to receive a gift card (once the audio recorder was turned off). My initial reaction/thought was about whether her data was viable. My second reaction was frustration. I could afford to spend only a few days in Thunder Bay and this participant took up, what felt like at the time, a valuable spot in my study. As a novice researcher, I have been encouraged to practice reflexivity and to acknowledge my position of power/privilege in the research encounter. It is likely that this youth participant entered the interview already feeling nervous/anxious, and that she may have picked up on my feelings of frustration regarding her inability to answer all of the questions posed, further perpetuating her feelings of nervousness/anxiety. I also questioned why someone would participate only to receive a gift card and as I write this, I realize that these individuals owe me nothing. They are doing me a favor, and they live with so many barriers so why not participate only to receive a gift card?

Figure 4. Reflexive journal excerpt, written on January 23, 2017

3.3 Situating the Researcher

As an individual with educational training in health sciences and personal/familial mental health experiences, I believe employment is a social determinant of health. I believe employment facilitates the development of skills and competencies, aids in the

establishment of extended social networks, and provides meaningful societal purposes. According to Rebeiro Gruhl (2010), "occupation, in its broadest sense, considers self-care, leisure and productivity activities" (p. 58). Thus, I believe the drug use of an individual with an addiction issue to be included in the definition of an occupation, and that selling drugs could be a form of employment. My research lens is also influenced by critical and social theories of disability. For example, I believe that the concept of individual agency only partially accounts for the limited employment experiences of youth with mental health issues who live in Northern Ontario. I view the lack of employment opportunities as a consequence of marginalizing and/or exclusionary practices, rather than a lack of ability on the part of youth with mental health issues. Thus, I question the simplistic explanations provided to explain their poor employment outcomes such as an overall higher unemployment rate in Northern Ontario. As described by Wilton (2006), the reality of the situation is that individuals living with mental health issues are over-represented in part-time, temporary and high-turnover jobs that require very few skills. I bring all of these perspectives, as well as my own personal and familial mental health experiences, to the research encounter.

Within the research setting, I presented myself as a graduate student researcher who is part of the target age group interviewed for the present study. I also presented myself a resident of Northern Ontario, who has experienced the challenges of searching for employment in a small northern community. Presenting myself in this way allowed for the identification of a common ground with the youth participants, which facilitated rapport building and led to a fuller and richer discussion (youth responded to me as an

insider rather than an outsider). With respect to employment counsellor participants, presenting myself in this way helped to establish credibility and demonstrated my first-hand knowledge about the phenomenon of interest.

3.4 Research Design

A qualitative research approach was adopted in order to understand the perspectives and experiences of youth in northern communities. This approach was selected because it facilitates an understanding of experiences and behaviors in context "from the perspective of those being studied" (Tewksbury, 2011, p. 78). The section below provides a rationale for the specific qualitative methodology used to conduct the present study: Interpretive Description (ID).

3.5 Research Tradition

ID is a non-categorical qualitative research methodology that was created by a group of nursing scholars in the late 1990s (Thorne, Reimer Kirkham & O'Flynn-Magee, 2004). ID has, as its primary goal, the identification of themes and patterns relevant for applied practice (Hunt, 2009; Thorne, Reimer Kirkham & MacDonald-Emes, 1997). It emerged in response to calls from qualitative methodologists "for researchers to come clean about the methodologies they employ" (Oliver, 2012, p. 419). Thorne (2008) explains that while researchers within the applied disciplines have used qualitative methodologies for almost 30 years, many have commented on the need for an approach that better suits their practice goals. ID is an example of such an approach. According to Thorne (2008), ID legitimizes the process of drawing on multiple research traditions, and

"offers a framework within which the design decisions that work for your particular questions can be effectively set forth" (p. 103).

ID is based on three philosophical assumptions. The first assumption is that realities are multiple, complex, contextual and subjective; as a result, they must be studied holistically. The second assumption is that the inquirer and object of study are inseparable; both are valued in the creation of knowledge. The final assumption is that no single theory can encompass all realities; as a result, theory must be grounded in the data (Thorne et al., 2004). These philosophical assumptions are consistent with the principal investigator's philosophical assumptions discussed in section 3.1.

Researchers adopting an ID approach begin with a process of scaffolding. There are two elements to scaffolding a study: (1) reviewing the literature, and (2) acknowledging any preconceptions that you may have as a researcher (Thorne, 2008). This second element distinguishes ID from some of the more established methodologies, which require researchers to bracket their assumptions (Ray, 1994; Thorne et al., 2004). Once the process of scaffolding is completed, researchers can start making decisions about study design. Although ID does not "prescribe an exact way to go about designing a study" (Thorne, 2008, p. 73), it borrows several aspects from phenomenology, ethnography and grounded theory (Kucukbumin, 2014). For example, it is often based on purposive or theoretical sampling and data collection through observation, interviews and focus groups (Hunt, 2009; Thorne, 2008).

An ID approach is most useful when the purpose of a study is to generate findings that are relevant to the applied disciplines (Hunt, 2009). Thorne (2008) provides the

following as examples of the applied disciplines: education, community development, health geography, and the health professions. In evaluating whether a research question is amenable to ID, readers should focus on whether a study is situated within an existing practice problem (Hunt, 2009). An ID approach was selected for the present study because it allowed for the description and interpretation of shared youth mental health and employment experiences, both of which are well-documented challenges within the health and vocational rehabilitation literature. Furthermore, congruent with ID philosophical assumptions, the present study also capitalized on the subjective and experiential knowledge of each individual participant.

There are a number of strengths associated with using an ID approach. ID's most notable strength is its orientation toward practice-relevant findings (Thorne et al., 2004). This orientation is the primary reason an ID approach was selected; the research team intends to generate findings that can be applied by employment counsellors in Northern Ontario. An additional strength relates to ID's acknowledgement of the researcher in the research process (Hunt, 2009). This acknowledgement is the second reason an ID approach was selected; although the principal investigator is a graduate student, the research team includes clinicians with expertise in mental health, service delivery and northern health issues. Thus, ID capitalizes on the unique insights and knowledge that this team brings to the research encounter.

3.6 Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was granted through the Hamilton Integrated Research Ethics Board on September 1, 2016 (see Appendix A). This application reinforced that all data

would be stored in a locked filing cabinet and/or on a password protected computer on a secured network. On December 5, 2016, ethical approval was granted for the addition of a demographic questionnaire to be used with the employment counsellor participants (see Appendices B and I).

3.7 Participants

The present study focuses on youth who have experienced a mental health issue and were seeking employment in Northern Ontario. To be included, youth needed to (a) be between the ages of 16 and 29 years, (b) have a self-identified mental health issue, (c) be seeking employment in Northern Ontario, and (d) be able to provide informed consent. Input was also sought from employment counsellors who work with youth in Northern Ontario. To be included in this study, employment counsellors needed to work at the participating center for a minimum of three months (to ensure that they have an understanding of the employment context and experience working with the target group).

3.8 Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants from employment centers in Sudbury, Parry Sound and Thunder Bay. These centers were selected because they represent different catchment areas in terms of population size and clientele characteristics. Staff at each of the participating centers assisted in recruiting youth who met the inclusion criteria. Maximum variation sampling was used to gather input from youth in a range of social positions, including variation in age, gender, educational background and work experience (Hays & Singh, 2012). To recruit employment counsellors, each employment centre was asked to nominate key informants who were

able and willing to reflect on the mental health and employment needs of youth in Northern Ontario.

3.9 Sample Size

There are a number of issues that can affect sample size in qualitative studies; the most common is the concept of saturation (Mason, 2010). Morse (1995) defined the concept of saturation as "collecting data until no new information is obtained" (p. 148). Interestingly, the concept of saturation has become an issue of debate. For example, Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) suggest that, "although the idea of saturation is helpful at the conceptual level, it provides little practical guidance for estimating sample sizes for robust research prior to data collection" (p. 59). Bowen (2008) has also contested the concept of saturation, stating that saturation is often claimed without any overt description of what it means and/or how it was achieved. Given this debate, the principal investigator is cautious about using the term saturation; however, the process of data analysis, in the author's opinion, did lead to sufficient depth to address the research question.

It should be noted that there are other factors that can influence sample size, including: heterogeneity of the population, inclusion criteria, data collection methods, and resources/budget (Mason, 2010). For researchers utilizing an ID approach, the justification of a study's sample size should be consistent with its research question. Thorne (2008) notes that, "if the background literature… suggests that a certain phenomenon occurs commonly within clinical populations… then we can likely determine that engaging with a small number of individuals… will produce something

worth documenting" (p. 94). Given that the present study focused on youth employment and mental health (two well-documented challenges among young people in Northern Ontario), the principal investigator determined that interviewing a smaller number of youth who were experientially familiar with the phenomenon of interest was appropriate. The sample size projected for the present study was 18-24 participants; due to time and budgetary constraints, only 15 participants were included in the final sample. However, in the author's opinion, sufficient data was collected to address the research question.

3.10 Recruitment

Initially, the recruitment strategy was through a provincial youth employment network to engage centres serving youth in Northeastern Ontario, Northwestern Ontario and 'small town' Northern Ontario. Two centres were selected through this network. A third centre was recruited outside of this network because it met the criteria for a small town/rural perspective. Once the centres expressed interest in participating, the principal investigator met with the executive directors and provided an overview of the research study. Following agreement to participate, employment centre staff displayed copies of the recruitment poster (see Appendix C). Employment counsellors also shared information about the study during youth intakes and during YJC workshops. A telephone and email correspondence script was prepared (see Appendix D); however, all youth interviews were scheduled through employment counsellors. Employment counsellor interviews were scheduled directly with the principal investigator. All participating centres received $100 for their coordination efforts.

3.11 Setting

Literature in the area of qualitative interviewing suggests that researchers thoroughly consider the location of face-to-face interviews (Hermanowicz, 2002; Runswick-Cole, 2011; Turner, 2010). Given the personal nature of the research, it was important that a familiar, confidential and quiet setting be selected. It was decided that all interviews would be conducted at the participating employment centre, in a private and/or sectioned-off area. All youth interviews were conducted in a private conference room, while all employment counsellor interviews were conducted in their respective offices. Interestingly, all youth participants spoke of the employment centre in a positive way. For example, one youth participant stated: "I love it here… I do, I do". This expression of comfort/familiarity expedited the process of building rapport and trust between the principal investigator and youth participants.

3.12 Data Collection & Management

Consistent with ID methodology, a semi-structured interview approach was adopted (Thorne et al., 2004). Semi-structured interviews elicit rich descriptions, while also allowing researchers to verify statements and probe for additional information (Low, 2012; Runswick-Cole, 2011). Interviews were conducted in-person by the principal investigator between November 2016 and January 2017; each interview ranged from 21 to 82 minutes in length. Youth interview questions inquired about their employment history, mental health experiences, and perceptions of/experiences with the services currently available to youth in Northern Ontario (see Appendix G). Employment counsellors were asked to reflect on the employment needs and mental health concerns of

the youth who access their services. Counsellors were also asked to share their perspectives on the provision of employment and career counselling services in Northern Ontario (see Appendix H). All interviewees received a $20 honorarium for participation in the interview.

Upon scheduling the semi-structured interview, counsellors were given copies of the interview questions. Sharing interview questions in advance enables participants to prepare more informative answers (Seidman, 2006). Questions were not shared with youth participants in response to feedback from employment centre staff, who were concerned that youth participants might look up answers to the interview questions on the Internet rather than provide a personal reflection.

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist. Transcripts were checked against audio recordings by the principal investigator for accuracy. NVivo software, a qualitative data management program, was used to store, organize and analyze all of the data (QSR International, n.d.). Data anonymization took place following the accuracy checks by removing participant names and any other identifying information from the interview transcripts (i.e. previous employers, names of physicians and/or other service providers, etc.). The removal of other identifying information was of paramount importance for participants in smaller communities such as Parry Sound, ON where the population is low and the community is well integrated (i.e. “everyone knows everyone”). Transcripts were then imported into N’Vivo for initial coding and for the development and refinement of themes.

3.13 Interview Format & Guides

Prior to the commencement of both youth and employment counsellor interviews, the principal investigator reviewed the letter of information (see Appendices E and F) and obtained verbal and written consent. Information sheets outlined the purpose of the study, provided an introduction to the interview questions, reviewed strategies to ensure confidentiality, and discussed the benefits and risks associated with participating in the study. Participants were also informed about the length of the interview, how to contact the principal investigator following the interview, and about the option of voluntary withdrawal without penalty. An opportunity to ask questions and/or for clarification was also provided. Upon receipt of informed consent, the principal investigator provided a copy of the letter of information for personal records.

The interview was piloted with three youth participants and with three employment counsellor participants in Sudbury during the week of November 7, 2016. The pilot interviews were conducted to obtain feedback regarding the clarity of the interview questions and to ensure that the interviews stayed within the intended one-hour time frame (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015; Turner, 2010). These sessions also provided the principal investigator with experience administering the interview guides and assisted with fluidity. Given that the pilot interviews were with individuals who met the inclusion criteria, pilot data was included in the study analysis.

Interview guides for both youth and employment counsellors were designed to encourage the sharing of individual perspectives with minimal prompting from the principal investigator. According to Turner (2010), creating effective research questions

"is one of the most crucial components to interview design… each [question should] allow the examiner to dig into the experiences and/or knowledge of the participants in order to gain maximum data from the interviews" (p. 757). As a novice researcher, the principal investigator reviewed the academic literature on qualitative interviewing (Bevan, 2014; Brayda & Boyce, 2014; Turner, 2010) and enlisted the help of her academic supervisor, who has expertise in workplace mental health and qualitative research methods, to create the interview guide. All questions were open-ended, to prompt participants to speak freely about their employment and mental health experiences in Northern Ontario. Initial questions were geared toward building rapport and trust (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), progressing to more sensitive questions about mental health and employment. Verbal and non-verbal prompts were used as needed to encourage elaboration in participant responses.

Following completion of the pilot interviews and feedback from the research team, the counsellor interview guide was modified to ensure that the information could be gathered more efficiently. Initial background questions were converted to a written questionnaire that collected the following demographic and work experience data: (1) gender, (2) age, (3) employment history, (4) education level, (5) caseload size, (6) time spent living in Northern Ontario, and (7) satisfaction with their work. A question was also added to inquire about what employment counsellors like about their jobs, in an effort to close the interview on a positive note (see Appendices B and I). With respect to youth interview guides, the term "psychosocial hazards" was replaced with "hazards" followed

by some examples (i.e. bullying, harassment), as all three youth participants in Sudbury inquired about the definition of a psychosocial hazard.

3.14 Field Notes

The principal investigator maintained a field journal to complement the digitally recorded interviews; field notes were documented simultaneously during and immediately following individual interviews. This strategy enabled the principal investigator to capture and comment on impressions, environmental contexts, behaviors, and non-verbal cues that that may be important during data analysis (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Field notes for the present study included descriptions of the environment and participant responses (verbal and non-verbal) to the interview questions. Field notes also included comments participants made before and after the digital recorder was turned on/off, as well as the principal investigator's reactions to the interview dialogue.

3.15 Data Analysis

According to Bradley, Curry and Devers (2007), there is no singularly appropriate way to analyze qualitative research data. However, there is widespread consensus that qualitative analysis is an ongoing, iterative process that begins during data collection and continues throughout the duration of a study. Researchers utilizing an ID approach are free to select qualitative analytic methods that suit their purposes (Thorne et al., 2004).

Guidelines for inductive thematic analysis, proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), were used to analyze the interview data. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that qualitative analytic methods can be divided into two categories; "those tied to… a particular theoretical or epistemological position [and those]… that are… independent of theory

and epistemology, and can be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches" (p. 5). These authors argue that thematic analysis is firmly rooted in the second category, with ties to essentialist and constructionist paradigms. One of the benefits associated with using thematic analysis is its flexibility; through its theoretical and epistemological freedom, thematic analysis is a useful tool that can provide a rich and detailed account of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Moreover, since thematic analysis "does not require the detailed theoretical and technological knowledge of approaches such as grounded theory or discourse analysis… it can offer a more accessible form of analysis, particularly for those early in a qualitative research career" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 9). The paragraphs that follow outline six phases for conducting thematic analysis; it should be noted, however, that although these phases are described in a step-wise fashion for the purpose of this report, the process was iterative and occurred concurrently with data collection.

