



MSU Graduate Theses

Fall 2019

A Qualitative Descriptive Analysis of Students' Experiences with the Child Life Internship Application Process

Haley Reeves

Missouri State University, Haley95@live.missouristate.edu

As with any intellectual project, the content and views expressed in this thesis may be considered objectionable by some readers. However, this student-scholar's work has been judged to have academic value by the student's thesis committee members trained in the discipline. The content and views expressed in this thesis are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its Graduate College, or its employees.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://bearworks.missouristate.edu/theses>



Part of the [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Reeves, Haley, "A Qualitative Descriptive Analysis of Students' Experiences with the Child Life Internship Application Process" (2019). *MSU Graduate Theses*. 3454.

<https://bearworks.missouristate.edu/theses/3454>

This article or document was made available through BearWorks, the institutional repository of Missouri State University. The work contained in it may be protected by copyright and require permission of the copyright holder for reuse or redistribution.

For more information, please contact bearworks@missouristate.edu.

**A QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH
THE CHILD LIFE INTERNSHIP APPLICATION PROCESS**

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science, Child Life Studies

By

Haley M. Reeves

December 2019

Copyright 2019 by Haley M. Reeves

A QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH THE CHILD LIFE INTERNSHIP

Childhood Education and Family Studies

Missouri State University, December 2019

Master of Science

Haley M. Reeves

ABSTRACT

This research study was an exploration of the Association of Child Life Professionals application process for the child life clinical internship. The purpose of this study was to understand better which aspects of the child life internship application process applicants have identified as stressors and to gather suggestions for improving the application process. Qualitative data were collected using an online survey through Qualtrics. The data indicated that the aspects of the child life clinical internship application process that caused moderate to high levels of stress were the writing and editing of documents, obtaining required documents, the finances, interview process, and the four-day offer period. Unnecessary stressors that can be reduced are the finances, obtaining large amounts of required documents, and the four-day offer period. To improve the experience of applicants and to reduce the stress experienced, suggestions were offered by participants that the Association of Child Life Professionals can further research, such as an online portal for the application or a matching system.

KEYWORDS: child life, internship application, stressors, Lazarus, Folkman, stress, coping, clinical internship, eligibility assessment, common application

**A QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH
THE CHILD LIFE INTERNSHIP**

By

Haley M. Reeves

A Master's Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate College
Of Missouri State University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Science, Child Life Studies

December 2019

Approved:

Denise Cunningham, Ph.D., Thesis Committee Chair

Melissa Schotthofer, MA, CCLS, Committee Member

Cara Smith, MS, CCLS, Committee Member

Julie Masterson, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate College

In the interest of academic freedom and the principle of free speech, approval of this thesis indicates the format is acceptable and meets the academic criteria for the discipline as determined by the faculty that constitute the thesis committee. The content and views expressed in this thesis are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its Graduate College, or its employees.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES.....	vi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Significance of the Study.....	2
Purpose of the Study.....	2
Chapter Summary.....	5
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	6
The Child Life Internship Application Process.....	6
Stress and Coping Theory.....	9
Research on the Stressors of Internship Applications.....	11
Chapter Summary.....	13
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....	14
Research Methodology.....	14
Data Collection.....	17
Data Analysis.....	19
Chapter Summary.....	20
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS.....	21
Demographics of Participants.....	21
Chapter Summary.....	31
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION.....	32
Student’s Experiences with the Child Life Internship Application Process (RQ1).....	32
Implications of Research on Child Life Profession.....	38
Limitations of Study.....	40
Future Research.....	40
Conclusion.....	41
REFERENCES.....	43
APPENDICES.....	46
Appendix A: IRB Approval.....	46
Appendix B: Human Research Training.....	47
Appendix C: Survey.....	48
Table 1. Pearson correlations for Q10, Q13, Q21, Q23	Page 21
Table 2. Qualitative data from student survey experience	Page 23
Table 3. Feelings identified during the application and interview process	Page 25
Table 4. Feelings of participants during the four-day offer period	Page 27
Table 5. Suggestions to improve the process made by participants	Page 30

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. The transactional model of the theory of stress and coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984)

Page 10

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The child life internship application process is the primary topic of this research study. Throughout the years, as the profession has grown exponentially, internship placements have been difficult to receive. Applying for any internship can be overwhelming, time-consuming, and lead students to question themselves and the career path they have chosen (Plante, 1987). Applicants go through countless hours of sitting at a computer working on describing themselves in a manner that will make a company, hospital, or specific internship program want to choose them. For these applicants, anxiety and stress levels are high. Through personal experiences and discussions with other applicants, typical stressors that were experienced by individuals were the financial expenses, the application, last-minute interview schedules, and the lack of guidance and organization from the Association of Child Life Professionals (ACLP). Personally experiencing this application process has led me to want to research this topic; before calling for a change, it is important to know the experiences and perceptions of others to inform about and change the preparation practices of the child life field.

Internships are becoming a stepping stone into gaining a real-world job that has become popular with many students. For professions, specifically in the healthcare environment, internships are required before students are allowed to graduate with a professional degree such as a master's or doctorate. Internships are providing students the opportunity to experience the working environment before becoming an employee. Schambach and Dirks (2002) found that students would say, "the internship experience is worthwhile and valuable" and students are able to gain skills and confidence within the work environment that they are not able to develop in the classroom (p. 5).

Significance of the Study

This study provides significant information about the application process, as there is a lack of research available in all realms of internships, academic programs, and jobs that examine the process and the stress that occurs. Because of the lack of research available, it is important that this study provides information to future researchers about the stressors that young adults undergo to start their process into the professional world and the benefits of changing and potentially standardizing the application process. As the child life profession continues to grow, the problems of the application process and the process of becoming a certified child life specialist (CCLS), and the imbalance of internship opportunities will affect the child life profession. This research study, along with the data obtained, is important because it can help the ACLP change the internship application process, which would better the overall reputation and better support the future of the ACLP.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide data to the ACLP to possibly influence the process of applying for a clinical internship and to protect future applicants from undue stress. This will be accomplished by gaining a better understanding of which aspects of the child life internship application process applicants have identified as stressors and to gather suggestions and information from study participants for further information concerning future research. Using the research questions about the students' experiences and specific components about the process will allow the ACLP to recognize how the application process affects future child life specialists mentally and emotionally. With this study, the professional board of child life can use the findings to change the process and better the future of the profession. As of 2017, the ACLP has been working to make child life internship programs accredited, meaning that programs will

adhere to certain requirements and processes; as of spring 2019, there were 69 accredited child life programs. Because of this study, the ACLP, hospital programs, and internship coordinators can understand the stressors that applicants experience by using the data obtained from this study.

Research Questions. This study explores the perceptions of undergraduate candidates and graduate candidates applying to child life internships. The questions that were used to form this study were the following:

1. How do students describe their experience/s with the child life internship application process?
2. What component/s of the internship application process create stressors for students?

Theoretical Framework. The theoretical framework for this study is based on Lazarus and Folkman's (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986) theory of stress and coping. The theory "identifies two processes, cognitive appraisal and coping, as critical mediators of stressful person-environment relations and their immediate and long-range outcomes" (Folkman et al., 1986, p. 992). Within this theory, individuals are studied as having personal and situational factors in addition to influencing factors; all of these factors lead to the primary appraisal, then secondary appraisal, and then finish in coping techniques. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theory of stress and coping is applicable to this study because this study focuses on factors of the child life clinical internship application process that have been identified as stressors and how individuals appraise the stress and then cope with these factors.

Definitions

. The terms in this section are ones that are common to the child life internship application process and are important for readers to understand.

Certified Child Life Specialists

. These are healthcare professionals who work with pediatric patients to reduce fear, anxiety, and pain for children who are experiencing a hospital (ACLP, Child Life Profession, 2018). They work with patients by using developmentally appropriate language and developmentally appropriate play to teach and prepare patients for the experiences that they will have during their hospitalization. Child life specialists provide play opportunities that provide normalization to patients and their families during their hospital stay.

Child Life Internship

. A child life internship is a 600-hour clinical experience that allows undergraduate or graduate students the opportunity to “build on coursework and put theory into practice while working in a variety of hospital and related settings under the direction of a Certified Child Life Specialist (CCLS)” (“Standards for academic clinical preparation,” 2011, p. 16). During the internships, interns are to complete different unit rotations to gather a complete experience. Interns are designated specific assignments that are focused on placing theory into practice. The internship goals include:

- “enhanced knowledge regarding the psychosocial care of infants, children, youths, and families”;
- “demonstration of assessment and intervention skills”;
- “increase in independence in providing services”; and
- “developing skills that can be applied to any entry-level position in child life.”