Phase one requires that researchers familiarize themselves with the research data. To become familiar with the data, the principal investigator listened to each audio recording and read each interview transcript twice. Familiarization was also accomplished during the completion of transcription accuracy checks. As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), the study's entire data set was reviewed prior to starting the coding process. However, the principal investigator did take notes in the margins of the interview transcripts about her ideas for coding.

Researchers can apply two methods to the process of transcription: naturalized transcription and denaturalized transcription (Davidson, 2009). According to Mero-Jaffe

(2011), naturalized transcription is detailed and less filtered, and includes breaks in speech, mumbling and involuntary sounds. Denaturalized transcription, on the other hand, "describes the discourse, but limits dealing with the description of accent or involuntary sounds" (Mero-Jaffe, 2011, p. 232). Compared to other analytical methods, thematic analysis does not require the same level of detail in the transcript. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that at a minimum, a rigorous, thorough and verbatim account of all verbal utterances should be provided. Adhering to the guidelines provided by Braun and Clarke (2006), the principal investigator opted for a denaturalized transcript. This approach also addressed the concerns of youth who feared being portrayed as inarticulate as a result of how they responded to the interview questions.

Phase two focused on the generation of initial codes. A total of four transcripts were reviewed and individually coded by hand by two members of the core research team (the principal investigator and her academic supervisor). As encouraged by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Thorne (2008), initial coding focused on breadth rather than precision, with the goal of coding as many potential themes/patterns as possible. Both the principal investigator and her academic supervisor coded larger segments of text (to avoid loss of context), and had instances of segments that had multiple, overlapping codes. The principal investigator and her academic supervisor met on two separate occasions (February 8, 2017 and March 1, 2017) to review their individually coded transcripts and to jointly develop a coding framework/codebook. The following are some examples of the codes developed during this exercise: stigma & discrimination, abuse & trauma,

employment trajectory, and small town/rural issues. It should be noted that a common codebook was used for youth and employment counsellor participants.

Following the creation of a jointly developed coding framework/codebook, the principal investigator created corresponding nodes in N'Vivo 11. A node is a collection of references about a specific concept, theme, or area of interest (QSR International, 2017). The principal investigator used these nodes to electronically code all 15 of the interview transcripts. N'Vivo software provided the ability to review coded text from different interviews under a single node, facilitating deeper analysis. Although the initial codebook was used to guide the coding of the remaining interviews, emerging codes that evolved from each subsequent interview were added (i.e. family challenges & conflict, hurt & loss, etc.).

Phase three is about searching for themes; this phase begins once all research data has been initially coded (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), "this is when you start thinking about the relationship between codes, between themes, and between different levels of themes (i.e. main overarching themes and sub-themes within them)" (p. 20). During this phase of data analysis, the principal investigator met with her academic supervisor on two separate occasions (July 10, 2017 and July 17, 2017) to assist with making sense of the individual codes and to move towards describing a coherent story. This phase allowed the principal investigator to shift from analyzing individual experiences to understanding shared experiences. As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), the principal investigator used a thematic map to organize codes from the finalized codebook into the initial themes identified with her academic supervisor.

A total of five themes emerged from the organization of codes, which are discussed in detail in the next chapter. These themes provided the principal investigator with an awareness of youth support needs in the context of northern communities. As per the guidelines developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), there were no themes and/or subthemes abandoned at this stage. These authors suggest that all themes/sub-themes be reviewed in detail to determine whether any need to combined, refined, separated, and/or discarded.

Phase four focuses on reviewing themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) note that there are two levels of review/refinement that occur during this phase. Level one focuses on reviewing coded data extracts and verifying that the devised themes form a coherent pattern. To accomplish this level of review, the principal investigator reviewed all collated extracts for each theme, and then repeated the process. It was during this level of review that the theme "complexities of place" was examined to determine whether it should remain a standalone theme, or whether it should be refined to act as a sub-theme. The second level of review focuses on the entire data set; at this phase, a researcher should "ascertain whether the themes work [and]… code any additional data within themes that [have] been missed in earlier coding stages" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 21). The principal investigator reread the entire data set one time. No new additional codes were created during this second level of review. However, there were instances where data extracts were assigned a second or third already existing code.

Phase five requires that researchers name and define themes. It is essential that researchers consider how each individual theme fits into the broader story and how they

relate to the proposed research question. It is important that a theme not try to accomplish too much or be overly complex (Braun & Clarke, 2006); to account for this, the principal investigator re-visited all collated data extracts, and organized them into coherent, internally consistent accounts with accompanying quotes/narratives. The principal investigator used the metaphor of youth on a road trip/journey to assist with the naming and definition of themes presented in chapter four.

The sixth and final phase is about producing the final report. The write-up, whether for publication or dissertation, should tell "the complicated story of your data in a way [that] convinces the reader of the merit and validity of your analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 23). The write-up should also provide sufficient evidence of themes, with selected extracts being easily identifiable as examples of the issues discussed. Braun and Clarke (2006) also note that the analytic narrative needs to move beyond basic description of the data, and make an argument that relates to the central research question. The final report is offered in chapters four and five.

3.16 Ethical Considerations

Due to the psychosocial vulnerabilities of the youth participants, it was important to consider a number of ethical issues related to consent, anxiety/distress, misrepresentation and confidentiality/risk of identification. As previously stated, all individual interviews began with the principal investigator reviewing the letter of information and obtaining verbal and written consent. The principal investigator made an effort to check in with the youth participants to ask if they wanted to take a break and/or if they were still in agreement with participating in the research study. The option to

reschedule an interview was also presented. Only two of the eight youth participants asked to take a break; both, however, returned following a 5-15 minute break and completed the interview on the originally scheduled date.

According to Richard and Schwartz (2002), the interview format/method sometimes provokes anxiety; to mitigate this risk, the principal investigator provided youth participants with an opportunity to review questions 10 minutes before the scheduled interview. Given the youth inclusion criteria of having a self-identified mental health issue, the principal investigator prepared a list of mental health resources (see Appendix K) in the event that discussing past employment and/or mental health experiences led to feelings of distress. Although this resource list was developed primarily for youth, it was available to all study participants. Richard and Schwartz (2002) also note that, in the past, qualitative interviews have been confused with a therapeutic encounter; to reduce this risk and enhance transparency, the principal investigator was clear about her role as a student researcher and the purpose of this thesis, which fulfills the requirements for a Master of Science at McMaster University.

With respect to misrepresentation, Richard and Schwartz (2002) note that, "although all research is, to some extent, socially constructed, it is in qualitative studies that participants are more likely to feel that their views have been misrepresented or taken out of context" (p. 136). One way to reduce this risk, particularly for novice researchers, is to avoid working in isolation; the principal investigator thus worked closely with her academic supervisor (who played the role of 'devil's advocate') during the process of data analysis. A less direct approach to minimizing this risk is for investigators to be

explicit about their theoretical approach to the research topic. The principal investigator documented her philosophical assumptions and social location in sections 3.1 and 3.2 of the present chapter. An additional strategy to avoid misrepresentation, although somewhat controversial, is member checking (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell & Walter, 2016; Richard & Schwartz, 2002). The principal investigator opted not to conduct a formal member check because she felt that the other credibility strategies utilized were sufficient to mitigate the risk of misrepresentation.

As mentioned previously, all transcripts were anonymized prior to being uploaded to N'Vivo, thus addressing concerns related to confidentiality. Other precautions taken by the principal investigator include deleting audio files from the digital recorder once downloaded to a password-protected computer on a secure network, and deleting the DropBox folder used to send audio files to the professional transcriptionist once all transcripts were received. Data extracts in chapter four also use pseudonyms to add an additional layer of participant protection and to lessen the risk of identification in publications.

Lastly, a basic ethical requirement of all research is that it be scientifically sound; studies should be designed and executed by investigators "with adequate levels of expertise and supervision" (Richard & Schwartz, 2002, p. 137). The present study was overseen by the principal investigator's academic supervisor and thesis supervisory committee members, whom together, have extensive knowledge in qualitative research methods and several years experience supervising graduate student researchers.

One other potential ethical issue that I considered was possibility of youth that identify as Indigenous approaching the study and asking to participate. As per guidelines for research involving First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada, if participation is incidental "rather than scheduled, community engagement is not required" (Tri-Council Policy Statement, 2014, p. 118). A decision was made, however, that if a significant number of Indigenous youth presented during data collection and exploring their unique voices became important, that the principal investigator would seek advice from community elders on how to interpret and present the data in an ethical manner. This did not end up being the case for the present study. However, the principal investigator did review government documents and academic journal articles focused on conducting research with Indigenous peoples and communities to enhance her cultural sensitivity (Burnette, Sanders, Butcher & Rand, 2014; Tri-Council Policy Statement, 2014).

3.17 Credibility Strategies

According to Thorne et al. (2004), it is important that credibility of ID findings move beyond reporting attributes such as trustworthiness and transferability. These authors argue that credibility is derived from the way analytic decisions are "presented and contextualized" (Thorne et al., 2004, p. 15). Thorne (2008) offers four evaluative criteria that can be applied to enhance the credibility of ID studies: epistemological integrity, representative credibility, analytic logic, and interpretive authority. Each of these criteria will be discussed below.

Epistemological integrity refers to how well a research question and approach to data collection/analysis aligns with principles of ID (Thorne, 2008). As previously stated,

ID studies aim to identify themes and patterns relevant for the applied disciplines. The present study's central research question is: "what are the support needs of youth with mental health issues who are seeking employment in Northern Ontario?" This question is in alignment with an ID design due to its focus on patterns of experience among youth in Northern Ontario. Study findings will be used to develop recommendations for professionals within the employment and mental health service systems in Northern Ontario, further demonstrating epistemological integrity.

Representative credibility refers to ensuring that theoretical claims are consistent with the sampling strategy (Thorne, 2008). Thorne (2008) notes that maximum variation sampling is often required "before certain kinds of knowledge claims can be accepted on the basis of qualitative findings" (p. 224). In this study, efforts were made to include variation in age, gender, educational background, work experiences, and geographic location. Another strategy to increase representative credibility is triangulation of data methods, sources and researchers (Thorne, 2008). Triangulation of data sources allows for the cross-examination of participant responses, while triangulation of researchers helps enhance the richness of the analysis process (Anney, 2014; Letts et al., 2007). The principal investigator used both of these triangulation methods; the former by collecting data from two groups of participants (youth and employment counsellors) and the latter by reviewing findings with her academic supervisor and thesis supervisory committee.

Analytic logic is another credibility strategy that focuses on whether an inductive reasoning process occurred (Thorne, 2008). The principal investigator demonstrated analytic logic by maintaining an audit trail, including decisions about research design,

data collection, data management, data analysis and final report writing. Audit trails are important because they provide other researchers with an explicit reasoning pathway (Thorne, 2008). A second way to demonstrate analytic knowledge is to use thick description (Thorne, 2008). The principal investigator provided thick descriptions of the study participants, methodology, and analysis procedures to ensure that readers and/or other researchers could assess transferability to other settings and populations. The principal investigator also used a number of verbatim quotes in an effort to ground interpretive claims in the research data.

Interpretive authority is the fourth and final evaluative criteria offered by Thorne (2008); it emphasizes the importance of minimizing bias in the interpretation and analysis of the research data. According to Thorne (2008), "our reports must account for the reactivity that will occur within the research process" (p. 225). The principal investigator demonstrated interpretive authority by maintaining a reflexive journal for the duration of the study. The reflexive journal began with an entry about the principal investigator's motivations for conducting the present study and continued with regular entries throughout the research process. The principal investigator also engaged in peer debriefing with her thesis supervisory committee; this experience allowed for the peer review of analytic steps and ensured that emergent themes were reflective of participant responses.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the key findings that emerged from analysis of the interview transcripts with youth and youth employment counsellors (will be referred to as counsellors), as well as the principal investigator's reflective journal. Descriptive data regarding youth will be featured, followed by demographic data for the counsellors. Finally, a total of three themes based on the metaphor of an employment journey will be presented with supporting participant data. The three themes are: roadblocks, pit stops, and maps for success.

4.2 Youth Participant Demographics

A total of eight youth participants were interviewed from employment centres in Northern Ontario; three were recruited from an employment centre in Sudbury, four from Thunder Bay, and one from Parry Sound. Of these eight participants, four identified as female, three identified as male, and one identified as alternative. The participants ranged in age, from 16 to 27 years. With respect to employment history, most youth spoke about experiences in the service sector, specifically retail and food/accommodation services. The youth participants self-identified as living with a variety of mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, addiction, schizophrenia, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Most had single, but a few had multiple mental health conditions. Two of the eight youth reported that they developed a mental health issue as a consequence of unsuccessful employment experiences related to their disability (i.e., diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder [ADHD] led to unsuccessful employment

experiences which led to feeling depressed and suicidal). There were also stark differences with respect to how well supported youth were in terms of managing their mental health; three were well connected and appeared to be regularly meeting with a mental health professional, while five were quite isolated, both from family/friends and healthcare professionals. Two of the eight youth participants spoke openly about having an Indigenous heritage and about living on a First Nation.

4.3 Employment Counsellor Participant Demographics

A total of seven counsellor participants were interviewed for the present study. Three were recruited from an employment centre in Sudbury, ON, two were recruited from an employment centre in Thunder Bay, ON, and two were recruited from an employment centre in Parry Sound, ON. Of these seven participants, six identified as female and one identified as male. The counsellors varied in age, with the youngest falling within the 30 to 39 range and the oldest falling within the 50 to 59 range. There was variability with respect to length of time employed at the participating centre. For example, the shortest employment period was 6-12 months and the longest employment period was 5+ years. Each of the participating counsellors had experience working in the YJC program. However, some counsellors also had experience working in the one or more of following programs: YJC – Student Stream, Youth Job Link and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). There was variability regarding the length of time each counsellor had spent living in Northern Ontario; the shortest residency period was less than 1 year and the longest residency period was 10+ years. There was also variability regarding counsellor education/training; some had high school diplomas, while

others had graduate-level degrees. All seven counsellors had a caseload size that exceeded 20 youth.

4.4 Overarching Themes and Subthemes

One of the core findings regarding the support needs of youth seeking employment services was that their need encompassed more than just employment. Although youth participants identified meaningful work as their ultimate goal, they noted that a number of different supports were required in order to achieve that goal. In presenting the findings, the progression towards employment will be characterized as a "road to support", using the metaphor of an employment journey.

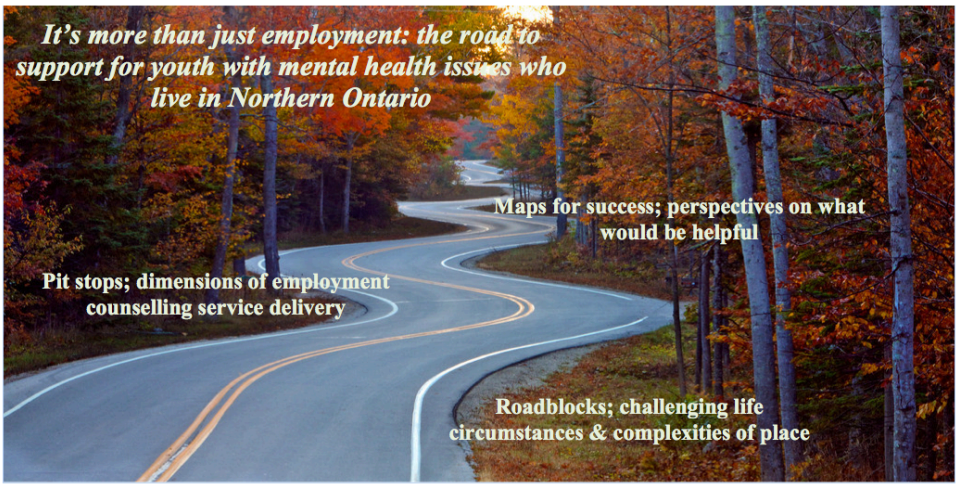

Figure 5. Image of employment journey

At the time of the interview, youth described having travelled on a "road" that was filled with "roadblocks". This first theme captures the challenging life circumstances experienced by youth, as well as the complexities of place, and explains how both can interfere with a young person's employment success. As a result of these roadblocks (being the recipient of benefits from Ontario Works [OW], for example), youth were led

to their local employment centre. This second theme was conceptualized as "pit stops", and reflects the different ways youth come into contact with counsellors as well as the critical role these individuals play in supporting young people in and out of the workplace. Finally, both youth and counsellor participants provided feedback on what they felt would be helpful for young people with mental health issues who are seeking employment in Northern Ontario. This third theme was conceptualized as "maps for success", and includes what is helpful for youth and for the counsellors that support them. Table 1 summarizes the key themes and sub-themes.