(ACLP Education & Training Committee, Internship Application Guide, 2018, p. 1)

Eligibility Assessment

. This process “is the vehicle used to review an applicant’s progress toward meeting the eligibility requirements (including coursework)” for the application process and then later accounts clinical experiences to be eligible for the certification exam (ACLP, Child Life

Professional Certification Candidate Manual, 2018, p. 14). When the eligibility assessment is completed, applicants are required to pay \$75. Once the assessment is complete and it is approved by the board, students are “eligible to register” for the child life certification exam (“Eligibility requirements,” 2018).

Accreditation

. The goal of the ACLP is to have each child life program offering an internship to be accredited. Accreditation “assures that a program or consortium meets the minimum standards and requirements established for clinical preparation programs in child life” and is used to improve the profession of child life (ACLP Education & Training Committee, Internship Application Process Guide, 2018, p. 3).

Chapter Summary

An internship is filled with great clinical experiences that allow students to apply theory to practice. The process of securing an internship placement can override the joy of receiving an offer. The purpose of this study was to explore how applicants perceived the child life internship application process. This chapter outlined the research questions and provided the theoretical framework used to guide the research as well as the analysis of data.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of undergraduate and graduate students who were applying to child life internships. This chapter examines and assesses the process, theory, and research about typical stressors that applicants of child life internships undergo. Next, the process was placed into Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theory of stress and coping, using the appraisal process to gain a better understanding of how applicants perceived the stress and then coped with the individual stressors. Third, I explored the research of stressors connected with any internship application process, and last, I provided a summary of the chapter.

The Child Life Internship Application Process

The child life internship is a six-hundred-hour unpaid clinical experience that prospective child life specialists are required to complete before they are employed as a child life specialist as well as being permitted to sit for the certification exam to become a certified child life specialist. According to the ACLP (2018), the process to be eligible for certification and an internship is to have completed required courses and obtain a bachelor's degree. This process is extensive and can take multiple years to complete. To complete the child life internship, "interns must complete a minimum of [six hundred] hours of child life clinical internship under the direct supervision of a Certified Child Life Specialist" (ACLP, Child Life Professional Certification Candidate Manual, 2019, p. 3).

For the internship application, the first step in applying is to research hospitals to determine if they offer an internship during the session (summer, fall, and spring) in which applicants are applying and make a list of those hospitals. Once the list is complete, applicants should move to the eligibility assessment. The eligibility assessment is an evaluation of the

academic portion of the application process. To complete the assessment, students must describe the class, give class codes, provide proof of course completion through the use of official or unofficial transcripts, and pay a \$75.00 fee (ACLP, Eligibility Requirements, 2018). Once this assessment is complete and applicants are cleared, they are able to apply to internships. If it is needed, applicants are able to provide an “in-progress” form for a course that they are currently completing and later provide proof to individual selection committees if needed. The next process is to fill out the common internship application, which is 19 pages long and provides hospitals with basic information: personal, experiences with children, academics, four common questions, goals, and objectives. The application requires verification of related experience hours that need to be completed for every location in which applicants completed designated hours, and it needs to be sent to every hospital. According to the Common Child Life Internship Application (2019), related experience hours are needed in the following areas:

infants, children, youth and/or families in healthcare settings (e.g. volunteer student), infants, children, youth and/or families in stressful situations (e.g. camps for children with chronic illnesses, programs for children with special needs, advocacy programs, bereavement/hospice experiences), [and] with well infants, children, youth and/or families” (e.g. nanny, counselor, teacher). (p. 16)

These areas provide vital experience that is useful during an applicant’s internship. The other form that is required is the practicum experience confirmation form or the practicum in-progress form. Additional forms that are provided within the application are the confirmation of child life course in-progress forms, additional course progress forms, and “the child life internship candidate common recommendation form” (Common Child Life Internship Application, 2019). Along with this single application, the eligibility assessment report, reference letters, resume, and any additional documents that hospital programs require must be included (Common Child Life Internship Application, 2019). As of spring 2019, the ACLP has placed a “common cover letter requirement as part of the Common Child Life Internship Application,” but each application needs to have an individual cover letter to the specific hospital where it is being sent. In addition

to the cover letter, the accreditation committee added the goals and objectives to the application to minimize another additional documents that applicants would create independently and for only certain programs. Last, the committee also added a common recommendation form hoping “many programs will utilize this form to provide consistency for applicants” (ACLP Education and Training Committee, Internship Application Process Guide, 2018, p. 6). Once applicants complete this application, they are then to complete additional requirements that are set by individual hospitals. These requirements can be, but are not limited to, a letter of intent, personal philosophy, a child life philosophy, answers to program-specific questions, and a personal statement. Before the application packet is complete, applicants may be required to provide payment for an application fee set by an individual hospital to which they are applying. As applicants complete their application packet, the hospital may have requirements on how the package is received, such as no staples or paper clips, and then the package must be posted by the application deadline or received by the application deadline.

Once the package is received, applicants are able to be chosen for an interview. For most, there are two rounds of interviews. In the first round, applicants are allowed to complete the interview by telephone or through virtual meetings. If applicants are chosen to proceed in the process, the second round of interviews, they are “highly encouraged” to attend the interview in-person. The in-person interview can create the stressor of financial expenses for the applicants because of last-minute travel plans. Wilson and Cross (2009) believed “child life staff and prospective interns should interview one another to ensure that their goals, needs, and expectations are congruent” (p. 212). Applicants should ask questions that will provide them insight about whether the program is right for them. The last step of the process is the four-day offer period. The first two days are for the initial offer. This provided 24 hours in which to accept

an internship placement. The next two days are the second offer period. Once these four days are over, the internship application process is complete.

Stress and Coping Theory

The theoretical framework that this study is based on is Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress and coping theory. Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman, both psychologists, had the desire to explain that stress was a more complicated progression than what it was believed to be (Stangor & Walinga, 2014). Lazarus and Folkman believed it can impact the individual, "individuals are constantly appraising stimuli within their environment [and then] this appraisal process generates emotions, and when stimuli are appraised as threatening, challenging, or harmful" (Biggs, Brough, & Drummond, 2017, p. 352). Lazarus and Folkman thought, "psychological stress is a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being" (Berjot & Gillet, as cited in Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 19). This theory describes a system that allows individuals to appraise the factors influencing the individual situation that they are experiencing (Figure 1). This theory also takes coping into consideration. The appraisal system considers stressors that individuals are experiencing, putting them through cognitive appraisal, and using coping to create an outcome. This theory is commonly used in the fields of psychology and medicine.

The theory of stress and coping was used in this study when examining the child life clinical internship application process, allowing the researcher to study the identified stress of the application process as a factor that affects the appraisal of the stress that applicants endure throughout the process. In the stress and coping theory, factors that influence the primary appraisal are known as personal and situational, which are unique to the individual, and

influencing factors, which are associated with the internship application process. Within the internship application process, situational and personal factors could be an incomplete required class, incomplete practicum, or the expenses incurred during the application process. The influencing factors can include the number of sites being applied to; length of time to complete the application packets; the number of extra documents required; and obtaining, writing, and editing documents.

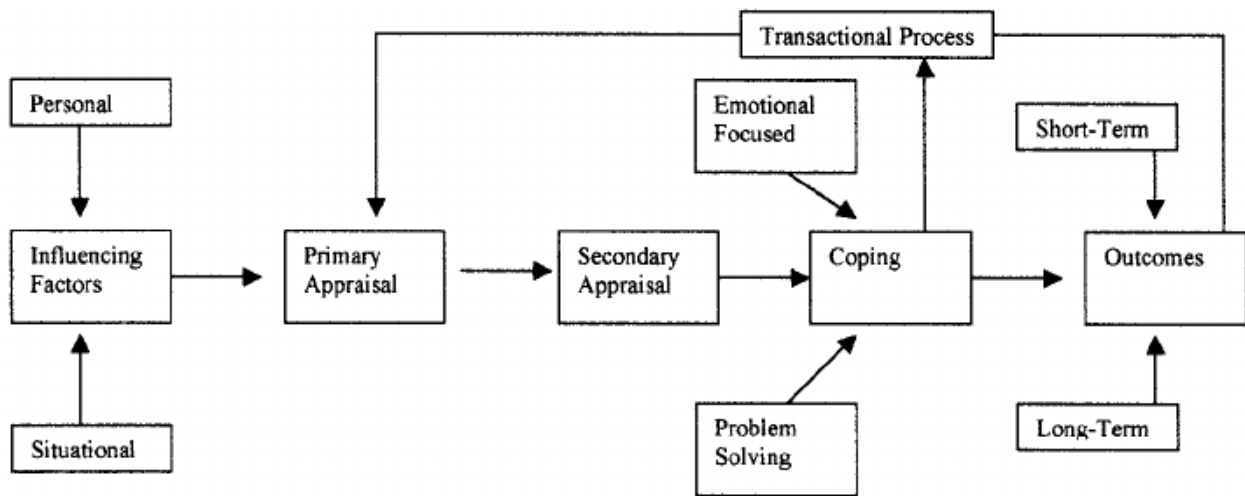


Figure 1. The transactional model of the theory of stress and coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984).

Once the factors are identified, the next step in the theory is the primary appraisal. In the case of the child life internship application, it is the act of completing the process. During the primary appraisal, a “person evaluates whether he or she has anything at stake in this encounter” or how important this event is to that individual (Folkman et al., 1986, p. 993). As the event is evaluated, the secondary appraisal occurs. This step focuses on whether the individual can cope with the event and what can be done to make it through the event successfully (Folkman et al., 1986). For the child life internship application process, the secondary appraisal would involve taking action to complete it step by step. Completing documents one by one is a means to cope with the stress of the amount of writing and editing of documents. Overall, the appraisal system

can be understood as a “mental judgment about a stressor . . . as it is an evaluative process that determines why and to what extent a particular transaction or series of transactions between the person and environment is stressful” (Rollins, Bolig, & Mahan, 2005, p. 45).

As the appraisal of the child life internship application process is completed, coping techniques to eliminate or decrease the amount of stress being experienced are involved. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) stated that coping is “changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific stresses” (p. 993). There are two types of coping styles: emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping. Emotion-focused coping is used to control emotions that are brought on by stress (Folkman et al., 1986). Within the internship application process, this type of coping can be seen through seeking advice from an academic advisor or a certified child life specialist that can provide insight or advice. Problem-focused coping is taking steps to alleviate the factors that are causing the stress (Folkman et al., 1986). In the internship application process, problem-focused coping is seen in the completion of writing, editing, and obtaining documents; completing the eligibility assessment; completing the application; mailing the packets; and preparing for interviews. The outcome of coping can have a lasting impact on the amount of stress that an individual feels. Therefore, if an applicant is not able to cope successfully, the stress level experienced may be high.

Research on the Stressors of Internship Applications

Below, the stressors applying to internships are discussed. The financial expense of applying to child life clinical internships is examined and different internships are discussed. Internships are an important stepping stone into furthering one’s resume and knowledge into a career field, leading them to be high in demand. The supply and demand for internships are discussed.

Financial Expenses

. According to the ACLP Education and Training Committee (“‘Cost’ in internship application process guide”), applying to “15 different internship sites will cost applicants hundreds of dollars to a thousand dollars” (p. 12). This amount is subdivided to consider application fees, postage, membership fees, and assessment fees, but it does not consider travel expenses for interviews, which can greatly increase the total paid. Once an internship is offered and the applicant accepts the position, expenses can become larger. Mondalek (2016) estimated that the minimum cost for students during an internship is \$5,800, which is significant, especially if they are considered unpaid interns (para. 1). The cost of internships can be steep and it can be one of the major stressors for applicants and interns. In a study by Oehlert, Lopez, and Sumerall (1997), 51 students who applied to a medical program and who received an interview, “spent over \$1,000 to compete for a job” and they may not receive an offer (p. 596). The data presented to demonstrate the financial effects of the increasingly competitive internship application process could be the same for the child life clinical internship application process.

Research on the Supply and Demand for Internships

. As the field of child life has become better known, there is a higher demand for internships. Keilin, Baker, McCutcheon, and Peranson (2007) investigated “the potential imbalances between the supply of predoctoral internship positions in psychology and the demand for those positions by graduate students” between the years of 1999 to 2007 (p. 229). In 2007, the imbalance between available positions and participating applicants increased significantly. This led to a shortage of positions for applicants creating the problem of students being turned down. Schaefer et al. (2011) offered that increasing the funding resources and providing alternative models of internship training could assuage the supply and demand issue of

internships. However, the crisis of supply and demand for internships remains. This issue is one of the most daunting for internship applicants, and it is causing stressors to be heightened.

Bradstreet, Wood, Parent, Ameen, and Callahan (2016) found “applicants would be more positive about the costs of doctoral training if the application process was less stressful and there was no risk of not matching” because of the supply and demand crisis (p. 738).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the theory and stressors that focus on internship application processes were reviewed. This chapter began by presenting the process of applying to child life clinical internships. This process coincides with preparing to become a certified child life specialist. Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) theory of stress and coping provided a perspective of how students who are applying to internships perceive and appraise the application process for a child life clinical internship. Last, the specific stressors were discussed through empirical studies. It was determined that these stressors have always been around and that they need to be fixed. The next chapter provides details about the methods used to explore this research through the specific child life clinical internship application process.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter entails information regarding the following components: the research methodology and design, the research questions, the site, sample, procedures, and data collection and analysis, which are considered to be a part of the context of the study.

Research Methodology

This qualitative research explored the opinions of child life internship applicants to gain an understanding of their feelings and stressors about their experiences. The methodology was a descriptive study that provided qualitative data collected through a survey. Descriptive studies; as defined by Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2019); are “research [that] describe[s] existing conditions without analyzing relationships among variables” and allows the researcher to understand the participants’ viewpoints (p. G-2). The qualitative descriptive study allowed this researcher to obtain the “goal” of collecting data that comprised a true experience of the applicants (Lambert & Lambert, 2012).

Qualitative research allows for participants to express their feelings about the event (the child life internship application process) being studied. This type of research is an “effective model that occurs in a natural setting that enables the research to develop a level of detail from being highly involved in the actual experiences” (Williams, 2007, p. 67). The researcher experienced this application process, which led to this study. The purpose of this research was to learn about other students’ experiences with the child life internship application process and to

use the data collected to push for standardization of the application process. This descriptive, qualitative research methodology was most appropriate for the present study.

Research Design

. A survey design was the most applicable to collect the greatest amount of data from the sample of participants across the nation. Jansen (2010) stated, “the qualitative type of survey does not aim at establishing frequencies, means or other parameters but at determining the diversity of some topic of interest within a given population” (p. 3). The qualitative design supports the exploration of understanding the applicants’ feelings and stress during the child life internship application process while the survey design “establishes the meaningful variation within that population” (p. 3).

Research Questions

- . This research study intended to answer the following questions:
1. How do students describe their experience/s with the child life internship application process?
 2. What component/s of the internship application process create stressors for students?

Site

. As of 2019, there were 28 states and 63 universities in the United States that offered a child life academic program, a course, or a stated degree related to child life (“Child life academic program directory,” 2018). According to the ACLP, there are “self-identified” programs that offer a degree or curriculum in child life studies (ACLP, Academic Program Directory, 2018). This study was sent to 61 academic program directors or advisors of child life

students through email who then took responsibility to pass along the survey to all students in a child life program who have applied to a child life internship.

Sample

. Purposive sampling was employed for this study. This sampling procedure was appropriate because the study used all programs across the nation instead of choosing the program based on the level of education provided. The survey was sent to 61 programs, with 2 programs declining, and 1 program being unreachable, leading to the sample size of the study to be between 69 to 77 participants.