Table 1
Overview of Analytic Categories

Themes	**Sub-Themes**
Theme 1: Roadblocks	1.1: Individual Trajectories 1.2: Challenging Life Circumstances 1.3: Complexities of Place
Theme 2: Pit Stops	2.1: Connections 2.2: Roles & Responsibilities 2.3: Counsellor Challenges 2.4: The Youth-Counsellor Relationship 2.5: Motivation
Theme 3: Maps For Success	3.1: Youth Recommendations – Types of Services 3.2: Youth Recommendations – Organization & Delivery of Services 3.3: Counsellor Recommendations

4.5 Theme # 1: Roadblocks

As the principal investigator met with the research participants and reviewed their interview transcripts, it became evident that youth experience a number of challenging life circumstances. For example, both youth and counsellor participants described challenges related to: affordable housing and food security, family support and living in care, social support networks, mental health and addiction issues, and stigma/discrimination. Participants also described challenges related to place, some of which include: access to social services, transportation infrastructure, small town/rural dynamics, geography, and indigenous culture. Although these challenges will be discussed separately below, all participants described instances of multiple, intersecting vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities result in different levels of risk and play a central role in shaping youth employment trajectories.

Sub-theme # 1: individual trajectories. A profile of the mental health and employment trajectory of each youth participant will be offered as an introduction to this section, since this provides the context for understanding the cross-case comparison inherent in the overall thematic analysis. The confidentiality of each youth participant has been protected through use of pseudonyms (assigned by the principal investigator) and by removing all other identifying information (i.e. previous employers, names of physicians, etc.).

Nathan. *Nathan is a 25-year old male living with epilepsy. The majority of his work experience has been in the manual labour sector; however, he has had a lot of difficult finding work since receiving a diagnosis of epilepsy. Following the experience of his first seizure, Nathan was told that he could no longer drive, making working in a geographically vast community nearly impossible. His employer at the time had agreed to pick him up and drop him off before/after work; however, two weeks in to this*

arrangement Nathan was laid off. Nathan is motivated to work, but his inability to find a job within the manual labour sector led to feelings of frustration, hopelessness, and depression. Nathan also struggles with the side effects of his medication, some of which include: mood swings, fatigue, and dry mouth.

Derek. *Derek is a 27-year old male living with addiction issues. He has very little recent work experience due to having been incarcerated for the past 3 years. Prior to being incarcerated, his work experiences revolved around selling drugs, although he did spend a short amount of time working in the food/accommodation industry. Derek explained that he felt seeking the help of a mental health professional would be beneficial, but did not appear to be ready to do so at the time of the interview. He also indicated that his drug use and feelings of depression began following the loss of his grandmother. Derek presented with a very macho attitude and in some ways, glorified a gangster lifestyle. Derek was ambivalent about whether his time at the employment centre would actually help him find a job.*

Carly. *Carly is a 25-year old female living with ADHD. She has experienced significant job retention issues, which she believes to be the result of not having been provided with appropriate on-the-job tools and supports. She explained that of the 20 jobs she had held over the years, she has been let go from 15. She also explained that her inability to hold onto a job for longer than three months led to feeling depressed and suicidal. Carly has a good relationship with her family, however, and through this support network was able to retain the services of a mental health counsellor. She noted that she wished she had known which social services were available to her at a younger age. Lastly, Carly spoke about the stigma associated with using services such as the ODSP and OW.*

Samantha. *Samantha is a 22-year old female living with schizophrenia. She associates her diagnosis of schizophrenia with her use of cannabis at a young age. Samantha grew up on a First Nation in Northern Ontario but is now living in an urban centre. Her work experience has primarily been within the retail industry. Samantha has experienced significant bullying related to her diagnosis and physical appearance; she became very emotional when describing these bullying experiences during the interview. She explained that she has been filmed talking to herself. Samantha is motivated to work but fears that her employer and/or colleagues will make fun of her. Although Samantha is being followed by a mental health professional, she does not have a strong social support network. She noted that her mental health counsellor is very difficult to get in touch with, and that she has very few friends she can talk to in-between professional appointments.*

Matthew. *Matthew is a 16-year old male living with a number of co-occurring conditions including anxiety, depression, oppositional defiant disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, autism and ADHD. His work experience has been primarily within the business sector; Matthew operated both a dog walking and an odd jobs business. Matthew became very emotional when discussing his lack of family support and the*

feelings of hopelessness that follow an unsuccessful job search process. Matthew indicated that the digital recorder made him feel nervous and continued to speak about his personal experiences once it was turned off. Matthew disclosed that he was self-medicating with cannabis in an effort to offset the side effects of taking Citalopram for his anxiety. He also disclosed that a number of his immediate family members are living with their own health issues. For example, his father is living with Asperger's and his two eldest sisters with addiction issues.

Hailey. *Hailey is an 18-year old female living with severe anxiety. She has had very little employment success; at the time of the interview, she had worked for only one day in the past three years. Her one work experience was within the food/accommodation industry. During the interview, it became apparent that Hailey lacked confidence and self-worth. She stated, on more than one occasion, that she had little to no job skills. She also stated that she believes she will "hold [her] colleagues back" and that she knows "most people [would not] hire" her. When asked about her interaction with mental health and addiction service providers, Hailey volunteered that her experiences have not been helpful. She explained that opening up was difficult and that her first encounter was with a mental health counsellor who she did not believe understood her point of view.*

Ashlee. *Ashlee is a 24-year old individual who identifies as Indigenous, gender 'alternative' and is living with schizophrenia. Ashlee was removed from their (a gender-neutral pronoun that will be used from here on out to replace he/she) home at 6 months of age due parental injection drug use. Unfortunately, the foster home Ashlee was placed in was very abusive. During the interview, Ashlee described frustration about the past; Ashlee expressed anger about not knowing their parents or about their Indigenous heritage. Ashlee also spoke about being incarcerated; it was during this time that Ashlee began "to hear voices" and received a diagnosis. Since being released from prison, Ashlee has become involved with a local mental health organization. Ashlee is motivated to help others with mental health issues, particularly those living on First Nations. Ashlee also spoke about the stigma associated with having a mental health issue and how it can interfere with developing relationships with work colleagues.*

April. *April is a 21-year old female who struggled with addiction issues but has now been sober for the past three years. She is currently on level 6 of a methadone treatment program (the highest level of independence, which means that she visits an Ontario Addiction Treatment Centre [OATC] once per week to pick up seven doses of methadone). April's work experiences have been in retail and food/accommodation services. April spoke extensively about her childhood experiences. For example, at 12 years of age April tried to take her life by suicide. She explained that her classmates were never allowed to come over because her parents had a bad reputation. She described feeling isolated and "different". April also spoke about the positive impact the local employment service provider has had in her life. However, despite the efforts of her counsellor, April continues to experience employment-related stigma due to her previous drug use.*

Sub-theme #2: challenging life circumstances. The second sub-theme related to employment roadblocks focuses on a range of challenging life circumstances experienced by youth, from inadequate housing through to limited social supports.

Housing, food insecurity and finances. All of the participants discussed challenges related to living situations. For example, both youth and counsellor participants described the difficulty associated with finding affordable housing; counsellors explained that in recent years the price of rent has increased significantly. Counsellors also explained that landlords tend to have a bias against youth, and that some of their requirements such as providing references and/or first and last month's rent can be significant, insurmountable obstacles for young people with multiple barriers. As a result, youth are often forced to use services such as homeless shelters and boarding houses, when available in their community (there is a shortage of such resources in small, northern communities). These resources, however, are not without challenges; one counsellor described a boarding house in his/her community as being full of drugs and violence and stated that by sending youth to these resources, "we are actually setting them up for failure". For youth in communities without such resources, the only other option is to be homeless, which is problematic, particularly during the harsh winters of Northern Ontario. All of these housing issues interfere with the process of finding a job, both for youth and for the counsellors that support them.

"I don't know what to do with kids that come in and they're sleeping in a tent and it's wintertime and the only place they have to go is the [Elm Street] boarding house, which is… it's bad there… you have people doing needles, you have drugs everywhere, alcohol, violence, fighting… it's horrible. And it's the only affordable place in town… you can't set somebody up for success without stable housing" – C4

"They're living in an impossible situation and we are saying, 'Come back to pre-employment' and they're like, 'Yeah, I don't know where I'm going to sleep tonight and somebody wants to stab me.'" – C1

The issue of food security was also discussed on numerous occasions. Participants explained that youth often show up at an employment centre when they have not eaten for multiple days. Counsellors explained that they have given up their lunch and that they do their best to provide snacks to ensure that youth have something to keep them going. C6, for example, reports that, "*some of them will let you know that they're not eating, and others just won't, but you put food on the table and it's gone in two seconds*."

Lastly, all participants described the financial struggles that youth are living with. Both youth and counsellor participants discussed the high number of young people enrolled in the YJC program who are receiving benefits from OW. In fact, a common concern among youth regarding participation in the YJC program was the effect it would have on receiving support from OW. Counsellors also spoke about youth getting into trouble with debt, and how they tend to gravitate towards things like Cash Money and Money Mart (companies that provide cheque cashing services and subprime, short-term loans). C3, for example, reports that, *"getting into trouble with debt is another [problem]… they start falling behind and are just overwhelmed… they just can't seem to get themselves out."* Lastly, counsellors spoke about how youth bank accounts are often in overdraft and how young people prefer to be paid cash versus by cheque (which avoids deposits going to their overdraft). These financial struggles create challenges with respect to preparing for employment (i.e. buying safety shoes or appropriate clothes for work),

and adds stress which, when coupled with the stress of being new to a job, is sometimes overwhelming for youth with multiple barriers.

Family support and living in care. A lack of family support and/or living in care was described as a common experience among youth. For example, youth participants spoke extensively about being removed from their birth homes and placed with foster families. Youth also spoke about being moved from home to home, and not developing strong relationships with their foster parents. Counsellors identified the lack of consistent family or foster parent support as a key determinant of the resilience and/or vulnerability of youth to life challenges.

"A lot of times it's a breakdown of the family… you get the one… sure they have a disability… but they've had someone love them and care for them their whole life… sure they have barriers but those barriers are completely different than someone who's been in care their whole life… and I mean… that's a very big, broad not answerable type of thing… you can't sit there and say, 'We're going to assign these people to love you.' There is no love patrol." – C6

Unfortunately, the homes that youth were placed in were sometimes no better than those from which they were removed. One participant, for example, described being physically and sexually abused and explained that these experiences interfered with trying to be a normal kid.

"I didn't grow up with my parents… they took us away, me and my brother… and the only thing that was different was my location… so I'm a little upset about my past… about growing up in the system and trying to be a normal kid but how can I be a normal kid when I come home and am being molested by my [foster] brother… I just get frustrated about my past… it wasn't fair… I didn't get my chance [participant begins to cry]." – Ashlee

Counsellors also noted that youth haven't grown up with a positive role model, which creates challenges in terms of knowing what is expected of them at work. For example, if

youth have not observed a family member going to work on regular basis, tasks such as proactively calling in when they are sick could be completely foreign to them. As C7 notes: "*we can't assume that they know… they don't come from that place of privilege where they were raised from the ground up knowing social norms… so it becomes a huge challenge… within the workplace.*"

Lastly, counsellors described a shift in family responsibilities as being very common among their youth clients. For example, one counsellor spoke about a female in her early 20s who was caring for a younger sibling because their mother left. A similar concern was reiterated by another counsellor regarding a youth who was asked by a family member not to accept a job so that he/she could assist with looking after other children in the home.

Lack of social support. Another issue is the weakened social support networks experienced by many youth. For example, counsellors explained that YJC clients tend to live with or be romantically involved with individuals that have the same issues they do, and who are not necessarily supportive of maintaining employment.

"A lot of the youth that we work with… are either (a) living alone or (b) living with a roommate who, most likely has their own challenges, so that support system is kind of weakened when it comes to waking up in the morning and having to go to work. 'I'm not feeling it. 'Awesome. Don't go. Stay home with me and we'll just hang out.'" – C3

"We've also had youth who, the person that they live with, whether it be a girlfriend [or a boyfriend] or whatever, was jealous of them working… didn't like that they were not there so they didn't support them in anyway; 'I don't have a job and want you here' type of thing.'" – C7

Participants also spoke about how youth find it difficult to trust people, particularly figures of authority, and explained that these trust issues often interfere with

developing supportive relationships. Since youth have not had someone in their life that they could trust, or who has trusted them, they are reluctant to develop close-knit relationships.

"I see a lot of people, especially with authority, as more monstrous than somebody without [authority]… that includes employers, parents, foster parents… I don't take the time to actually get to know somebody. The first thing I do is judge them… it's a survival tactic that I needed to pick up… sometimes the people that seem like they love you the most absolutely devastate you." – Matthew

These trust issues and general feelings of unease around figures of authority make it difficult for youth to interact with their employers. To overcome this challenge, many counsellors described being present for initial meetings with employers to ask questions youth are uncomfortable asking (i.e. inquiring about changing a young person's start time so that it lines up with public transportation hours of operation).

Lastly, counsellors noted that some youth use the workplace as their source of social support, which creates job retention challenges. As stated by C3:

"And a lot of them don't have… strong supports or a lot of friends so when they get to work, that's the other problem, they start befriending everybody… and it becomes more of a social place for them to kind of get their issues out there."

Mental health and addiction issues. All participants discussed the presence of youth mental health and addiction issues. Although the youth participants had a range of individual and co-morbid conditions, counsellors described the majority of YJC clients as experiencing some form of anxiety, depression and/or addiction issue. Counsellors also described an increase in youth who are presenting with mental health issues relative to older clients. They attributed this increase to the poor job market in Northern Ontario and

to the lack of supportive services, including affordable housing and reliable transportation infrastructure.

"I've had more youth come to me and to say that they have anxiety then I've ever come across in my life, well [in] my career, and I've been doing this a long time… and I think what it is… when you take hope away from people, that's the result. And when there are no jobs and there is no housing and no transportation, what is there? There's no hope, and when there's no hope, there's anxiety and depression. And when there's anxiety and depression, there's drug use, alcohol use and addiction. So it all works together." – C4

Many youth reveal that they are not seeing a professional for their mental health and/or addition issue. Counsellors are concerned that this can interfere with their ability to maintain employment because the youth have not been provided with the necessary tools and skills to manage their symptoms.

"A lot of them have disclosed that they're not seeing anyone so they go to work and have very limited, from my perspective, coping skills because they've never been taught how to deal with what they identify as anxiety or bipolar disorder or anything like that" – C2

Youth echoed concerns about living with a mental health issue and maintaining employment but focused instead on challenges related to disclosure and being viewed differently by colleagues.

"It was hard to work because I was scared… they're going to be like, "Oh, she's a freak show… we can't have her working here, she's schizo." That's what I was thinking… that they wouldn't want me to work with them… just too scared to say it… I don't like saying it because it sounds so scary; schizophrenia sounds so… that word sounds scary." – Ashlee

In terms of drug use and abuse, both youth and counsellors explained that young people have moved away from using well-known substances such as cocaine and crystal meth and have moved towards using pain pills and fentanyl. Many challenges in maintaining employment were attributed to living with an addiction issue, both when actively using and in recovery. For example, one participant discussed getting fired for

being under the influence of drugs at work. A second participant discussed challenges in accessing an OATC since hours of operation often interfere with hours of work.