Procedures

. Once the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained, IRB number IRB-FY2019-578 was issued April 1, 2019, and a study invitation that contained an assent and consent agreement was sent by email to 61 of 63 enlisted child life programs from the professional site. Participants were secured through emailing the ACLP-listed education programs. A total of 67 emails were sent to ACLP-listed contacts. Three programs replied that they were not able to participate because of multiple factors. One program emailed stating, “Our program is new, so we do not have any students at this level.” Another program stated, “We no longer have an undergrad or graduate program in child life. The profession itself was too unwelcoming.” The last program stated, “Our child life program has been discontinued, and we no longer have child life students in our graduate program.” One program was unreachable; leading to four programs being taken out of the sample; a total of six programs were not included in the study. Once students received the email, they were permitted to open the link attached to the survey, which first took them to the consent or assent form. Participants were notified that

they were able to stop participation in the survey at any time. Once consent or assent was obtained, the participants were able to access the survey. The survey contained 28 questions, but because of skip logic on specific questions (see Appendix C), not all participants answered all of the questions, which were in the form of Likert-scale, open-ended, and closed-ended questions. This survey took participants 10 to 15 minutes to complete. In this research study, there were 74 students who agreed to participate, but there were 69 responses on the majority of the questions. The majority of the participants were females ($N = 67$), males ($N = 1$), and other ($N = 1$). At the beginning of the survey, participants were to agree to consent; 77 participants did, but the highest number of responses was 69, leading to the sample size to be 69 ($N = 69$).

Data Collection

Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, and Hanson (2003) stated, “researchers’ personal stances toward the topics they are studying, a stance based on personal history, [and] experience” can be used to create surveys (p. 176). Using personal experience can provide the opportunity to create questions to which participants can relate. The sources of data for this research were collected using one survey with Likert-scaled, closed, and open-ended questions (see Appendix A).

Survey

. The survey was the research design chosen because of the ability to produce the largest number of responses. The survey was created and composed in Qualtrics and it was comprised of 28 questions that pertained to demographic matters, experiences during the application and interview process, stress level during the application, stress level during the interview process,

the four-day offer period, students' feelings and emotions during the process, students' feelings and emotions about the process, and the ability to provide suggestions for the future of the application process. This type of research design allowed for programs across the United States to be contacted and increased the probability of responses.

Likert Scales

. Using Likert-scaled questions within the survey allowed participants to place a label and rate the stressors that were given in the survey. The Likert scales that were seen in the survey were labeled from not helpful, helpful, and extremely helpful, to no stress, moderate level of stress, and high level of stress. Using this form of data collection helped with the nature of the research question by allowing participants to rate their level of stress and experience.

Closed-Ended Questions

. Using the closed-ended questions, specifically multiple-choice, within the survey, allowed the researcher to gather demographic information, such as gender, age, and education level. Using this form of question provided participants with multiple answers to choose (Fraenkel et al., 2019, p. 365). The use of multiple-choice questions was to provide the researcher with the opportunity to gather standardized data (p. 386).

Open-Ended Questions

. Using the open-ended questions within the survey allowed the use of qualitative data collection strategies, which can lead to the data being "easily compared" and studied (Creswell et al., 2003, p. 175). The essence of the questions was to provide participants the opportunity to share their personal experience with words, providing the researcher anecdotal records.

Data Analysis

With qualitative methods, descriptive statistics, coding, and theming were used to analyze the qualitative data. Descriptive statistics allow for researchers to “summarize the overall trends or tendencies in [their] data, provide an understanding of how varied [their] scores might be, and provide insight into where one score stands in comparison with others” (Creswell, 2012, p. 183). Descriptive statistics, specifically the mean from the Likert-scaled questions, were calculated. The qualitative data were collected and then coded and themed. These data were coded and themed by categories, otherwise known as thematic or pattern analysis (Clark & Creswell, 2008). The themes were based on the stressors that were available in the survey and then from the responses that were gathered from the open-ended questions. The reliability of the data was analyzed by completing an item analysis on Q10, Q13, Q21, Q22, and Q23. An item analysis “is the set of qualitative and quantitative techniques and procedures used to evaluate the characteristics of items of the test before and after the test development and construction” (Goyhyev & Sabers, 2010, p. 2). Within this analysis, the Pearson correlation coefficient, otherwise known as the Pearson’s r , was used to complete the item analysis. The Pearson correlation coefficient is “an index of correlation appropriate when the data represent either interval or ratio scales; it takes into account each pair of scores and produces a coefficient between 0.00 and either [positive or negative] 1.00” (Fraenkel et al., 2019, p. G-6). Aside from Q21, when the questions were analyzed, they were found to be reliable, as the confidence level was $> 95\%$ ($p = .05$).

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the use of a mixed-methods approach that used both qualitative and quantitative data to collect necessary information by using a Qualtrics survey. The site and sample of child life students who met the criteria to be a senior or graduate student were detailed. Last, the data collection and analysis were described by using Creswell and Clark.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of the survey are analyzed and reported. Results, such as the means from the Likert scales, are reported. Obtaining the frequencies and means from the Likert scales provides an insight into the average amount of stress and the number of students applying in the child life internship application process. Descriptive data from the open-ended questions were themed and categorized to provide an insight into what the participants experienced throughout the child life internship process. The results gathered provide a better understanding of what participants experienced and the parts of the application process participants identified as stressors.

Demographics of Participants

Participants were secured through emailing the ACLP-listed academic programs. A total of 67 emails were sent to ACLP-listed contacts. Three programs replied that they were not able to participate because of multiple factors. One program emailed stating, “Our program is new, so we do not have any students at this level.” Another program stated, “We no longer have an undergrad or graduate program in child life. The profession itself was too unwelcoming.” The last program stated, “Our child life program has been discontinued, and we no longer have child life students in our graduate program.” One program was unreachable, leading to four programs being removed from the survey. A total of 77 students agreed to participate, but the highest number of responses was 69.

The average age of participants was 22.8, leading them to be seniors in college; the oldest participant was 33 years of age. The level of education with the highest number of participants was an undergraduate degree (49.28%, $N = 34$), with a graduate-level degree being second highest at (27.54%, $N = 19$), and the third-highest level of education was some college, but no degree at 21.74% ($N = 15$) of participants. These results show that most applicants had a bachelor's degree and that students were taking the step to obtain their master's degree.

When the reliability of the survey was being measured, it was found that one (Q21) of the five viable questions (Q10, Q13, Q21, Q22, and Q23), was analyzed with poor reliability. This question was relevant and important to this study, leading to the question to be maintained within the data. The reliability was seen as poor because of the value being analyzed at $r = .194$, when it should be above $r = 0.3$, as seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Pearson correlations for Q10, Q13, Q21, Q22, and Q23

		Stress_Sum	Q10	Q13	Q21	Q22	Q23
Stress_Sum	Pearson's r	—					
	p -value	—					
Q10	Pearson's r	0.398	—				
	p -value	0.036	—				
Q13	Pearson's r	0.769	0.099	—			
	p -value	< .001	0.617	—			
Q21	Pearson's r	0.194	-0.017	-0.026	—		
	p -value	0.322	0.931	0.898	—		
Q22	Pearson's r	0.514	-0.153	0.350	0.140	—	
	p -value	0.005	0.437	0.068	0.477	—	
Q23	Pearson's r	0.545	0.020	0.240	-0.189	0.102	—
	p -value	0.003	0.918	0.218	0.337	0.607	—

Met Requirements for Application Process

. There are minimum requirements that must be met before the start of an internship, such as completed courses, a clinical practicum, and volunteer hours. For course requirements, the

results of the survey showed that 81.16% (56 of 69) of participants had met the course requirements to be able to apply for a clinical internship. A total of 15.94% (11 of 69) of the participants needed to complete the in-progress form, (indicating that a required class was in progress and it would be completed by the end of the semester). While applying for internships, it was acceptable for applicants to be in the process of completing their clinical practicum. In this research study, 76.81% or 53 participants had completed their practicum, while 10.14% ($N = 7$) were in the process of completing a practicum, and there were 9 (13.04%) who had not yet completed a practicum.

Rounds, Sites, and Information for the Application Process

. Because of the competitive nature of the clinical internship, applicants may repeat the application process multiple times before securing an internship. Of 69 responses, 47 (67.12%) participants during the spring 2019 application session identified that this was their first round of applying, while 22 (31.88%) participants had applied multiple times. Of these 22 respondents, 10 provided additional information. The average number of times these participants applied was two rounds. Within the data, there were two participants who completed the application process four times. Many students were being encouraged by the ACLP and academic advisors to apply to multiple internship sites. Of 59 participants who had reported multiple applications, the average number of sites applied to was 16.62; however, this did not consider whether this was per round or total for all rounds of applications. The ACLP provides information about the process of applying for an internship, which can be used by applicants to learn about the process and create a to-do list. Of 61 responses, 37 (60.6%) participants stated that the information provided on the ACLP website was helpful, 18 (29.5%) responded it was not helpful, and 6 (9.8%) stated it was extremely helpful.

Stress Before, During, and After

. The participants were asked about their stress levels before starting the application process. Results showed that of 61 responses, 24 (39.34%) applicants were experiencing a moderate level of stress, while 37 (60.66%) participants were experiencing a high level of stress. During the application process, applicants were writing and editing their application and additional required documents. It was found that of 61 participants 58 (95.08%) experienced stress during the writing and editing period of the process (Table 2).

Table 2. Qualitative data from student experience survey

Questions about Stress	Number of Participants	No Stress	Moderate Level of Stress	High Level of Stress
		F	F	SF
Q. 10. Stress level before application process	61	0	24 (39.3%)	37 (60.7%)
Q. 13. Cost of application process	45	6 (13.3%)	22 (48.9%)	17 (37.8%)
Q. 21. Stress during application process	44	0	9 (20.5%)	35 (79.5%)
Q. 22. Stress during interview process	45	3 (6.7%)	7 (15.6%)	35 (77.8%)
Q. 23. Stress during four-day offer period	34	1	10 (29.4%)	23 (67.6%)

Some participants described their stress during the writing and editing of required documents in the following ways:

- “the biggest stressor in the writing of documents was the volume of documents required,”
- “there were times where I would become overwhelmed with the additional stress this provided that I would have to take time away from working on my application,”

- “it was overwhelming in the beginning and almost debilitating because of the amount of work required, I decided to quit one of my part-time jobs in order to adequately complete these child life applications”
- “on top of completing a full-time academic workload, writing and editing the documents required for the application process was equivalent to a full-time job”
- “I felt that the process of writing and editing the required documents was incredibly stressful and that stress was heightened when internships changed their requirements or their essay questions a month out from the applications being due”
- “constant editing and tailoring for each specific site took a tremendous amount of time”
- “I was stressed about if what I was writing was good enough, the best of my ability, and made sense to convey the knowledge I have. The stress of getting these done made me regress from my social life.”

The responses provided above were only a sampling of what participants had to say about creating and proofing the documents that were sent to child life internship programs. Overall, 44 (100%) participants stated that they experienced stress during the application process.

Specifically, 35 of the 44 responses (79.55%) stated that they experienced a high level of stress.

Participants were given the opportunity to describe their feelings and stress during the application and interview process. Sample statements are provided below:

- “This was an unnecessary amount of work. There should be an online portal where applicants complete the common application then choose listed hospitals to apply. This year, in particular, the ACLP changed recommendation forms and all verification application materials. This made me do the process twice and added extra stress to my recommenders! It wasn’t fair to do that in the middle of the process. Also, hospitals should have to list their interview dates in advanced on their website so that applicants can know and prioritize dates to leave open so they can be in as many interviews as possible”
- “The stress I experienced during the application and interview process was great as I was spending up to 15-20 hours a week completing phone screenings and video interviews. When offer day approached, I began spending 30-40 hours of my week traveling to complete in-person interviews. This caused a great deal of stress and fatigue as I was simultaneously attempting to balance my last semester of academic work including research papers and senior projects.”
- “A lot of frustration with how unclear everything was and stressed with how much everything was costing.”

- “I felt that it was unfair that students had to take so much time and money to get an internship that was unpaid. It felt imbalanced and too competitive. A match-system needs to be in place.”
- “Moderate stress; I often compared myself to others I knew applying.”
- “I had a lot of stress during the application and interview process. During the application process, I was stressed that I didn’t have enough hours or that I wasn’t good enough. I was stressed that my applications would get lost in the mail. I was stressed about getting the right components to every hospital. Some hospitals was letters of recommendation. Some want the common reference form; some want something else. Also, some hospitals want verification of hours others want their own sheets. Each hospital had their own component variations about the common app, letters of recommendation, verification forms, essays, eligibility assessment, etc. Some hospitals have confusing requirements. If hospitals don’t get what they want in the right order, they will throw it out. So, it was very stressful figuring out what each hospital needed and making sure they got all of the right components. During the interview process, it was stressful trying to figure out if I should use my time and money to go in person or not. It was also stressful coordinating everything. During the interview I was always very nervous. Afterwards, I always worried if I answered it right or if they were looking for something else”
- “This stress really put a strain on some of the things I was dedicated to school, relationships, work, and self-care. It made me remove myself from a lot of these, so I had the time to work on my applications and prepare for interviews”
- “There was so much to do, and it was all very complicated, and it didn’t feel like there were resources available to help me navigate it”

As the sample statements provide the opportunity for participants to describe their experience, the researcher was able to categorize the feelings that participants were identifying. Stress and anxiety were the highest identified feelings during the application and interview process, as seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Feelings identified during the application and interview process

Theme	<i>f</i>
Stress/anxiety	20
Nervous/worried	7
Frustrating	6
Overwhelmed	5
Total participants	34
Total feelings expressed	38

Note. Participants identified multiple feelings within their answers. Feelings were categorized and counted for this table.

Finances

. The participants in the study were predominately undergraduates and graduate students, leading to finances to be a hypothesized stressor. Of 45 responses, 22 (48.89%) participants indicated that finances caused a moderate level of stress, while 17 (37.78%) considered it to be high-level stress, and 6 (13.33%) categorized it as not a stressor (Table 1). An additional cost to the application process is traveling to interviews when offered. Most second-round interviews are held in-person, or at least participants are highly encouraged to attend an onsite interview. Of the 42 participants, 27 (64.29%) incurred travel expenses, while 15 (35.71%) others did not. Overall, participants reported having paid for traveling to interviews, while additionally paying for postage and shipping of materials, hospital application fees, printing fees, and the child life assessment required to complete the application round. When participants were asked about how much they paid for the total application process, many estimated between \$50 to over \$3000. The average was found to be an estimated \$762.50. These results were not identified as per round.

Interview Process

. Applicants who are selected by internship committees undergo an interview. Interviews are conducted in multiple ways. The three most common are (a) in-person ($N = 40$, 36.04%), (b) telephone interview ($N = 37$, 33.33%), and (c) virtual interviews ($N = 34$, 30.63%). It is important to note that survey participants experienced all three types. Some applicants experience two or three rounds of interviews. During the interview process, it is the program's decision on the type and format of the interview. Two forms that are seen are multi-mini interviews and panel. Of 45 responses, a majority of participants ($N = 29$, 64.44%) experienced both formats. The survey asked participants if they traveled to a location outside of the city in which they lived; 33 of 45 (73.33%) reported yes, and 12 (26.67%) indicated no. Applicants

traveled by plane and car. The distance of travel had a wide range from 156 miles to 2,011 miles. Of 45 participants, 35 (77.78%) reported a high level of stress, 7 (15.56%) experienced a moderate level of stress, and 3 (6.67%) experienced no stress during the interview process. The feelings of participants were identified and categorized; stress and anxiety were the highest identified feelings during the application and interview process (see Table 2).

Four-Day Offer Period

. There was a four-day offer period at the end of the application round. This four-day event was separated into two periods. The first period was the initial offer day. Applicants were then provided 24 hours to accept or decline the offer. Once the 24 hours were over, applicants moved into the second offer period, where hospitals could offer an internship placement after their first-round choice/s decline. When participants were asked if they experienced stress during the 4-day offer period, 23 (67.65%) participants categorized their stress as high level, 10 (29.41%) categorized their stress as moderate, and 1 (2.94%) applicant stated that she experienced no stress during this period. If participants stated they experienced stress, they were asked to describe and evaluate their feelings during this time. Within the descriptions, the researcher was able to identify feelings that were commonly stated by participants. These are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4. Feelings of participants during the four-day offer period

Theme	<i>f</i>
Stressed/anxious	19
Other	19
Fear/nervous/worried	8
Excitement/relief	5
Total participants	33
Total feelings identified	51

Notes. Participants identified multiple feelings within their answers. The most commonly identified were categorized. Thirty-six participants did not respond to the question.