Lastly, youth discussed how various disabilities (i.e. ADHD, epilepsy, etc.,) interfered with their employment success, and stated that these unsuccessful employment experiences eventually led to feelings of hopelessness and depression. For example, one youth participant spoke at length about living with ADHD and the toll unsuccessful employment experiences has taken over the years. This participant stated:

"I have thought about it too you know, when I was in my jobs and I kept getting let go and I didn't know why people weren't accepting me… so personally, emotionally and physically… it affected me so much to the point where I did think of committing suicide once or twice and I had to get help for those things" – Carly

Stigma and discrimination. Instances of stigma and discrimination were discussed as common experiences, both by youth and by counsellors. Participants provided examples of intersecting stigmas (due to a young person's social class and sexual preferences, for example), and explained that these individuals are in a particularly vulnerable situation with respect to finding employment. Participants also described a stigma hierarchy regarding the types of mental health issues employers are willing to take on. One counsellor noted that because anxiety has become such a common issue, employers don't appear to be as concerned as they were in the past. However, there is still resistance when conditions such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia are discussed in the context of work. Participants also described a stigma hierarchy regarding social services; these participants noted that youth are often more open to receiving benefits from OW than they are benefits from ODSP.

"Unfortunately there's still that stigma or that label so a lot of kids [the] that I work with I'm like, 'Hey, have you ever thought about ODSP? 'Nope, not going to do it… there's not a chance… I'm not doing that.' 'Well it's better than the alternative of not having an income… it's definitely a little bit more advantageous to go that route rather than OW… you won't get nearly as much.' But still, a lot of them are like, 'No, not a chance.'" – C3

Program and service silos.

Another area of vulnerability relates to program and service silos. For example, counsellors explained that a number of YJC clients do not have a permanent address and are therefore unable to access support from OW. One counsellor, for example, relayed the following story about one of his/her recent clients:

"I did an intake about an hour ago with a young person who moved here from out of town… he is sleeping on a friend's couch. He can't get on OW because he doesn't have an address and can't get an address until he gets on OW. He has anxiety and depression and has a valid prescription, which he was taking regularly, however, he has no OW; therefore, he can't access his prescription. So I mean, he's going around untreated… literally homeless and trying to do something better but can't because the system is making it impossible for him." – C1

On the other end of the spectrum are youth who are well connected to services and who have a good working knowledge of the available supports in their community, but are "falling through the cracks" because there is no central accountability for coordination of service delivery.

"It's when you don't have somebody in your life that is consistently caring about you… it brings everything else down… so support yeah, they get support all over the place… they come in here and they know how to access everything but really, they're falling through the cracks because there is no one person caring for them, holding their hand like a parent should." – C6

Counsellors also described the impact that accessing social services can have on a young person's identity. For example, one counsellor explained that because youth have to talk about their barriers any time they seek service, those barriers/challenges

eventually become part of their identity, and negatively impact their self-confidence, worth and esteem.

"They become a list of barriers and everywhere they go… every time they are accessing any sort of support, it's all about their barriers. What don't you have? What are you lacking? So they actually walk around with their lacking… that's their identity after a while… would you call that a mental health issue? I think it's a state of mind that is just so deeply ingrained in them" – C6

Additional challenges: education and criminal records. Additional barriers faced by many youth include their lack of educational qualifications, and/or their criminal record. Counsellors reported that a high percentage of their clients have either not completed high school or are currently enrolled in an alternate education program. Due to their challenging life circumstances, youth do not function well within the traditional education system. Counsellors also explained that many jobs require a high school diploma; for those youth without a diploma, the already small job market in Northern Ontario becomes even smaller. A similar scenario was identified for youth with criminal records. Many employers require a clear police record check; for youth who have been in trouble with the law, employment opportunities are even more difficult to obtain.

Sub-theme # 3: complexities of place. Challenges related to living in a northern, rural community is the final sub-theme (in the overall theme of employment roadblocks). Living in northern, rural communities created many additional areas of vulnerability, from limited access to social services through to the stigma linked to Indigenous communities.

Access to social services. The first area of vulnerability (within the complexities of place sub-theme) relates to the long waiting lists for health and social services in

northern communities. Long wait times are further complicated by the fact that youth typically do not have reliable communication devices or live in an area with poor reception; thus, when they have an opportunity to move off of a waiting list, agencies providing non-employment services have no way of reaching them. An additional challenge relates to the lack of variety of non-employment service providers. As noted by C5:

"Because it is a smaller community, there aren't a lot of options… when you're looking for help… your first option isn't always the one that fits. It sometimes takes several different tries and several different people to find that right fit. Well they just don't have those options here." – C5

Lastly, with respect to youth-specific programming, counsellors noted that while there are services and/or programs for youth in their teenage years, there is a gap for those between 20 and 29 years of age in northern communities.

Transportation infrastructure. A number of participants spoke about the lack of transportation infrastructure in their community, and explained how this interferes with a young person's ability to get to and from work. Participants also described challenges related to purchasing a bus pass (when available in the community) and/or using taxi services. Since youth are being paid minimum wage and working very few hours, paying for transportation means they aren't actually making any money. As Nathan explains: *"I don't want to go from one end of town to the other for only 15 hours a week… that's not worth it for me. I'm spending that much in bus fare."* Counsellors also explained that there are many employers that require transportation and noted that if they had youth applicants with their own vehicles, they could have them placed in a job immediately. However, youth enrolled in the YJC program do not have driver's licenses or their own

vehicles. Due to this challenge, counsellors are often looking for employment in a young person's immediate community but this additional consideration usually shrinks an already small pool of jobs. Other concerns identified relate to safety, walking distance from a bus stop to a young person's home, and hours of operation in certain areas of the community (the outskirts of Sudbury and Thunder Bay, for example).

Small town/rural dynamics. Challenges unique to small, rural communities were also discussed. The most pressing concerns were those related to anonymity. For example, both youth and counsellor participants spoke about that stigma that certain names carry in a small community. Counsellors explained that youth in this position often ask to change their last name in an effort to improve their employment prospects. As C5 notes: "there are a lot of family names that carry a certain stigma… I've had people say, 'Well no one's going to hire me because my last name is whatever.'" A similar concern was noted regarding a young person's reputation. For example, April shared that she applied for a job where the manager was the mother of an individual she used drugs with. April noted: "right there you're not going to get the job… reputation is everything in small towns".

Concerns about anonymity also interfered with a young person's willingness to access supportive services, and with potential solutions to overcome youth barriers. Both youth and counsellors noted that because "everybody knows everybody"; there is reluctance to seek supportive services out of fear that youth will run into a neighbor, friend or some other individual they know. Similarly, counsellors in small communities explained that they believed a mentorship program would benefit youth enrolled in the

YJC program but that to find individuals who do not know the youth (or someone they are related to) is next to impossible. Youth also described feeling powerless with respect to reporting issues related to anonymity. As April notes:

"I'm on assistance and my worker… [is] related to my ex-boyfriend's family and through the grapevine, some of my confidential stuff has gotten out… it doesn't matter if you say, 'It's not supposed to happen.' It's your word against theirs… who's the government going to believe? Are they going to believe you or are they going to believe the person who has a degree? They're not going to believe me. I'm a methadone user who's a single mom and on assistance. Nobody listens to us."

Lastly, counsellors emphasized the lack of all types of resources in small communities. Counsellors described needing to be creative, but explained that it is difficult to meet a young person's employment needs when there is nothing that can be done for them (i.e. no jobs, no external agencies to refer to, no youth programs to get involved in, etc.). Counsellors also noted that they are able to work with non-employment service providers on a personal basis, but that it can be very challenging to develop professional relationships in a small community.

"It's the lack of everything… I mean, it's frustrating as heck for me as an employment counsellor to go to some of these seminars... I remember being at one… it was a great conference but they're going on and on about all of these wonderful programs and I went, 'We don't have those.' 'Well what do you mean?' 'We don't have this, we don't that, and we don't have that… we have nothing! So what do you suggest we do?' They had no answer. So what do you do when you have nothing to work with? You have to be creative and even that, it stretches our creativity." – C4

Geography. The fourth roadblock related to complexities of place references challenges associated with geography. For example, both youth and counsellors spoke about geographic isolation; participants explained that if jobs and/or resources are not available in a young person's immediate community, that the next available community is usually quite a distance away. Counsellors also noted that with respect to education,

some youth settle for less and enrol in programs available in their community but often without the same long-term employment prospects. Lastly, participants described challenges related to the harsh climate, specifically the length and severity of winters, and explained the negative impact this can have on a young person's ability to get to work, as well as on some of their underlying mental health issues. Even for individuals who don't rely on public transportation or walking, there are safety concerns related to travelling long distances in Northern Ontario; for example, ice roads and two-lane highways with narrow shoulders are very common in the region, both of which can be dangerous in the middle of a harsh winter.

"The seasons in this area are rough… so again, if you're thinking, 'I'm just going to walk to work. That's great… it could snow in October… especially if your depression is affected by the changing seasons… we suffer a pretty long fall… [and a] pretty long winter… that is something that can affect the youth that I think we don't always remember… the fact that it's dark at 4:30 is a little depressing, even for myself so I can only imagine them." – C3

Indigenous Peoples. The final roadblock related to 'place' includes issues related to Indigenous Peoples. Both youth and counsellor participants spoke of the racism that exists towards the Indigenous community. Participants explained that sometimes racism is subtle and that other times it is blatant, both inside and outside of the workplace.

"Working with Indigenous youth and just seeing the difference in the interactions… even just going for a coffee it's like, 'Wow, I never noticed but there is a difference'… one incident was just somebody giving change… they put it in my hand and then just dropped it on the counter for the youth. I was like, 'What?' It's pretty obvious what's going here." – C3

As a result of this racism, youth expressed sentiments such as "wishing they weren't brown". To avoid discrimination in the workplace, Indigenous youth have explored

changing their last names (to remove bias from initial screening and to avoid tension with prejudiced colleagues).

"Our Aboriginal folks have a really hard time… they'll sit in front of employers and employers will see an Aboriginal last name and they won't touch them… so it's not just about employment and mental health. You've got major cultural and race problems that are happening here." – C7

Lastly, participants discussed the frequency with which youth return to their First Nation; counsellors explained that this creates challenges to maintaining employment (because there are fewer opportunities in these communities), and creates gaps in resumes which can be difficult to position in a positive light when approaching employers about placements for youth. Some of the other issues discussed relate to the need for culturally appropriate and sensitive services, particularly in very northern communities such as Thunder Bay. As C6 explains:

"We're the pinnacle… if you look on a map… above us is all reserves… so we are servicing a very big area here… and it isn't just; you can sit there and say, "A lot of people are moving to Barrie." Barrie doesn't have a history of hurt people coming into it… people are going to Barrie because it's an up and coming place… you have people that are educated and [are] looking for jobs and wanting to live rural. Not here. We have people that are coming in that are hurt and damaged and desperate. That makes a huge difference; that makes all the difference and we do not have the capacity, at this point, in this community, we just don't."

4.6 Theme # 2: Pit Stops

The second central theme related to the employment journey is one that focuses on employment counsellors. "Pit stops" refers to the different ways youth come into contact with the counsellors and the different things that they do to support young people who are looking for jobs in Northern Ontario. As noted in the previous section, youth come to the employment counselling relationship with multiple, intersecting

vulnerabilities that present unique challenges to the mandated tasks that counsellors provide, and to the timelines and metrics they are required to meet. These challenges, and the motivations that counsellors have for continuing to do this type of work, are discussed below.

Connections. Youth come into contact with counsellors by different means and for different reasons. For example, some youth approach a counsellor because they have been told to do so by an OW provider. C4 notes:

"OW… [expects] them to connect with us…even if they're not job ready. If they don't, they threaten to cut them off [of their welfare payments]… 'You're not doing what you need to, you're off'… so they have to at least be looking because otherwise, there goes their pay cheque."

Other participants spoke of youth seeking the guidance of a counsellor as a condition of their parole. There were also examples where youth were connected with a counsellor through an external agency (i.e. the CMHA, Children's Aid Society [CAS], etc.,). Counsellors expressed concern about youth who were forced into using their services, as they believed this lack of "buy-in" interfered with youth engagement and overall dedication to the pre-employment training and job trials process. Interestingly, this concern was legitimized during an interview with a young person who was sent to an employment centre following his release from prison. *"After this session and after I finish the rest of my papers, I'm done here… then they're apparently [said sarcastically] going to find me a job."* – Derek

Counsellors also described youth approaching the employment counselling relationship as a result of a deep-rooted belief that looking for employment should be their top priority, regardless of the need to attend to other challenges in their life (i.e.

dealing with their mental health). Lastly, counsellors explained that by the time youth approach them, they are in a state of desperation. As stated by C1: *"by the time they get here, they've tried everything else."*

Roles and responsibilities. There are a number of mandated roles and responsibilities counsellors are expected to fulfill. Some of these roles and responsibilities include but are not limited to: facilitating pre-employment workshops, job monitoring and carving, referring to external agencies, and when required, providing support following the completion of an employment training program. As discussed in the first chapter of this report, pre-employment workshops take place over several days/weeks and amount to a total of 60 hours. During these workshops, counsellors touch on a variety of subject areas, including: how to deal with conflict at work, employee rights and responsibilities, effective communication techniques and goal setting. Counsellors also provide job monitoring and job carving services; the former refers to the support provided while youth are in a placement (i.e. checking in to ensure young people have received the necessary training), while the latter refers to developing jobs that cater to a specific individual's needs.

"We also do what is called job carving… so we talk to employers about specific youth and the barriers they face… anxiety, struggles getting up in the morning… whatever they've disclosed to us… and we'll work with the employer to place the individual… we kind of develop a job for them… so let's say an [an outdoor sports store]… we will… develop a job of just crushing boxes; so it's not a normal job but [it helps] us employ these kids." – C2

Counsellors also spoke about supporting clients who, because of their age, are no longer eligible for certain programs. As noted by C3:

"We won't leave them high and dry… we'll definitely find somewhere that they can get those supports but hopefully by that point they'll… kind of be able to navigate on their own… better than let's say at 18 years or 21 years."

Similarly, counsellors described supporting youth who have already completed the YJC program (and used the funds attached to it) by allowing them to sit in on repeated workshops.

"I've done that with many participants… even when they've gone through and finished their hours, I've said to them, 'Stay in touch, come back. You can come to more workshops.' I can't pay them but I let them know, 'You're always welcome to come in whenever you want to and sit in on some more workshops just to stay involved.'" – C5

Lastly, given that the YJC program is designed to support youth with multiple barriers, counsellors often have to refer to external agencies such as the CMHA or local Friendship Centres (for youth that identify as Indigenous and are looking for culturally appropriate resources or methods of healing).

However, because of the intersecting challenges youth present with, there are also a number of unofficial roles and responsibilities that counsellors assume. These include: believing in and encouraging youth, replacing significant relationships in their lives, and providing one-on-one support. As the youth enrolled in the YJC program often come from families that do not provide sufficient emotional support, youth may present with low levels of confidence and self-esteem. Counsellors described filling this support need by encouraging and believing in their clients. As noted by C6:

"Encouragement is another one... believing in them for real and not just paying them lip service. Saying, 'We believe in you' and when someone says they believe in you, how much more do you believe in yourself? Encouragement… we always say it's our secret weapon and it is."

Counsellors also emphasized the importance of not giving up on youth.

"It takes a lot of patience… and not giving up. That's the big thing. You can't give up on them and I think that's where a lot of the problems are; these are the people that people are giving up on. And if you give up on them, you're giving up on their kids, right. You gave up on their parents, you're giving up on them, and you're going to give up on their kids." – C4

Similarly, because a number of youth enrolled in the YJC program come from unstable family situations and/or CAS, there is often a gap with respect to significant relationships. To address this need, counsellors described completing tasks that a parent and/or loved one would typically fulfill. For example, C7 described providing support to a client who recently gave birth to her first child: *"We had a girl at the end of November that had a baby that didn't know she was pregnant and so I was at the hospital seeing her with this new baby."* Counsellors also described filling the absence of a social support network for youth enrolled in the YJC program. As noted by C1: *"I become the be all and end all... 'I call C1 for everything' kind of thing.'"*

Counsellor challenges. During the counsellor interviews, it became evident that there are a number of challenges related to working with youth with multiple, intersecting vulnerabilities in the context of a provincially funded employment training program. Some of these challenges exist at the macro-level (i.e. the economy), some at the meso-level (i.e. the community), and some exist at the micro-level (i.e. the individual). At the macro-level, counsellors spoke of challenges related to the poor job market in Northern Ontario. Counsellors commented on how the economy has changed since the recession, and noted that jobs historically available to youth (i.e. entry-level jobs at a restaurant) are now being occupied by adults, effectively shrinking an already small pool of jobs for youth. Counsellors also spoke about system challenges, specifically gaining access to

certain services without the necessary documents and navigating the health and social services systems.

"I understand social insurance numbers are important… but I mean… there are some programs where they're like, 'Oh you're eligible to have this type of service but you need to have your taxes from last year or… we need to see a bank statement and we need to have this and that.' And it's like well, they've never done their taxes because they've never really worked." – C3

At the meso-level, counsellors described challenges related to employer attitudes about youth. Counsellors explained that employers are sometimes reluctant to hire young people because they perceive them as unqualified, lazy and difficult to train. Counsellors also noted that some employers have had bad experiences with youth in past and so they are hesitant to agree to a job trial. Counsellors also spoke of resource restrictions. For example, C5 and C7 described challenges related to time; they explained that the timing of certain tasks is mandated (i.e., job monitoring), and that sometimes this interferes with supporting youth the way they would like to. Counsellors also spoke of being restricted by funding and other services available. C1 and C4 noted that compared to previous employment programs, there is less funding attached to the YJC. For example, there use to be a budget for supporting youth through the driver licensing process, which would help address some of the transportation barriers in Northern Ontario, but this funding is no longer available. Similarly, counsellors described challenges related to not having anywhere to refer youth or having to accept that when they do refer a client, that they may not be receiving quality care.

"It's hard to help them when there's nothing to do for them…there's no homeless shelter, there's no drop in centre… there's no place to send people and I mean… we can only do what we can do with what we've got." – C4

Challenges regarding waiting lists were also discussed; counsellors explained that it is already difficult to get youth to agree to seeing a non-employment service provider such as a mental health counsellor and that waiting lists can interfere with ensuring that youth continue on their road to support.

"It's hard to get these kids motivated in the first place… 'I'm going to do it!' They do it and… now they wait. 'That's awesome! You did it!' But now just wait. And then eventually, it's going to go to the back of their mind. Whatever situation happened that made them say, 'Yes, I need this help' may seem more acute. Other situations may seem more important… so during that waiting period, are they actually going to, once something else happens, are they going to be motivated enough to continue on that path?" – C2

Lastly, counsellors discussed challenges related to their physical location and the surrounding community. For example, counsellors in Sudbury discussed how they were located across from a transit hub and explained that this poses a challenge for working with clients with addiction issues because of the availability of illicit substances in the area. Counsellors also spoke about employment centres that are located in a mall and explained that this creates a barrier for working with youth who have been banned from the establishment (for things such as fighting or shoplifting), particularly if there is not a separate entrance to the centre.

"The access here is horrible and some of these kids… crossing this general area of town presents too much temptation. Between the probation office, which is 2 blocks away and here, we've lost people… because they were pulled in whatever direction by people that they know" – C1

The most commonly discussed challenge was observed at the micro-level; all seven counsellors spoke of the complexity of youth issues and noted how to it can be difficult to "get to the bottom of all that". There was also discussion about not always knowing how to respond to youth with mental health issues, and the challenges

associated with not blurring the line between an employment counsellor and a mental health counsellor. As noted by C5:

"I've had some individuals come in to me and start opening up about certain things and I don't mind that but at the same time… I'm not a mental health professional. I'm an employment counsellor, a job coach, and a facilitator… mental health is not my area of expertise. I'm glad that I can be there when they need to talk to somebody and that I have that rapport with them but at the same time, I can't give them exactly what they need."

Participants also spoke about how it can be emotionally exhausting to work with youth with multiple, intersecting vulnerabilities in the context of employment. C6 explained that it can be difficult to hear youth life stories and know that there is not a lot counsellors can do to lessen their burden. C6 also described challenges regarding leaving work at work, and noted that he/she often thinks about his/her clients and the issues they are facing on his/her personal time: "*sometimes you end up awake at night going, 'Okay, I have to find out.' So that whole side of it… that's challenging."*

Counsellors also described challenges related to resumé building; it was explained that there are often gaps in resumés that make it difficult to market a young person to a prospective employer. Positioning certain work experiences was identified as an additional challenge. For example, C7 noted that there are a number of youth who have had experiences put together for them by an organization such as March of Dimes or CMHA, and explained that while these experiences provide youth with hands on skills, they create challenges when it comes to interviewing with potential employers who will ask about where youth learned those skills. As noted by C7:

"It's like someone going to jail, 'I have 10 years of cooking experience but it was at Stony Mountain in Winnipeg' which is a high security jail. So there are these gaps… if people have working experience, 'Do I put it on or do I not put it on, because it looks like I've never worked but then I'm going to have to talk about it'. At least for the kids who

have never worked, they don't have anything they have to hide… they've just never worked"

Lastly, counsellors discussed challenges related to disclosure and communication. With respect to disclosure, C5 noted that it can be difficult to correspond with prospective employers about youth support needs without violating disclosure rules; *"there is a fine line there".* With respect to communication, counsellors noted that it can be difficult to correspond with youth because they either do not have a phone or cannot afford to pay their phone bill.

The youth-counsellor relationship. In terms of overcoming challenges, counsellors emphasized the importance of developing a relationship that is based on trust and respect. For example, in attempting to overcome challenges related to employer attitudes or employers asking youth to do things that are not safe (i.e. meso-level), counsellors explained that youth tend to reach out immediately if they have developed a good relationship with their counsellor. Counsellors also described that youth sometimes stay in a job "past its best before date" because they do not want to disappoint their counsellor.

"They just need to know that we're not going to be disappointed in them… that's one of the biggest things when you have a really strong relationship with youth… they will stay in a job past its best before date because they don't want to disappoint you." – C4

Counsellors also explained that because youth tend to be uneasy around non-employment service providers, they often wait until they have developed a relationship with their clients before suggesting that they seek help for their mental health issue (i.e. micro-level). As noted by C2: *"especially with this population… you don't want to offend*

them… you have to be very sensitive with them… I always make sure that we have a good relationship and that we are able to go there kind of thing."

Motivation. Despite the challenges noted above, most counsellors described being very satisfied with their jobs. In fact, of the seven counsellors who participated in this study, six responded that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with their job. Only one counsellor responded that he/she was somewhat satisfied. Reasons provided for continuing to do this type of work include: seeing growth, making a difference, and being "a bright spot on their journey".

"The fact that you see growth makes it very rewarding… I like when someone surprises me… [does] something that you don't expect; it's great." – C7

I love making a difference… when they're so down [and] have no life left in them and through a simple conversation; you bring them up a level. That's amazing… to at least be a bright spot on their journey… someone who is willing to listen, answer their questions and just be a servant to them… being able to hold that role for them; that's so, it's awesome." – C6

4.7 Theme # 3: Maps for Success

The third and final theme addresses what would be helpful for youth and counsellor participants. This theme was conceptualized as maps for success because it reviews what the participants feel is required to overcome youth roadblocks and counsellor challenges. The theme begins by focusing on youth roadblocks; a total of 10 suggestions were identified (by both youth and counsellors), and are broadly organized into the following two categories: the types of health and social services youth require (including modifications to services currently available), and how these services should be organized and delivered. The theme concludes with a discussion about what

counsellors feel would allow employment professionals to better serve youth with multiple, intersecting vulnerabilities.

Types of health and social services for youth. Six suggestions identified for youth pertained to the types of health and social services required by young people with intersecting vulnerabilities. The first relates to the need for affordable housing and transportation. Both youth and counsellor participants described an inaccessible housing market for young people in Northern Ontario, highlighting the need for initiatives that focus on increasing the supply of subsidized housing. A similar concern was expressed regarding the need for affordable transportation. To overcome this roadblock, Hailey and Matthew suggested providing youth with free bus passes, whereas counsellors spoke of creating a discounted youth pass, similar to those provided to students enrolled in a post-secondary academic institution. The second suggestion highlights the need for youth-specific services, namely homeless shelters and drop-in centres. As C4 explains:

"We should have a drop in centre in every single community… with youth workers… and I'm not talking youth workers who are privileged. I'm talking youth workers who have been in the trenches, who have some life experience… who know what it's like to be marginalized."

There was also discussion about the need for services that cater to youth above 25 years of age, services for youth that identify as indigenous, and services for youth with young children. The third suggestion highlights the need for improved transition programs for youth. Participants described needing enhanced support for young people with mental health issues that are transitioning from inpatient to outpatient, and for young people transitioning from child to adult services.

"I find [that] when they're at the hospital in crisis or they transition over to another

site… the transition plan or the release plan is a little open. So again, 'You're being released… you have a follow up appointment in 2 weeks… make sure you attend.' So again, we need more of a bridge between those services… we need to make sure that there are better supports in place for them." – C3

The fourth suggestion addresses the need for peer support. As noted by Samantha:

"Just getting together with people that have the same or somewhat of the same mental health issue that you have… because you can share it and explain it… talk about our past experiences and how we got diagnosed… a small community of just us people."

The fifth suggestion is employment-specific; a number of youth participants spoke about the need for an on-the-job mentor that could respond to their questions and clarify instructions as needed.

"There should be an appointed person on the jobsite… that way if you have an issue at work, you're not having to go to this person and that person and then everything gets banana-phoned. You know how banana phone works… one person says this and one person says that. Well, it gets back to the manager and then it makes you look like you've done something wrong when you were just asking a question… or even a helpline of some sort to say, 'This is the situation at hand [and] I don't know how to handle it.'" – Carly

Youth also described the importance of an individual on the job that they could talk to about non-work related issues that they are dealing with. This strategy would circumvent stigma from colleagues while also addressing the challenge of not always being able to separate their personal and work lives. The sixth and final type-of-service suggestion relates to the educational system; specifically, curriculum changes that incorporate life skills, worker rights, and information about available social services. As noted by C5:

"'I wish I had learned how to budget this and that I knew what a hydro bill looked like' and that kind of thing. So that's a common thing that's come up… a lot of those life skill things and things that are more relatable, more realistic… a lot of the stuff that we cover in here they say that there should be something like this in high school so that they're not doing it at 26 years old… so that they're more prepared when they finish high school."

Organization and delivery of health and social services for youth. Four suggestions were identified that pertain to the organization and delivery of health and social services for youth. The first suggestion highlights the need to consolidate services and resources. Counsellors communicated that having services under one roof would be helpful, whereas youth focused on resources being packaged and provided to them upon receiving a diagnosis. Nathan, for example, said that he would like an "epilepsy package" with information on where to go for peer support, rebates on certain medications, and where to look for equal-opportunity employers. The second suggestion addresses service hours of operation; although this suggestion was discussed in the context of youth employment counselling, it may apply to other youth services as well. Counsellors explained that while an 8:30 AM – 4:30 PM schedule works well for employment service providers, it does not always work for youth with multiple barriers. Participants suggested that hours be extended beyond 4:30 PM to accommodate those who do not function well in the morning, and to offer more flexibility to youth who are in part-time jobs and have little control over their work schedule. The third suggestion refers to the need for a flexible, individualized approach to service delivery. Specifically, counsellors described a need for flexibility regarding the non-employment service providers youth are assigned to, as well as flexibility regarding the location of client intake meetings. Counsellors noted that while they can appreciate the resource restrictions that need to be taken into account, they also feel it would be helpful in certain circumstances to consider youth preferences. For example, for youth who are transitioning from one gender to another, it would be helpful if they could choose between working with a male or female.

"A lot of policies of, 'You can't pick and choose who your counsellors are… you either get A or B and that's who you have to work with.' So for certain youth, it's difficult… especially if you're transgender or are transitioning. I find they have preferences around whether they want to work with a male or with a female… but you don't get to pick… you're assigned to one. And I understand it would be difficult if somebody had 12 clients and another person only had two but in certain circumstances it would be nice if there were a little bit more… flexibility" – C3

Similarly, for youth who are living with post traumatic stress disorder related to abuse, it would be helpful to have some leniency with regard to who they are assigned.

Counsellors also noted that it would be helpful to not always have to complete a client intake in a social services building since entering these spaces tends to provoke anxiety in a number of youth, particularly those who were formerly in care. Lastly, counsellors spoke of the need for services to be individualized and to recognize that what acts as a roadblock or barrier for one individual may not be an issue for another individual. As stated by C6:

"The challenges are as varied as the individuals. And I think that's the caution… there is no 'most', there's everything, there's all of it and sometimes there's none of it. If somebody says, 'Hi, I'm bipolar. I've been on medication since I was 15 years old. It's under control. I've never worked before and I'm afraid because I don't know what to do. I've never done this before and I'm worried that everyone is going to be judging me because of my mental health issue.' It can be as simple as that… there's no impact except in their mind."

The fourth and final organization-and-delivery suggestion relates youth engagement in future youth-oriented policy and program development. As highlighted by April:

"They should want to hear from us as opposed to hearing from everybody else… they should be trying to listen to the young people… they should be getting the young people to fill out, you know how they do those census things… why wouldn't they do something like that… almost like a survey… where they take a vote of what should be brought into town for the youth… to keep the suicide rate down, to keep the drug use down, and to keep pregnancy down."

Counsellors echoed concerns about the need for youth-driven initiatives. As noted by C5: *"It's very different… what the youth are looking for as opposed to adults or someone who doesn't fall in that 16 to 29 year category."*

Recommendations for counsellors. A number of suggestions for counsellors were also identified. Due to the frequency with which counsellors interact with youth living with mental health issues, many counsellor participants identified a need for more training in mental health. Specifically, counsellors described wanting to be able to support youth who are in crisis but who are waiting to see a mental health professional. As noted by C2:

"Always more training in the mental health… like what we can be teaching the youth? Yeah it's great, "you have anxiety"… we can tell them about breathing techniques and stuff like that, but does that actually work for with someone with anxiety? Do we have the appropriate training to be able to help with mental health on the employment side? And I get that we're not the counsellors and it's not our role, however, when they're contacting us, how should we be responding to them?"

The need to better understand the mental health system in general was also identified by numerous participants. Counsellors described wanting to refer themselves to a mental health service provider so that they had a better understanding of the process and wait times; they believed this would allow them to better prepare the clients they refer to these same services. There was also discussion about the need to decompress due to the complexity of the issues faced by their clients. As noted by C3:

"I mean other than a few more weeks vacation… I joke about it but it would be nice… decompressing is definitely something that is vital and it's tough. I mean anybody that works in the social work realm, you definitely do need time to disconnect and stuff… sometimes I wish I had just that extra week a year."

Lastly, counsellors expressed a need for more collaboration with other service providers. For example, one counsellor participant spoke of creating a reporting system that could be used among different service providers (i.e., mental health, employment, social assistance, etc.,) to reduce the misuse of services as well as ensure that contact is made when a youth is referred to an external agency. Other counsellors described wanting an event similar to a job fair, but for different service providers in the community.