Some participants described their stress during the offer period:

- “because I had a full day of classes, I had to inform my professors that I may be leaving the class to take phone calls. I didn’t get an offer on the first day, so I was highly stressed that missing this round of internships would push my graduation to the next semester.”
- “The idea of waiting 24 hours for [second] round offers is beyond flawed. Hospitals should contact individuals as soon as they are told they need to ask someone else. My feelings definitely ranged from stressed, to devastated, to anxious, to satisfied, to happy.”
- “Stressful due to having to weigh options from first day without knowing what could happen on secondary offer day.”
- “I think that it puts students in a difficult position with the first and second offer date. We are told that if you have already accepted, you cannot back out if you receive an offer on the second day. After spending so much on the application process and will be required to move for the unpaid internship, it would be hard for me to not accept an offer on the second offer date that was closer to home or where I had family I could live with.”
- “there was definitely a lot of stress around this time. I worried that I didn’t do enough. I also had feelings that I wasn’t good enough. I was constantly stressed about wanting my phone to ring and to get an offer.”
- “very nervous, always feeling I regretted saying something I should have added to the interviews, second-guessing myself, reoccurring events from the interview that kept playing in my mind. High stress.”
- “I was somewhat relieved to just be completed with the applications and interviews. I had this sense of “I have done all I can do up until this point, so the rest is up to the hospital.”
- “I was nervous because, without the internship, I wouldn’t graduate college on time. I felt like my whole future relied on this internship.”

Within the data collected from questions 26 and 27 (Appendix A), suggestions were identified and categorized. These are presented in Table 5.

Future of the Child Life Internship Application Process

. The last two questions of the survey focused on the students’ perspective of how the child life internship application process might look in the future. When specifically asked if the process should be standardized, in addition to 32 of 35 participants stating, “yes,” they also provided further comments (Table 4). Sample statements included:

- “While it would be useful for every hospital to be required to take the same materials in an internship packet, I don’t [think] that it should be that way. When I think about the

non-traditional settings, those sites may want more information from applicants about different areas of knowledge that aren't questioned on the application. Also, different application processes may help students who are having a hard time getting an internship find one that is a better fit."

- "I think the common application needs to be the only thing that is used. I think some internships require even payment or additional documents that cost me more time and labor to provide."
- "While I do think that the application process can be improved, I do not have the expertise or background to state that the application process needs to be standardized. I do think that a standardized application process would simplify the intensity of the process for students. However, I have heard from student coordinators that it would be more difficult to select students based on a standardized process as they have developed their own process over the years to be specific to their needs as a program and department."
- "Yes, standardizing the application would allow students to fill out one form. I believe that the ACLP making their own recommendation forms and application, but not requiring hospitals to use it made the process much harder on students. You have to determine if the hospital wants the ACLP application, their own application, or both. Then you have to see if they want letters of recommendation, the ACLP common rec form, or both. Then you have to determine if the hospital has additional essay questions or requirements and if the application is to be turned in by mail or online."
- "Yes. Child life supports effective coping, and this process tears individuals down. I understand the competition, but people are unable to apply because of price, distance, and the mental toll it takes on someone."
- "Yes, I do. I think there are many things that could be changed. This process is causing very high amounts of stress for many students. Plus, students are getting overlooked just because they forgot one document. If the process is standardized and easier on students, I think there will be much higher quality applications because students aren't having to spend the time worrying about what each hospital needs. They can focus their energy on making a good application."
- "Yes! I know every hospital is different, but it's very hard on a student to spend so much money printing and purchasing items for 15+ hospitals, mailing out applications for some sites to not even respond to you saying that they received your application".
- "Definitely! With an online application, preferably, where you just upload everything and pick the hospitals you want to apply to."

These results showed that most participants think there needs to be a change in the application process, and they provided suggestions on how to make those changes.

Chapter Summary

Within this chapter, the results of the data collected showed the components of the child life internship application process that are considered stressful for participants. The qualitative data collected about the process were themed and coded. This information was presented through narrative and tables. In the next chapter, theory and literature are used to provide further analysis of the data collected.

Table 5. Suggestions to improve the process made by participants

Theme	<i>f</i>
Online portal	17
Universal requirements and rules	9
Other	6
Decrease finances	5
Better communication	5
Change in letter of recommendations	2
Matching system	2
Total participants	33
Total feelings identified	46

Notes. Participants offered multiple suggestions with answers. The most commonly were identified and categorized. Thirty-six participants did not respond to the question.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

In this chapter, a review of the data obtained related to the two research questions is presented to analyze and further explore options for the child life clinical internship application process. The data collected are organized based on the research questions using Lazarus and Folkman's stress and coping theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This chapter explores the data obtained from the current study through literature and theory.

Student's Experiences with the Child Life Internship Application Process (RQ1)

Internships are a way students gain experience in a professional field. The internship is a clinical experience that provides training that a prospective CCLS will face. Mellott, Arden, and Cho (1997) agreed that the internship experience is valuable and a stepping stone into the professional field. Although the experience is valuable, the application process is challenging and daunting but is necessary.

When participants were asked to describe their experiences, frustration and anxiety were seen in their responses. Words that were used to describe the process included, "unnerving," "incredibly flawed," "constant roller coaster of emotions," "high stress," and "complicated." The last question of the survey asked participants to provide suggestions that they believed would make the child life clinical internship application process better. The answers provided insight into the aspects of the process that are most likely to be able to be changed. Sampled suggestions were as followed:

- "a match system"
- "an online portfolio of the references, resumes, cover letters, experiences, and all that was required on paper to be sent on document/online form to all internship coordinators"

- “online portal, [one] application for every hospital, match system to guarantee that hospital get interns”
- “make the applications online and make all transcripts not official so that students can just send copies and not spend \$200 alone on transcripts”
- “I think you should be able to upload everything online to the ACLP website, and you should be able to apply to sites electronically from that site. I still believe sites can ask for additional essays or questions because applicants should still have to work hard, but all the necessary requirements should just be uploaded to one spot”
- “It should be a standardized practice with a set number of interviews. If interviews are in-person, students should be financially compensated. Additionally, if a matching system was not obtainable, it would be more beneficial to have everything online and have interviews offered on a set day to better plan for travel and expenses”
- “limit the number of places one can apply”
- “Make all hospital use the common application. Extremely insane how so many hospital did not follow the ACLP curriculum. Also, make hospitals clarify exactly what they mean when they say three references. Does that mean 3 common application forms and 3 personal letters of recommendations? Or does it only mean ACLP common application forms?”
- “I think the process is going to be stressful no matter what. Most of my stress was because of the thought of what would happen if I didn’t get one, and that thought is going to be there even if the process changes. You can’t guarantee that everyone is going to get a placement. That being said, I think one area of stress that could be negated is that of how much money is spent. Perhaps the ACLP could encourage hospitals to accept digital applications via email, which would reduce the price of printing and shipping and to encourage using unofficial transcripts instead of expensive official transcripts.”

The internship is an important time for a prospective child life specialist, but the applicants should not have to bear a process or stress level that takes over their academic schedule and financial standings. The suggestions provided from the survey were the aspects of the application process that participants thought were the best way to help reduce the stress that applicants experienced and a way to advance further the process and the profession overall.

Application of Theory to Students’ Experiences (RQ1)

. The theory that was studied within this research was Lazarus and Folkman’s theory of stress and coping (1984). Using the stress and coping theory, researchers looked at the child life

clinical internship application process as the event that underwent an appraisal. Stressors were identified, and coping techniques were used to decrease the amount of stress experienced. An aspect of this research study that is unique is that the students were able to express their feelings or stress about the experiences through open-ended questions. This expression of feelings has allowed participants to show that they have developed emotion-focused coping techniques. Additionally, they are using their feelings to take steps to provide lasting outcomes on the future of the application process. Participants were also able to provide suggestions for the future of the child life clinical internship application process. The information obtained could be used in further research to improve the application process, thereby decreasing the amount of stress that future applicants may undergo. This opportunity of making suggestions shows that participants have developed problem-focused coping techniques and that they are taking steps to improve the application process for future applicants. Last, the impact of the event and the coping techniques have long-term effects on the application process through the expression of feelings and the suggestions offered. The child life clinical internship application process could be changed for the better, which would have a lasting impact on the professional field.

Components of the Internship Application Process Considered Stressors (RQ 2)

. There is stress with any application process or job interview, but there are steps through which academic programs, clinical programs, and professional companies can alleviate unnecessary stress. The data obtained from this study show that the child life internship clinical application process causes stress on applicants. The study shows that unnecessary stress came from the non-universal requirements among the programs, financial expenses, interview process, and the four-day offer period. These stressors cannot be eliminated, but the requirements of the application process can be changed to help applicants experience less stress.

Apart from the application process as a whole, one of the aspects of the application process that can be changed is the information that is provided by the ACLP about the application process. Although 60.6% of the survey respondents stated that the information provided was helpful, 29.5% recorded that it was not helpful. One way that could help alleviate the disorganization of the ACLP information is to work on clarification of requirements and providing the updated information within a timely manner or not allow any changes in the middle of when applicants are preparing their packages.

The next stressor that applicants identified was the number of documents required and the proofing and editing of those documents. One way that was suggested by participants to decrease the number of documents was to make it a requirement for the hospitals to follow and obtain the common application that is provided by the ACLP, which each hospital uses as a requirement to apply. One goal of accrediting hospital internship programs is to make the application process cohesive between all accredited hospitals, but participants are not experiencing that. In the spring 2019 round, there was a form that was to be used for letters of recommendation; there was also a new requirement for applicants to write their goals and objectives for the clinical experience, and a new “in progress” form for courses outside of the child life course. Changes were implemented to make the application process easier. However, survey participants stated that did not happen because hospitals are requiring documents in addition to those on the application. These documents included, but were not limited to, a letter of intent or cover letter, personal statements, a child life philosophy, autobiography, extra questions, individual hour verification forms, as well as some hospitals require recommendation letters outside of the forms provided through the common application. Within these extra documents, hospitals have their own specified required information that needs to be covered.

Finances were the next stressor that applicants identified. Nearly 67% of the survey respondents stated that financial expenses accounted for moderate to high levels of stress. Applicants paid for multiple things throughout the application process, beginning with the \$75 application fee, plus the cost of official transcripts that were often requested by hospitals, paper, ink, postage, and postal tracking, if the applicant decides to make sure his or her packet arrives. Additionally, they incur travel costs that might include gas, airfare, hotel, and in-city transportation. Survey respondents estimated they spent \$50 to \$3000 on the application process. This aligns with Oehlert et al. (1997), who studied 51 students who spent \$1,000 to compete for a job that they might not get, which is the same case for child life intern hopefuls. This would lead child life applicants to restart the process and experience the \$50 to \$3,000 or more to ensure that they have an increased chance to secure an internship. The competitiveness of the application process is increasing, which in turn, is increasing the number of programs that applicants are applying to and/or being encouraged to apply to, which is increasing the cost to each student, thus, increasing the level of stress that applicants are feeling. Furthermore, once applicants secure an internship, they need to pay for relocation, which can be an estimated \$5,800 (Mondalek, 2016). This causes more stress for unpaid interns, as is the case for child life interns (Mondalek, 2016).

The next stressor of the application process is the four-day offer period, meaning that there are four days to receive an offer for a child life clinical internship. The “unknown” was the most stressful part of this period for applicants. From the data obtained from the survey, 33 of 34 respondents indicated that the four-day offer period was either a moderate or high-level stressor. Participants stated that this period was “unnerving,” “stressful,” and “flawed.” Applicants felt stress about needing to decide within the first two days without knowing all of their options

before they accepted.

Application of Theory to the Stressors of the Child Life Clinical Application Process (RQ2)

. This research study focused on the stressors experienced by applicants of the child life clinical internship application process. Using the stress and coping theory, researchers examined the child life clinical internship application process as the event that underwent an appraisal. Stressors were identified, and coping techniques were used to decrease the amount of stress experienced. The stressors that were identified by study participants were the non-universal requirements between the programs, financial expenses, interview process, and the four-day offer period, which can be seen as influencing factors. The primary appraisal of these factors concluded that these factors were necessary and required factors that would be experienced, but it was up to the individual to decide whether the child life internship was important enough to them to continue with the application process (Folkman, 1984). The secondary appraisal takes into consideration possible resources and steps that can be taken to complete the factors that are causing stress.

The number of documents that need to be obtained, written, and edited can be overwhelming but using the experiences and knowledge as a step forward and a resource that applicants can use to help start the process of writing. For applicants, the number of different documents needed per hospital was overwhelming. It was suggested by applicants that this stress factor could be alleviated or decreased if all hospitals required the same documents. Financial expense is a factor that is heavily influenced by the number of internship sites to which an individual applied. Therefore, taking steps to build up a small savings for hospital fees, the eligibility assessment, transcripts, and traveling can be a way in which applicants can help

alleviate the financial burden that applying to child life internships can create. Interviewing for any position is always a stress factor, but applicants can use problem-focused coping techniques to help alleviate stress. Through the use of peers, academic supervisors, or teachers, applicants can practice interviewing and answering questions that are similar to the ones they will experience with the hospital. The four-day offer period is a time that participants labeled with many feelings. The use of emotion-focused coping becomes important for applicants. The expression of talking, crying, or avoidance of the feelings such as stress, anxiety, nervousness, disappointment, discouragement, and fear, can help alleviate the stress that applicants are undergoing through those four days. The effective coping techniques that applicants may use can have a lasting impact on their confidence. If an applicant does not obtain an internship, the coping of the individual can be damaged, and the stress level can increase and have a lasting impact on the applicant's success the next round and a short-term effect on his or her timeline for graduation.

Implications of Research on Child Life Profession

The purpose of this research was to provide a foundational study for the ACLP to consider for making changes to the internship application process. This research explored perceptions and stressors that future child life specialists have about the internship application process. Identifying the stressors that are brought about by the applicants' experience brings us closer to improving the process, which, in turn, benefits the profession. This research provided a glimpse into the financial commitment it takes to accomplish one's dream of becoming a CCLS. This study revealed the need for the ACLP to decrease the cost for the eligibility assessment as well as exposed the need for financial support throughout the internship. This research also provided an unexpected look into how academic programs view the field of child life. Academic

programs were contacted during the recruitment phase of this study. One program response was “We no longer have an undergrad or graduate program in child life . . . the profession itself was too unwelcoming.” Others responded that programs were no longer available due to a lack of students going into the field. These responses from academic institutions reflect the perceptions about the child life professional and can provide the impetus for the professional association to work for better communication and improve relations with academic programs.

Additional Questions that Arose

. Additional questions arose during the research period of this study. The first additional question was that of participants’ coping mechanisms. Learning about the coping mechanisms during the child life internship application process would have allowed a better look into whether students completing the process used either emotion-focused or problem-focused coping. This would provide an additional application of the stress and coping theory and perhaps a deeper understanding of the theory into practice. Another question that arose was regarding the physical location of the participants. The location of participants could reveal important data about where the majority of child life specialists are being educated and where they are applying for internships. This information would identify the most sought-after clinical programs and academic programs. A final question that emerged was about the academic program that “matched” their students to a clinical program. One survey participant responded, “I go to [blank] program. . . . We were matched to internships and then interviewed at our matches. . . . We did not really have to go through the same application process as everyone else . . . though we did fill out the ACLP common app.” The idea of matching applicants to two or three internship programs and then interviewing after would decrease the amount of stress that applicants experienced, although it would limit student choice.

Limitations of Study

As with all research, there are limitations to this study. The first is that, in general, the topic about an application process for any type of program is limited and under-researched. Second, the researchers were not able to tell which programs had students participate in the survey, which provided no information about the location demographics of participants. As the survey was occurring, the researcher thought this information to be important, as it would be a way to learn about programs and the requirements that participants were undergoing per region. The next limitation was not having the requirement that participants must answer all questions that were in the survey. This issue led to a decrease in responses, leaving data out. Fortunately, the data obtained from the survey were still usable. The last limitation of the study was that the survey should have required participants to be specific about each application round they went through. For example, when the participants were asked about how many sites they had applied to, for those who applied multiple times, participants should have been asked to give answers per round.

Future Research

The ideal next step for this research is to survey internship coordinators regarding the application process. This different perspective could provide a balance to the students' perspectives of the internship application process. Taking this step would allow the possibility to see whether the applicants and coordinators have the same thoughts and ideas to improve the process. Additionally, the future of the research can focus on how better to connect and match interns to child life clinical programs across the nation. This topic would allow researchers to determine if the idea of matching participants to a program, much the same as medical schools and residencies do, would be the best path for the future implications of the child life internship

application process. Last, an investigation into the possibility of an online portal that would allow applicants to upload the required documents; such as the eligibility assessment, common application, letters of recommendations, transcripts, hour verification forms, cover letter, resume, and any additional documents; might provide a solution for organizing materials but also decrease the expense of applying to an internship and reduce applicants' stress.