"A job fair but for service providers so that you can go around and find out what everybody does… what's available, what the referral process is, what the requirements are… just having that face-to-face… and I'm not going to say non-profit or this or that, but the people who serve people below the poverty line, you know?" – C1

"Meeting with people that provide different services in the community… just to know what is out there, what is coming down the pipe and what we can look forward to… just more collaboration because really, employment or unemployment, the majority are going to be dealing with [the same sort of issues]" – C5

4.8 Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed description of the findings under major themes and sub-themes, using the metaphor of an employment journey. Participants described experiencing a number of challenging life circumstances, including those related to place, and explained how these circumstances interfere with their ability to find a job. Participants also described the different avenues through which they come into contact with counsellors, and emphasized the critical role these individuals play in supporting vulnerable youth. Discussion about the challenges counsellors experience and their motivations for doing this type of work also emerged. When reflecting on what would be helpful, both youth and counsellor participants offered solutions that relate to the type of services required by young people with mental health issues, as well as how

these services should be delivered. Lastly, while all participants described employment as an important developmental milestone, they identified a number of additional support needs that extended beyond employment and mental health.

Chapter 5: Discussion & Conclusion

5.1 Chapter Overview

The following chapter will review the two key messages of the study, considering how they reflect academic literature. Recommendations for practice, policy and research will then be outlined, followed by a discussion of the study's strengths, limitations and dissemination plan. The chapter concludes with final remarks.

5.2 Key Messages

The overall purpose of this study was to understand the support needs of youth with mental health issues who are looking for jobs in Northern Ontario. Two key messages were elucidated from the major themes of the study. The first key message was that the support needs of youth are complex and multi-layered. The second message was that the Youth Job Connection program is inadequately resourced to support young people with complex needs that are looking for jobs in northern communities.

Complex, intersecting support needs. As noted in the section on 'roadblocks', the youth who participated in this study had complex, intersecting support needs that extended beyond employment and mental health. For example, youth and counsellor participants described challenges related to affordable housing, food insecurity and unreliable transportation. The experience of stigma, racism and discrimination was also quite common, and was compounded, at times, by intersecting social identities (i.e., being young and gay, being young and poor, being young, gay and Indigenous, etc.,).

The concept of intersectionality provides an important theoretical lens for understanding some of the challenges faced by young job seekers in northern

communities. Kimberlé Crenshaw first proposed intersectionality as a theoretical construct in 1989 (Hallet, 2015). Crenshaw was studying antidiscrimination doctrine and explained that, "cases of sexual discrimination tended to focus on the experience of 'women', whereas cases of racial discrimination focused on the 'Black experience'" (Hallet, 2015, p. 157). She argued that in order to understand the experiences of any individual, particularly those who have been marginalized, it is important to develop an awareness of how their social identities intersect (Hallet, 2015). Crenshaw also highlighted that the, "position at the intersection of both race and gender differs from the experience of solely race or gender" (Hallet, 2015, p. 157). Put simply, the concept of intersectionality refers to the ways in which aspects of social identity interact with systems of oppression (Etherington & Baker, 2018; Hallet, 2015)

Although first developed in feminist studies, the concept of intersectionality is now being applied across disciplines (Hankivsky & Christoffersen, 2008). Applied to youth employment, an intersectionality lens reminds both service providers and policy makers that aspects of identity are, "not independent dimensions of stratification but rather are interconnected and work simultaneously to shape lived experiences and life chances" (Etherington & Baker, 2018, p. 60). The concept of intersectionality highlights that human lives are multidimensional, and discourages the use of large group categorizations (which overlook intragroup differences). It also recognizes that, at any given time, individuals can simultaneously experience privilege and oppression. Consequently, intersectional approaches deem "one-size-fits-all" models as inadequate, focusing instead on the complexities of identity (Etherington & Baker, 2018). The

concept of intersectionality can thus be used, in part, to explain how aspects of a young person's identity impinge or accelerate employment success.

In relation to the present study, intersectionality provides a framework that acknowledges the diversity that exists within groups. It also rejects the assumption that young job seekers with mental health issues have the same experiences and respond to circumstances the same way. Although the youth that participated in this study were all categorized as 'multi-barriered' (a requirement to participate in the YJC program), each had their individual story. Additionally, while some presented with a high number barriers, they did not necessarily require more support than those who presented with fewer barriers. Recognizing the way different identities interact with each other and with systems of power and oppression is a necessary first step in shifting from linear, one-dimensional policies to those that are dynamic and multi-level (Etherington & Baker, 2018). With respect to policies and programs designed for youth with complex support needs such as the YJC, using an intersectional lens is one way this can be accomplished.

Complex support needs can also make it difficult for counsellors to successfully link youth to meaningful jobs, and stay within their scope of work, since other social determinants of health may be primary barriers to employment. As noted in the section on 'pit stops', many counsellors utilized strategies to overcome these barriers, such as implementing a food security program. This example is consistent with findings from the 2017 Ontario Centre for Workplace Innovation (OCWI) Summary Report on employment service delivery. According to the OCWI report (2017), "in many cases, [employment service] providers have already identified and implemented ways to counter

the impact of these [socio-economic] realities… examples include fundraising initiatives to provide food and clothing to clients, partnerships with employers/municipalities around ride share and/or community transportation options, and development of pro bono, referral networks for professional supports (e.g., counselling, addiction, life coaching)" (p. 9). Counsellors also described becoming a source of emotional support for their clients, as well as attending significant life events (i.e., the birth of a child) in place of a close friend or family member. It is important to note however, that while helpful, these activities extend beyond what is mandated in the YJC service delivery model.

The frequency with which counsellors work outside of their service delivery model is significant given the well-established body of literature on job stress discussed in chapter two. Several counsellors discussed how it is emotionally exhausting to support youth with complex, intersecting vulnerabilities (demands) and know that there is very little they can do to alleviate their burden (control), providing support for the strain hypothesis of the JDC model (Karasek, 1979). Although studies that focus on the experience of job strain among employment professionals are less predominant than some of the other helping professions (i.e., nursing, social work, etc.,), employment and career counsellors have been identified as 'high touch' professionals (Skovholt, Grier & Hanson, 2001). Skovholt et al. (2001) define high touch professions as those that focus on improving the lives of others. These authors argue that self-care is often a struggle for high touch professionals, and that the "need to re-create the cycle of caring can lead to counselor depletion and burnout" (p. 167).

Skovholt et al. (2001) identified common hazards associated with high touch work, such as limited resources and the inability to detach from one's work, which are consistent with the counsellor challenges discussed in the section on 'pit stops'. These authors go on to argue that from a professional longevity perspective, it is important that self-care be prioritized. These authors also highlight that there are steps that can be taken, both by high touch professionals and their employers, which promote self-care. It was evident in the findings that counsellors play a pivotal role in YJC program success, and that youth value the relationships developed with their counsellors. However, counsellors struggle to 'leave work at work', and often assume roles and responsibilities that extend beyond employment counselling. It is reasonable to assume that counsellors need to maintain their mental wellbeing in order to continue to deliver high-quality services; thus, while in operation, it is imperative that mechanisms that promote counsellor self-care be put into place.

Program gaps. The second key message relates to the capacity of the YJC to address the needs of the participants it was designed to serve.

Mandate. As noted in chapter one, the YJC aims to provide youth who experience multiple, complex barriers to employment (i.e., living in poverty, experiencing stigma and discrimination, etc.,), an opportunity to learn about jobs and gain working experience (MAESD, 2015). However, counsellors are provided with very few resources to address the challenging life circumstances clients present with. For example, several counsellors discussed not knowing how to support clients living with a mental health issue, and needing to be careful not to blur the line between employment and mental health

counselling. Counsellors also described not always having access to the extensive resources youth required within their communities. This program gap is significant because it highlights the tension between the mandate to serve multi-barriered youth, and the limited resources available to meet this mandate. Researchers have also pointed to policies that ignore social context as one of the reasons programs such as the YJC struggle to meet their mandates. According to Bancroft (2017), "it is the failure of the positive youth development model, and by default of [the] YJC, to recognize how NEET youth's marginal status impacts their ability to find and keep work which restricts the program's capacity to achieve the goals it sets out" (p. 5). Bancroft (2017) also draws attention to the fact that the history of how young people have come to experience higher unemployment rates continues to be left out of provincial policy frameworks. Zoltok (2015), who studied youth public policy in Ontario, supports this view. Zoltok (2015) argues that instead of acknowledging the challenging life circumstances youth experience as being a consequence of the social relations in which they reside, provincial policies focus on delayed transitions to adulthood. The YJC follows the trend of abstracting youth from their social contexts, and as a result, struggles to successfully fulfill its mandate.

Measures of success. The second program gap relates to YJC measures of success. To be considered a success, participants "must achieve a better status having… completed the program compared to when they started the program" (MAESD, 2016, p. 34). That is, participants "must achieve a desired employment, training or educational outcome, measured… three months after exiting the program" (MAESD, 2016, p. 34). However, in order to participate in the YJC, youth must experience multiple barriers to

employment. In fact, as of January 2018, the requirement is that participants possess 45% of the program's suitability indicators, up from 35% when the program was initially launched (MAESD, 2018). This narrow definition of success is a significant program gap because it ignores other accomplishments that young people may attain through participating in the YJC, such as finding stable housing or becoming connected with mental health supports. It also overlooks young people's own definitions of success (Bancroft, 2017).

The program is also evaluated by the MAESD to determine whether counsellors are meeting minimum provincial standards. This appraisal plays a key role in funding decisions. As demonstrated in Table 2, the most heavily weighted standard is service impacts (i.e., the number of youth who, three months after program exit, are in employment, education or training).

Table 2
Provincial Service Quality Standard

Table 7: Provincial Service Quality Standard (SQS)

Dimension	Measure	Weight	Maximum value	Minimum Provincial Standard	SQS Value
		a	b	c	d
Customer Service 25%	1. Customer Satisfaction	5%	0.5	85%	0.43
	2. Service Coordination	20%	2.0	50%	1.00
Effectiveness 55%	3. Service Impacts	35%	3.5	75%	2.63
	4. Participant Suitability	20%	2.0	45%	0.90
Efficiency 20%	5. Completion Score*	20%	2.0	100%	2.0
		100%	10.0	**Overall Provincial Service Quality Standard**	**6.96**

Note. Ontario Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development. (2018). Youth job connection program guidelines. Retrieved from http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/yjc_program_guidelines.pdf

This program gap is significant because it may lead to 'creaming'. Corden and Thornton (2003) define creaming as, "serving clients with lower support needs at the expense of others with more intensive needs because of financial incentives" (p. 34). To prevent creaming, researchers have suggested adopting a tiered funding system (instead of an outcome-based funding system) that reward service providers who support individuals with complex needs (Corden & Thornton, 2003; Gewurtz, 2011). Other suggestions put forth to counter the negative effects of creaming include: setting different benchmarks for individuals with complex needs and incorporating a quota into an outcome-based funding system for individuals with complex needs (Corden & Thornton, 2003). These suggestions promote shared risk among funders and service providers (Gewurtz, 2011), and ultimately work to ensure that those who are most vulnerable receive the services they require.

Funding. Concerns about funding are the third program gap. The MAESD provides two streams of funding to third-party YJC service providers: (1) operating funds, and (2) financial support and incentive funds. The first stream of funds is to be used for the day-to-day operation of the program, including: counsellor salaries and benefits; staff training; marketing; facilities (i.e., rent); and other operating expenditures. Approximately $3,000 in operating funds is allocated per participant (MAESD, 2018).

The second stream of funds was briefly discussed in chapter one. Approximately $7,500 is available per participant in this stream. These funds can be further divided into the following two categories: (1) employer incentives, and (2) participant employment and training supports. According to the MAESD (2018), employer incentives are meant

to "offset costs of temporary reductions in productivity, increased supervision requirements, and other expenses resulting from hiring a participant… the incentive can be related to the cost of the participant's wages and may cover 100 percent of the wages for the entire placement" (p. 24). Participant employment and training support funds are to be used to remove barriers to participating in the program ($1,000 maximum), to offer a pre-employment training stipend ($1,260 maximum), and to offer skills enhancement support (MAESD, 2018).

Although counsellors have the flexibility to allocate the $7,500 in a way that best supports the participant (excluding the stipend, which all participants receive at the provincial minimum wage rate), a gap remains in the lack of acknowledgement of unique northern community issues. For example, both youth and counsellor participants spoke about the lack of transportation infrastructure in northern communities. A young person living outside the Town of Parry Sound, but still within the District (i.e., Carling Township), can expect to spend approximately $46-84 per day travelling to and from the employment office (Parry Sound Taxi, personal communication, May 23, 2018). At a cost of $84 per day, the $1000 maximum for removing participant barriers would be exceeded by day 12 of the program. Thus, it is essential that policy makers stop using one-size-fits-all approaches, and that they take into account the unique context third-party service providers are working in when making decisions about funding.

Indigenous partnerships & culture. The final program gap relates to the absence of Indigenous partnerships and culture. As noted in chapter one, identifying as Indigenous is one of the suitability criteria of the YJC program. However, program

guidelines do not provide direction on how to be inclusive of Indigenous value systems (i.e., acknowledging traditional lands, allowing youth to cleanse before beginning program activities through smudging, etc.,). This gap is significant given the negative impact colonization and Western assimilation has had on Indigenous people in Canada (MacDonald & Steenbeek, 2015). There is also well-established body of literature that recognizes connection to one's culture as a form of healing for Indigenous Peoples (Kirmayer, Simpson & Cargo, 2003; McCabe, 2008). Stewart (2008) supports this view; she argues that, "cultural identity gives [Indigenous] peoples the strength and wherewithal to consider healing possibilities through personal self-growth, connections with family, community, and Indigenous cultures" (p. 52). Although connecting to culture may not directly improve job readiness, it may have other positive healing effects such as improving self-worth, which will be of value to young people when they enter the world of work (D. McKay, personal communication, June 11, 2018). Thus, there is a need to reevaluate the way YJC counsellors engage and support Indigenous participants. As stated by Merrill, Bruce and Marlin (2010), Indigenous people "want to feel that their cultures, beliefs, and ways of thinking and problem solving are respected and valued" (p. 28). In the author's opinion, there are simple steps that can be taken to ensure that Indigenous youth feel welcome in YJC workshops; recognition of Indigenous cultural practices is one of these steps.

5.3 Recommendations

This study offers several recommendations, categorized as recommendations for practice, policy and future research.

Practice recommendations. The findings of this study demonstrate a need to re-evaluate the way health and social services are delivered to youth with complex, intersecting vulnerabilities in Northern Ontario. It was evident in the introductory and literature review chapters that young people experience several barriers related to employment and mental health. The study findings illuminated the complexity of these barriers, demonstrating that they are often interdependent, extend beyond employment and mental health, and require the support of multiple professionals. The findings also highlighted some of the unique challenges that young people in Northern Ontario experience, including poor access to services, lack of transportation infrastructure, and geographic isolation. One way to address these barriers and geographic challenges is to move towards integrated, collaborative services.

A model worthy of consideration is the Government of Ontario's recently launched Youth Wellness Hubs. On February 8, 2017, Dr. Eric Hoskins (Ontario's former Minister of Health and Long-Term Care) announced funding to implement up to nine integrated service hubs across the province. These hubs offer high quality, walk-in mental health and addiction services, as well as primary care and other community and social supports, to youth aged 12-25 (Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario, 2018). As discussed in the earlier chapters of this report, young people tend to have a negative perception of mental health professionals, which often results in underutilization of services (French, Reardon & Smith, 2003; Rickwood, Deane, Wilson & Ciarrochi, 2005; Vanheusden et al., 2008). Youth participants held similar views, but added concerns about anonymity as an additional barrier. Youth Wellness Hubs help to overcome these concerns since mental

health service providers are co-located with several other professionals (i.e., bystanders don't know which services youth are seeking when they enter a hub). Youth Wellness Hubs also provide rapid access to services, which address the sometimes-lengthy wait times in Northern Ontario.

There are several features of the Youth Wellness Hub model that are consistent with the recommendations provided by youth and counsellor participants in the section on 'Maps for Success'. For example, youth participants described wanting peer support; this is one of the services offered at Youth Wellness Hubs. Additionally, both youth and counsellor participants discussed needing enhanced supports for young people that are transitioning from child to adult services. The Youth Wellness Hub model addresses this concern by adopting an expanded age range for youth services. Finally, counsellors expressed a desire for collaboration with non-employment service providers; this is one of the core values of the Youth Wellness Hub model (Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario, 2018).

Given that the present study reflects a geographic context characterized by a lack of resources, it is important to consider models that are less costly to implement. An example of such a model is the enhanced intersectoral links approach to supported employment. King et al. (2006) described intersectoral links as formal structures that "enable collaboration and sustained communication between vocational and clinical services, supported by formal protocols and regular cross-training" (p. 475). Although primarily used as an alterative to supported employment models, Sherring, Robson, Morris, Frost and Tirupati (2010) argue that intersectoral links offers a viable alternative

to co-location. It is the author's opinion that these formal communication structures can be developed and expanded to other professionals (i.e., housing, justice, etc.) to ensure that young people with complex barriers in Northern Ontario receive the support they require.

Policy recommendations. The study findings also demonstrate a need to re-evaluate the way public policy is developed in Ontario. It was evident in the 'Maps for Success' section that both youth and counsellors have ideas about the types of programs that would be helpful for young people experiencing barriers to employment, as well as how those programs should be organized and delivered. An approach to policy development that would ensure these perspectives are captured prior to program implementation is co-design. Co-design has roots in the Scandinavian tradition of participatory design (Steen, Manschot & De Koning, 2011). As stated by Blomkamp (2018), "this approach is based on the democratic concept whereby people affected by design decisions should be involved in the process of making the decisions" (as cited in Sanoff, 1990, p. i). This moves beyond consultation, and recognizes service users as experts of their own experience (Steen et al., 2011). Some of the immediate benefits associated with a co-design approach include: improved knowledge of service user needs, better cooperation between organizations/across the disciplines, and lower development costs. Long-term benefits include: improved public relations, higher satisfaction of service users and more successful innovations (Steen et al., 2011). Applied to the current study, a co-design approach may have helped avoid some of the program gaps addressed in the second key message. This view is consistent with findings from the 2017 OCWI

Summary report; "the success of a new program or service would have increased if [employment counsellors] had been given an opportunity to provide input on its feasibility or effectiveness in advance, e.g., the Youth Job Link (YJL) and YJC programs" (p. 11).

It was also evident in the findings that there are challenges unique to northern communities, and that funding models often overlook these challenges. A shift is thus required at the policy-level that acknowledges the social landscape of Northern Ontario; for example, funding decisions should account for physical distance and availability of resources. Rebeiro Gruhl (2010) supports this view, and suggests that services "be funded with consideration of place" (p. 216). She also suggests that funding models be restructured, removing competitive aspects and rewarding collaboration. This second recommendation aligns well with the Youth Wellness Hub model discussed in the previous section.

Future research recommendations. This study fills an important gap in research, focusing specifically on the support needs of youth with mental health issues who are looking for jobs in northern communities. There is, however, a need for future research to build on the study findings. The first relates to employers; while not the focus of this research study, employers play a pivotal role in the hiring of youth with mental health issues. They also play an important role in ensuring that youth succeed in the workplace; hence, their perspectives could add valuable insight into the feasibility of on-the-job supports required by young people with complex, intersecting vulnerabilities.

Another direction for future research is exploring the perspectives of youth who identify as Indigenous. According to Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (2018), the Indigenous population in Canada is highest in Ontario, with a significant portion residing in Northern Ontario. Although recruitment was open to any job seeker with a mental health issue in one of the participating employment centres, purposive sampling of Indigenous youth did not occur. Although issues related to race and intergenerational trauma did emerge, they were not explicitly explored, as focusing on issues specific to Indigenous youth was not the purpose of this study. Examining these experiences and perspectives could have important practice implications that relate to providing culturally competent services in northern communities.

Future endeavors may also consider exploring the support needs of youth employment counsellors. As explained in the 'pit stops' theme, counsellors noted that they were emotionally exhausted, and that it is not always possible to disengage from their work. Given the critical role that these individuals play in supporting and directing youth to appropriate health and social services, understanding how to support them may help prevent emotional exhaustion and staff turnover.

A final area for future investigation involves examining the barriers and facilitators associated with implementing an integrated health and social services model for youth within northern communities. As previously discussed, the Province of Ontario announced funding for up to nine Youth Wellness Hubs in February 2017 (Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario, 2018). Four of these hubs are operational, and are located in Scarborough, East Toronto, Central Toronto and Chatham-Kent. On May 3, 2018, the

province revealed the locations of six additional hubs: Eastern Champlain, Haliburton, Kenora, Malton, North Simcoe and Niagara Region (Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2018). Note that only one location (recently announced) meets the study's definition of Northern Ontario, and that none are representative of rural, northern communities. As such, the barriers and facilitators associated with implementing this type of service delivery model in Northern Ontario remains largely unknown. There will be considerable opportunities for future research to inform the work in this area.

5.4 Strengths & Limitations

One of the strengths of this study is the inclusion of both youth and counsellor participants from the YJC program. This provided an opportunity for triangulation and in-depth exploration of the program from different perspectives (service user and service provider). It also facilitated exploration of the issues, not only at an individual client level, but at a system level, considering implications for both practice and policy. A further strength is the application of multiple strategies to enhance credibility. For example, the principal investigator and her academic supervisor individually coded four interview transcripts. They also met on two separate occasions to jointly develop a coding framework, recognizing "knowledge beyond a single angle of vision" (Thorne, 2008, p. 224). The principal investigator also maintained an audit trail with decisions about research design, data collection and data analysis, providing other researchers with an explicit reasoning pathway. Finally, the principal investigator maintained a reflexive journal and engaged in peer debriefing with her thesis supervisory committee; this helped minimize bias in the interpretation and analysis of the research data.

The study limitations relate primarily to transferability of the findings. Four limitations should be considered, however, efforts were made to mitigate these limitations where possible. The first limitation relates to transferability of the findings to youth and counsellors from rural and remote communities. Although the principal investigator made an effort to recruit youth and counsellor participants from communities that represent different catchment areas, two of the three study locations were large urban centres. Given that Northern Ontario is made up of several rural and remote communities, research examining their unique experiences and challenges may be warranted in order to better respond to local support needs.

The second limitation relates to the study setting; all youth and counsellor participants were recruited from the YJC program. As such, the study reflects a particular service delivery context. Although this limitation could be perceived as a strength of the study, the opportunity to interview youth and counsellors in other settings may have enriched the study findings. To mitigate this limitation, the principal investigator provided a detailed description of the YJC program to enable readers to assess transferability to other service delivery settings. A profile of the mental health and employment trajectory of each youth participant was also provided.

The third limitation addresses the likelihood of self-selection bias; it is possible that the experiences of individuals who volunteered differed from the experiences of individuals who did not volunteer. According to Robinson (2014), self-selection bias is likely to lead to a sample that is "more open, more patient and more interested in the topic than the general sample universe" (p. 36). The study findings, therefore, are not

necessarily representative of all youth in the YJC program. In addition, the perspectives of youth who never made it to the YJC program may be important to explore in future research.

The final limitation relates to study design; although cross-sectional studies allow for the comparison of several variables at the same time, they are limited in their ability to provide information about change over time (Institute for Work and Health, 2015). Although determining change over time was not the purpose of the present study, caution should be taken when interpreting findings as they reflect participant experiences at a particular point in time.

5.5 Dissemination Plan

There are two target audiences for the findings from this research. One important audience is the front-line service providers who support young workers with mental health issues. The message for this audience is that there are several challenges inherent in supporting young people with complex needs; because of this, support is required to maintain boundaries and self-care, and to extend professional referral networks. The second important focus for dissemination are policy makers who have the power to effect system change within the province to address the needs of young workers with mental health issues (i.e., the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, etc.). The message for this audience is that single-focus programs are inadequate for audiences with multiple vulnerabilities; key priorities for future program development should include realistic mandates, appropriate

measures of success, and the integration of health and social services. Future program development should also be informed by co-design and include consideration of place.

This research will be disseminated through articles published in peer-reviewed journals (i.e., Child and Adolescent Mental Health, Psychiatric Rehabilitation and Journal of Disability Policy Studies). The principal investigator intends to publish two articles; the first will focus on the lived experiences of youth participants, and will be targeted towards services providers that work with young people in Northern Ontario. The second will focus on changes required at the system-level, and will be targeted towards provincial policy makers. In addition, findings will be disseminated at the ground level through community meetings. Some of this work has already begun; a community meeting was held in Parry Sound on December 14, 2017. Professionals from employment services, mental health services and local First Nations were all in attendance; one of the outcomes from this meeting was that it started a local dialogue about what is needed to better support young people with mental health issues that are looking for jobs in northern communities. An additional outcome was that it created space for attendees to network with new partners. Dissemination will also occur through presentations at the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists Conference, the Canadian Association for Research on Work and Health Conference, and the First Work Futures Conference.

5.6 Conclusion

This is the first known study to explore the support needs of youth with mental health issues who are looking for jobs in Northern Ontario. The key messages underline the complexity of youth support needs and limitations of the YJC program to address

these needs. The complexity of needs, coupled with the challenges unique to northern communities, highlight the importance of re-evaluating the way health and social services are delivered in Northern Ontario.

The way forward must consider these unique, multi-layered needs, and the perspective of both youth and front-line service providers. Youth require multi-disciplinary services that acknowledge their differences and individual experiences. Service providers require access to resources that allow them to address the challenges their clients present with. These needs must be considered within the context of under-resourced communities in northern and rural settings. Integrated care models show promise, however, they can be costly to implement in under-resourced communities. An intersectoral links approach is a promising alternative that establishes formal communication structures between external service providers. Furthermore, decisions about funding need to be made in consideration of social context, rather than assume one-size-fits-all models are adequate.

This thesis advocates for an integrated, collaborative and responsive approach to youth service delivery, informed by co-design with stakeholders from rural, northern communities. Collaboration and innovation are needed in order to adequately address the social context and multi-layered needs of youth with mental health issues who are seeking employment in Northern Ontario.

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Appendix A

HiREB
Hamilton Integrated Research Ethics Board

1 September 2016

Project Number: 2167

Project Title: A Northern Perspective on Youth Employment & Mental Health

Student Principal Investigator: Ms. Katrina Aguiar

Local Principal Investigator: Dr. Sandra Moll

We have completed our review of your study and are please to issue our final approval. You may now begin your study.

The following documents have been approved on both ethical and scientific grounds:

Document Name	Document Date	Document Version
Ethics Application - Attachment A - Research Protocol - V3 Clean	28/Aug/2016	3.0
Ethics Application - Attachment B - Recruitment Poster - V3 Clean	24/Aug/2016	3.0
Ethics Application – Attachment C – Email & Telephone Correspondence - V3 Clean	28/Aug/2016	3.0
Ethics Application - Attachment D - Youth Consent - V2 Clean	28/Aug/2016	2.0
Ethics Application - Attachment E - Employment Counsellor Consent - V2 Clean	28/Aug/2016	2.0
Ethics Application - Attachment F - Budget and Justification - V2 Clean	28/Aug/2016	2.0
Ethics Application – Attachment G – Youth Interview Guide - V2 Clean	26/Aug/2016	2.0
Ethics Application – Attachment H – Employment Counsellor Interview Guide - V2 Clean	26/Aug/2016	2.0

Any changes to this study must be submitted with an Amendment Request Form before they can be implemented.

This approval is effective for 12 months from the date of this letter. Upon completion of your study please submit a **Study Completion Form**.
If you require more time to complete your study, you must request an extension in writing before this approval expires. Please submit an **Annual Review Form** with your request.

PLEASE QUOTE THE ABOVE REFERENCED PROJECT NUMBER ON ALL FUTURE CORRESPONDENCE

Good luck with your research,

Kristina Trim, PhD, RSW
Chair, HiREB Student Research Committee
McMaster University

The Hamilton Integrated Research Ethics Board operates in compliance with and is constituted in accordance with the requirements of: The Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans; The International Conference on Harmonization of Good Clinical Practices; Part C Division 5 of the Food and Drug Regulations of Health Canada, and the provisions of the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act 2004 and its applicable Regulations;for studies conducted at St. Joseph's Hospital, HIREB complies with the health ethics guide of the Catholic Alliance of Canada

Appendix B

HiREB
Hamilton Integrated Research Ethics Board

Amendment Approval

5 December 2016

HiREB Project #: 2016-2167

Local Principal Investigator: Dr. Sandra Moll

Project Submission Title: A Northern Perspective on Youth Employment & Mental Health

Document(s) Amended with version # and date:

Document Name	Document Date	Document Version
Ethics Application - Attachment A - Research Protocol - V4	29/Nov/2016	4.0
Ethics Application - Attachment E - Employment Counsellor Consent - V3	29/Nov/2016	3.0
Ethics Application – Attachment I – Employment Counsellor Demographic Questionnaire – Version 1	29/Nov/2016	1.0

Research Ethics Board Review:

[X] Amendment approved as submitted
[ ] Amendment approved conditional on changes noted in "Conditions" section below
[ ] New enrollment suspended
[ ] Study suspended pending further review

Level of Review:

[ ] Full Research Ethics Board
[X] Research Ethics Board Executive

Raelene Rathbone

Dr. Raelene Rathbone, MB BS, MD, PhD
Chair, Hamilton Integrated Research Ethics Board

The Hamilton Integrated Research Ethics Board operates in compliance with and is constituted in accordance with the requirements of: The Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans; The International Conference on Harmonization of Good Clinical Practices; Part C Division 5 of the Food and Drug Regulations of Health Canada, and the provisions of the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act 2004 and its applicable Regulations; For studies conducted at St. Joseph's Hospital, HIREB complies with the health ethics guide of the Catholic Alliance of Canada

Appendix C

Young workers!
We want to hear from you…

- *Are you between the ages of 16 and 29?*
- *Do you have something to say about work, stress and mental health?*

You are invited to share your thoughts and experiences as part of a research interview on work and mental health. You will receive a $20 gift card to thank you for your participation.

Please contact Katrina Aguiar at (647) 296-5084 for details.

McMaster University FIRST 1 WORK Occupational Science & Occupational Therapy UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Appendix D

Ethics Application – Attachment C – Email & Telephone Correspondence

Email – Interview Scheduling:

Hello,

My name is Katrina Aguiar and I am a Masters student from McMaster University. Your name was given to me by an employment counsellor at **[insert employment center]** about your interest in participating in a research study about youth employment and mental health in Northern Ontario. Interview questions will focus on employment history, mental health experiences, occupational stress and the services available to young workers in Northern Ontario.

If it's alright with you, I'd like to go ahead and schedule the interview now. The interview will take place at **[insert employment center]** and will take about 90 minutes to complete. The interview will be conducted in a private room at **[insert employment center].** You will also receive a $20 gift card for participating in this study.

Do any of the dates/times listed below work for you?

[Insert date/time option 1]
[Insert date/time option 2]

Please let me know what your preference is by **[insert date]**. Please also let me know if you have any questions.

Cheers,
Katrina

Version 3.0 – August 28, 2016

Ethics Application – Attachment C – Email & Telephone Correspondence

Email – Interview Follow Up:

Hello,

My name is Katrina Aguiar and we met on **[insert interview date].**

I have a couple of follow up questions that I would like to ask you. Is it possible to arrange either a Skype or telephone meeting with you? If so, do any of the dates/times listed below work?

[Insert date/time option 1]
[Insert date/time option 2]

Please let me know what your preference is by **[insert date]**. Please also let me know whether you would prefer to connect via Skype or by phone.

As always, let me know if you have any questions.

Cheers,
Katrina

Version 3.0 – August 28, 2016

Ethics Application – Attachment C – Email & Telephone Correspondence

Telephone – Interview Scheduling:

Hello,

My name is Katrina Aguiar and I am a Masters student from McMaster University. Your name was given to me by an employment counsellor at **[insert employment center]** about your interest in participating in a research study about youth employment and mental health in Northern Ontario. Interview questions will focus on employment history, mental health experiences, occupational stress and the services available to young workers in Northern Ontario.

If it's alright with you, I'd like to go ahead and schedule the interview now. The interview will take place at **[insert employment center]** and will take about 90 minutes to complete. The interview will be conducted in a private room at **[insert employment center].** You will also receive a $20 gift card for participating in this study.

Do any of the dates/times listed below work for you?

[Insert date/time option 1]
[Insert date/time option 2]

[Select date and confirm meeting time]

Do you have any questions for me?

[Answer any outstanding questions]

Thank you for taking the time to chat with me today – I look forward to meeting with you on **[insert date/time at X employment center].**

Good bye.

Version 3.0 – August 28, 2016

Ethics Application – Attachment C – Email & Telephone Correspondence

Telephone – Interview Follow Up:

Hello,

My name is Katrina Aguiar and we met on **[insert interview date].**

I have a couple of follow up questions that I would like to ask you. Is it possible to arrange either a Skype or telephone meeting with you? If so, do any of the dates/times listed below work?

[Insert date/time option 1]
[Insert date/time option 2]

[Select date and confirm meeting time]

Is your preference that we connect via Skype or by phone? Do you have any questions for me?

[Record follow-up interview format preference and answer any outstanding questions]

Thank you for taking the time to chat with me today – I look forward to meeting with you on **[insert date/time via Skype/telephone].**

Good bye.

Version 3.0 – August 28, 2016

Appendix E

Letter of Information & Consent Form – Youth Interviews

Title: A Northern Perspective on Youth Employment & Mental Health

Investigators:
Katrina Aguiar, MSc Candidate, School of Rehabilitation Science, McMaster University
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Cheryl Missuna, PhD, School of Rehabilitation Science, McMaster University

Funding Source: Canadian Occupational Therapy Foundation

What Is This Study About?
You are invited to take part in a research study about youth employment and mental health in Northern Ontario. Feedback will be gathered from youth participants, as well as from youth employment counsellors. Findings will be used to develop resources that support youth who are seeking employment in northern communities, and that support counsellors who provide employment services.

Who Can Take Part?
Youth between 16 and 29 years of age who have experienced a self-identified mental health issue and are seeking employment in Northern Ontario. Our goal is to include 20-25 youth participants. Participation in this study is voluntary and is not linked to employment or the services provided at employment centres in any way.

What Will You Be Asked To Do?
During the interview, you will be asked to reflect on your employment history, exposure to hazards, mental health experiences, and the challenges you have encountered when accessing relevant support services. The interview will take about 90 minutes, and if you agree, it will be audiotaped.

What Will Happen To The Information That I Share In The Interview?
Your interview data will not be shared with anyone except with your consent or as required by law. All personal information will be removed from the data and replaced with a code. A list linking the code with your name will be kept in a secure place, separate from your data. Only members of the research team will review audiotaped interviews. The interview transcript, with identifying information removed, will be securely stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office and/or on a secure, password protected hard drive. Audiotaped interviews and other study data (i.e. transcripts, field notes) will be retained for 2-3 years. If the results of the study are published, personal information that could identify you will be removed.

How Will I Benefit If I Take Part?
Although there may not be an immediate benefit to you, we hope that study findings will lead to the development of resources for youth with mental health issues who are seeking employment in Northern Ontario. A summary of the study findings will be available to participants, if they wish, at the conclusion of the study.

Will I Be Paid For My Time?
You will receive a $20 gift card for your participation in this study.

Are There Any Risks?
Some people find it helpful, but others may find it stressful to discuss their mental health and employment experiences. It is important to know that you do not have to answer questions that are uncomfortable for you, and that you can stop the interview at any time.

What If I Decide Not To Participate?
You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time by contacting one of the researchers. If you do not want to answer some of the questions, you can choose not to answer them and still remain in the study. Please note that individual data sets cannot be removed 6 weeks following the interview.

What If I Have Questions About The Study?
If you have questions about the study at any time, you can contact:

Katrina Aguiar, School of Rehabilitation Science, McMaster University
Phone: (647) 296-5084 OR Email: aguiak1@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Participant

Yes, I would like to take part in this study. I have read the letter of information thoroughly, and have had questions answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I will get a signed copy of this form.

_____ _____

Name of Participant (please print) Signature

_____

Date

Person Obtaining Consent:

I have discussed this study in detail with the participant. I believe the participant understands what is involved in this study.

_____ _____

Name and title (please print) Signature

_____

Date

This study has been reviewed by the Hamilton Integrated Research Ethics Board (HIREB). The HIREB is responsible for ensuring that participants are informed of the risks associated with the research, and that participants are free to decide if participation is right for them. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please call the Office of the Chair, HIREB at (905) 521-2100, ext. 42013.

Appendix F

Letter of Information & Consent Form – Counsellor Interviews

Title: A Northern Perspective on Youth Employment & Mental Health

Investigators:
Katrina Aguiar, MSc Candidate, School of Rehabilitation Science, McMaster University
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Cheryl Missuna, PhD, School of Rehabilitation Science, McMaster University

Funding Source: Canadian Occupational Therapy Foundation

What Is This Study About?
You are invited to take part in a research study about youth employment and mental health in Northern Ontario. Feedback will be gathered from youth participants, as well as from youth employment counsellors. Findings will be used to develop resources that support youth who are seeking employment in northern communities, and that support counsellors who provide employment services.

Who Can Take Part?
Counsellors that have been employed at one of the participating youth employment centres for 3 months or more. Our goal is to include 5-6 employment counsellor participants. Participation in this study is voluntary and will not affect your employment at the centre in any way.

What Will You Be Asked To Do?
During the interview, you will be asked to reflect on the needs of youth who access your services and on service provision in Northern Ontario. The interview will take about an hour, and if you agree, it will be audiotaped. You will also be asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire. The questionnaire will be completed at the beginning of the interview.

What Will Happen To The Information That I Share In The Interview?
Your interview data will not be shared with anyone except with your consent or as required by law. All personal information will be removed from the data and replaced with a code. A list linking the code with your name will be kept in a secure place, separate from your data. Only members of the research team will review audiotaped interviews. The interview transcript, with identifying information removed, will be securely stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office and/or on a secure, password protected hard drive. Audiotaped interviews and other study data (i.e. transcripts, field notes) will be retained for 2-3 years. Comments will be aggregated, with no individual statements being released in any report or publication that would allow for identification. If the results of the study are published, personal information that could identify you will also be removed.

How Will I Benefit If I Take Part?
Although there may not be an immediate benefit to you, we hope that study findings will lead to the development of resources that support young workers in northern communities, as well as the counsellors who work with this population. A summary of the study findings will be available to participants, if they wish, at the conclusion of the study.

Will I Be Paid For My Time?
You will receive a $20 gift card for your participation in this study.

Are There Any Risks?
Some people find it helpful, but others may find it stressful to discuss the challenges experienced by youth with respect to employment, mental health and service access in Northern Ontario. It is important to know that you do not have to answer questions that are uncomfortable for you, and that you can stop the interview at any time.

What If I Decide Not To Participate?
You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time by contacting one of the researchers. Please note that individual data sets cannot be removed 6 weeks following the interview. If you decide not to continue in the study, no one will know, and it will not affect your employment in any way.

What If I Have Questions About The Study?
If you have questions about the study at any time, you can contact:

Katrina Aguiar, School of Rehabilitation Science, McMaster University
Phone: (647) 296-5084 OR Email: aguiak1@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Participant

Yes, I would like to take part in this study. I have read the letter of information thoroughly, and have had questions answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I will get a signed copy of this form.

_____ _____
Name of Participant (please print) Signature

_____
Date

Person Obtaining Consent:

I have discussed this study in detail with the participant. I believe the participant understands what is involved in this study.

_____ _____
Name and title (please print) Signature

_____
Date

This study has been reviewed by the Hamilton Integrated Research Ethics Board (HIREB). The HIREB is responsible for ensuring that participants are informed of the risks associated with the research, and that participants are free to decide if participation is right for them. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please call the Office of the Chair, HIREB at (905) 521-2100, ext. 42013.

Appendix G

Ethics Application – Attachment G – Youth Interview Guide

Research Question:

What are the support needs of youth with mental health issues who are seeking employment in Northern Ontario?

Background & Work Experience:

- Please describe the type of work you have done in the past few years.
  - **Prompt:** How long did you work there? What did you like? What didn't you like?
- What kinds of challenges and/or hazards have you experienced at work (e.g. safety, demands, bullying, harassment)?
- How have you tried to cope with these challenges and/or hazards?
  - **Prompt:** How have you tried to cope at work? How have you tried to cope outside of work?
- What helped you deal with these challenges and/or hazards? What would have been helpful?

Mental Health & Work:

- Tell me about your mental health. For example, have you ever struggled with anxiety, stress, depression, or urges to drink and/or do drugs?
- If so, how have these experiences affected your work?
  - **Prompt:** How have these experiences affected your ability to find a job? How have these experiences affected your ability to keep a job?
- How would you describe the experience of living in Northern Ontario, having a mnetla health issue, and looking for work in your community?
  - **Prompt:** Tell me about the availability of jobs. Tell me about community attitudes/stigma related to mental health and youth employment.
- What kind of support do you need when you experience these issues?

Services & Supports:

- What do people your age struggle most with in terms of employment and mental health?
- What kinds of barriers do young people face in getting the help that they need (e.g. transportation, cost, stigma/community attitudes, waiting lists, trust)?
- Do you know of any services and/or resources that could help young people who are struggling?
  - Have you ever accessed any of these services and/or resources?
  - If so, can you tell me about that experience?
    - **Prompt:** What was difficult? What was helpful?
- Do you see any gaps and/or need for services for young people in Northern Ontario?
- What needs to be done to better support young people in Northern Ontario?

Conclusion:

- Is there anything else you would like to add before we finish?

Appendix H

Ethics Application – Attachment H – Employment Counsellor Interview Guide

Research Question:

What are the support needs of youth with mental health issues who are seeking employment in Northern Ontario?

Background:

- Tell me about the young people who access your services.
    - **Prompt:** How old are they? What types of issues are they dealing with (i.e. employment, mental health, legal issues, housing, family conflict, etc.)? What are their support needs? What are there education needs?
- Are there any challenges that you face in terms of meeting their needs?

Employment & Mental Health:

- What kinds of jobs are available for young people in your community?
- What are some of the hazards and/or challenges that young people experience at work (i.e. safety, demands, bullying, discrimination, harassment)?
    - How do young people respond to these hazards and/or challenges? What might be helpful?
- Can you describe some of the mental health issues that your clients experience?
    - **Prompt:** How does this affect their ability to find a job? How does this affect their ability to keep a job? Are they being followed by a mental health professional?
- Describe the experience of trying to find employment for young people with mental health issues.
    - **Prompt:** What is challenging (i.e. job availability, community attitudes/stigma, etc.)? What is helpful?
    - Is the experience different for youth who have been unsuccessful in the past? If so, how?
- When a client experiences a mental health issue related to employment, how do you respond? How do you determine that they are ready for employment/re-employment?

Services & Supports:

- What do young people struggle most with in terms of employment and mental health?
- What kinds of barriers do they face in getting the help that they need (e.g. transportation, cost, community attitudes/stigma, waiting lists, trust)?
- Are there issues that you feel are unique to Northern Ontario? Are there issues that you feel are unique to your community?
- Do you see any gaps and/or need for services for young people in Northern Ontario?
- What resources and/or services would be helpful to better address their needs?
- What do you love about your job? What do you not love?
- What resources and/or services would be helpful to better address **your needs as a service provider**?

Conclusion:

- Is there anything else you would like to add before we finish?

Appendix I

Employment Counsellor Demographic Questionnaire

1. Are you:
   ☐ Male
   ☐ Female
   ☐ Other (if checked, please list below)
   _____

2. How old are you?
   ☐ 19 or younger
   ☐ 20-29
   ☐ 30-39
   ☐ 40-49
   ☐ 50-59
   ☐ 60+

3. How long have you been working at your current place of employment?
   ☐ 3-6 months
   ☐ 6-12 months
   ☐ 1-2 years
   ☐ 2-5 years
   ☐ 5+ years

4. How long have you worked with youth regarding employment issues?
   ☐ 3-6 months
   ☐ 6-12 months
   ☐ 1-2 years
   ☐ 2-5 years
   ☐ 5+ years

5. What level of education/training have you completed?
   ☐ High School
   ☐ College
   ☐ Undergraduate Degree
   ☐ Graduate Degree
   ☐ Other (if checked, please list below)
   _____

6. What programs do you work in? Check all that apply.
   ☐ Youth Job Connection
   ☐ Youth Job Connection – Student Stream
   ☐ Youth Job Link
   ☐ Ontario Disability Support Program
   ☐ Other (if checked, please list below)
   _____

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7. How long have you lived in Northern Ontario?
   - ☐ 0-1 year
   - ☐ 2-5 years
   - ☐ 5-10 years
   - ☐ 10+ years

8. What is your caseload size?
   - ☐ 0-5
   - ☐ 5-10
   - ☐ 10-15
   - ☐ 15-20
   - ☐ 20+

9. How satisfied are you with your job?
   - ☐ Very Satisfied
   - ☐ Satisfied
   - ☐ Somewhat Satisfied
   - ☐ Neutral
   - ☐ Somewhat Dissatisfied
   - ☐ Dissatisfied
   - ☐ Very Dissatisfied

10. You have the resources required to do your job well:
    - ☐ Agree
    - ☐ Somewhat Agree
    - ☐ Neutral
    - ☐ Somewhat Disagree
    - ☐ Disagree

Appendix J

Mental Health Resources and Services

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. The main goal of this research is to understand the support needs of youth with mental health issues who seeking employment in Northern Ontario. Therefore, we are we are providing every participant with a list of mental health resources and services. Please feel free to share with others.

Name of Resource/Service	Description	Contact Information
Mental Health Helpline	The Mental Health Helpline provides information about mental health services in Ontario.	T: 1-866-531-2600 (available 24/7) * There is also a live chat function available on their website. Here is the website link: http://www.mentalhealthhelpline.ca/
Kids Help Phone	Kids Help Phone is Canada's only national 24-hour, bilingual and anonymous phone counselling, web counselling and referral service for children and youth.	T: 1-800-668-6868 * There is also a live chat function available on their website. Here is the website link: https://kidshelpphone.ca/
Telehealth Ontario	Telehealth is a free, confidential service you can call to get health advice or information. A Registered Nurse will take your call 24 hours a day, seven days a week.	T: 1-866-797-0000
Drug and Alcohol Helpline	The Drug and Alcohol Helpline provides information about drug and alcohol addiction services in Ontario. The service is available 24/7, is confidential and free.	T: 1-800-565-8603 * There is also a live chat function available on their website. Here is the website link: http://www.drugandalcoholhelpline.ca/
Good2Talk	Good2Talk is a free, confidential helpline providing professional counselling and information and referrals for mental health, addictions and wellbeing to post-secondary students in Ontario. This is a year-round service, available 24/7.	T: 1-866-925-5454 (or dial 2-1-1 to speak with an information and referral specalist)
ONTX	Ontario text and crisis services (available 2 PM to 2 AM daily). Responders are available to chat and text	Text: 741741

	regarding all issues related to distress, crisis and suicidal thoughts, prevention and intervention.	
BroTalk	BroTalk is part of Kids Help Phone's service. What started as an online portal specifically designed to support teen guys has evolved into a dedicated effort to provide male (and male-identifying) youth with the support they need.	T: 1-866-393-5933 * There is also a live chat function available on their website. Here is the website link: https://kidshelpphone.ca/brotalk
Mind Your Mind	Mind Your Mind works with young people to co-create interactive tools and innovative resources to build capacity and resilience. An online space for youth (aged 14-24) to find support; includes many helpful resources.	Website: http://mindyourmind.ca/
Mind Check	Mind Check is a website designed to help young people assess how they are feeling and quickly connect with mental health resources and support. This is a British Columbia based resource.	Website: www.mindcheck.ca
Regional Warm Line	The Warm Line is a pre-crisis telephone support service. The goals of this service are to provide pre-crisis telephone support; to help people in a situation before a crisis results; peers empowering peers; and to provide employment opportunities. Warm Line staff members are consumers of mental health services.	T: 1-866-856-9276
First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Helpline	This service functions as a crisis counselling helpline for Indigenous people who are suffering from mental health issues. It is available 24/7 in the following languages: English, French, Cree, Inuktitut, and Ojibway.	T: 1-855-242-3310