Conclusion

In summary, this research study explored the stressors experienced by applicants of the child life clinical internship application process. Data were collected from applicants across academic programs throughout the United States. The requirement for participation in this study was the student status of undergraduate seniors or those in graduate school and undergoing the process of applying to child life clinical internships. The sample size was 69. Data were collected regarding the stressors experienced by applicants and suggestions of the participants.

Results indicated that the child life clinical internship application process was a stressful experience for applicants. Stressors were identified as (a) obtaining, writing, and editing of documents, (b) financial expenses, (c) interviewing, and (d) the four-day offer period. Factors that had the highest percentage of reports of stress were the four-day offer period (97.06%, $N = 33$ of 34), obtaining, writing, and editing of documents (95.08%, $N = 58$ of 61), interviewing (93.4%, $N = 42$ of 45), and financial expenses (86.7%, $N = 39$ of 45). When examining the data obtained, it appears that unnecessary stressors can be decreased through suggestions provided by the participants of the study. Overall, the majority of the participants considered the application

process stressful but worth it once an internship was secured. Applicants acknowledged that the stressors experienced could not be eliminated but could be decreased.

REFERENCES

- Association of Child Life Professionals Education & Training Committee. (2018). *Internship application process guide* [PDF]. Arlington, VA: Author.
- Association of Child Life Professionals. (July 2019). *Child life professional certification candidate manual* [PDF]. Arlington, VA: Author
- Biggs, A., Brough, P., & Drummond, S. (2017). Lazarus and Folkman's psychological stress and coping theory. In C.L. Cooper and J.C. Quick (Eds.), *The handbook of stress and health: A guide to research and practice* (p. 351-364).
- Bradstreet, T. C., Wood, M., Parent, M. C., Ameen, E., & Callahan, J. L. (2016). *This has been the worst experience of my life: The internship crisis and its impact on students*. doi:10.1037/e542032014-001
- Child life academic program directory. (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.childlife.org/certification/students/child-life-academic-programs>
- Clark, V. L. P., & Creswell, J. W. (2008). Data analysis strategies for mixed-method evaluation design. In V. J. Caracelli, & J. C. Green (Eds.), *The mixed methods reader* (pp. 229-250). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Common child life internship application. (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.childlife.org/docs/default-source/certification/internships/common-child-life-internship-application.pdf?sfvrsn=18>
- Creswell, J. W., Plano Clark, V. L., Gutmann, M. L., & Hanson, W. E. (2003). Advanced mixed methods research designs. In A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research* (pp. 159-196). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Lincoln, NE: Pearson Education.
- Eligibility requirements effective January 1, 2019. (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.childlife.org/certification/students/requirements-after-2019>
- Fraenkel, J. R., Wallen, N. E., & Hyun, H. H. (2019). Mixed-methods research. In Gardner, M.K. (Ed.), *How to design and evaluate research in education* (10th ed., pp. G-2, G-6). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Folkman, S. (1984). Personal control and stress and coping processes: A theoretical analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 46(4), 839-852. <https://doi-org.proxy.missouristate.edu/10.1037/0022-3514.46.4.839>

- Folkman, S., Lazarus, R. S., Dunkel-Schetter, C., DeLongis, A., & Gruen, R. J. (1986). Dynamics of a stressful encounter: Cognitive appraisal, coping, and encounter outcomes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 50(5), 992-1003. doi:10.1037//0022-3514.50wa.5.992
- Goyhyeyev, P., & Sabers, D. (2010). Item analysis. In N.J. Salkind (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of research design*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. doi:10.4135/9781412961288
- Jansen, H. (2010). The logic of qualitative survey research and its position in the field of social research methods. *Forum Qualitative Social Research*, 11(2), Art. 11, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1002110>.
- Keilin, W. G., Baker, J., McCutcheon, S., & Peranson, E. (2007). A growing bottleneck: The internship supply-demand imbalance in 2007 and its impact on psychology training. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, 1(4), 229-237. doi:10.1037/1931-3918.1.4.229
- Lambert, V. A., & Lambert, C. E. (2012). Qualitative descriptive research: An acceptable design. *Pacific Rim International Journal of Nursing Research*, 16, 255-256.
- Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). Cognitive appraisal process. *Stress, appraisal, and coping*, 22-54. Retrieved from https://books.google.com/books/about/Stress_Appraisal_and_Coping.html?id=i-ySQQQuUpr8C&printsec=frontcover&source=kp_read_button#v=onepage&q&f=false
- Mahan, C. C. (2005). Stress and coping. In J.A. Rollins, R. Bolig, and C.C. Mahan (Eds.), *Meeting children's psychosocial needs: Across the health-care continuum*, (pp.43-75). Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.
- Mellott, R. N., Arden, I. A., & Cho, M. E. (1997). Preparing for internship: Tips for the prospective applicant. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 28(2), 190-196. doi:10.1037//0735-7028.28.2.190
- Mondalek, A. (2016, April 6). Here's how much your summer internship will really cost you. Retrieved from <http://time.com/money/collection-post/4269235/summer-internship-real-costs/>
- Oehlert, M. E., Lopez, S. J., & Sumerall, S. W. (1997). Internship application: Increased cost accompanies increased competitiveness. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 28(6), 595-596. doi:10.1037//0735-7028.28.6.595.b
- Plante, T. G. (1987). Comments on the clinical internship application process. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 18(1), 7-8. doi:10.1037//0735-7028.18.1.7
- Schaefer, M. R., Newman, G. H., Perl, R., Morrison, A., Jordan, V. B., Wong, J., . . . Montenegro, H. (2011). Shifting the paradigm: Alternative perspectives and solutions to increasing the availability of quality internships. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, 5(4), 209-212. doi:10.1037/a0026276

- Schambach, T. P., & Dirks, J. (2002, December). Student perceptions of internship experiences. *Proceedings of the 17th annual conference of the International Academy for Information Management*. Barcelona, Spain.
- Standards for academic clinical preparation programs: Internship. (2011). *The official documents of the child life council*. Arlington, VA: Child Life Council.
- Stangor, C., & Walinga, J. (2014). Stress, health, and coping. In J. Walinga (Ed.), *Introduction to psychology—1st Canadian edition*. Victoria, BC: BCcampus. Retrieved from <https://opentextbc.ca/introductiontopsychology/>
- Wilson, J. M., & Cross, J. (2009). Program administration and supervision. In R.H. Thompson (Ed.), *The handbook of child life: A guide for pediatric psychosocial care and book of child life*: (pp. 199-219). Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.
- Williams, C. (2007). Research methods. *Journal of Business & Economics Research*, 5A(3). <https://doi.org/10.19030/jber.v5i3.2532>



APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Approval

The IRB approved research on April 1st, 2019.

Approved

IRB-FY2019-578 A Qualitative Descriptive Analysis of Student's Experiences with the Child Life Internship Application Process

 PDF  Delete

Approval Date: 04-01-2019	Expiration Date: N/A	Organization: Childhood Ed & Fam Studies	Active Submissions: N/A
Admin Check-In Date: N/A	Closed Date: N/A	Current Policy Post-2018 Rule	Sponsors: N/A

Key Contacts | Attachments

Team Member	Role	Number	Email
Denise Cunningham	Principal Investigator	417-836-4492	denisecunningham@missouristate.edu
Haley Reeves	Primary Contact		haley95@live.missouristate.edu
Haley Reeves	Investigator		haley95@live.missouristate.edu

Appendix B: Human Research Training



Completion Date 23-Jun-2018
Expiration Date 22-Jun-2021
Record ID 27610794

This is to certify that:

Haley Reeves

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Human Research (Curriculum Group)
Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Missouri State University



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w01dc5f81-28ea-41ad-b5ef-085631621be5-27610794

Appendix C: Survey

Qualitative Descriptive Analysis of Student's Experiences with the Child Life Internship Application

Survey Flow

Standard: Informed Consent (1 Question)**Block: Child Life Internship Survey (27 Questions)**

Informed Consent

Research Title: A Qualitative Descriptive Analysis of Student's Experiences with the Child Life Internship Application Process

Dear Participant,

My name is Haley Reeves, and I am a child life studies master's candidate at Missouri State University, in the Department of Childhood Education and Family Studies. I am under the supervision of Denise Cunningham, PhD. I am collecting data for my graduate thesis, which explores the experiences of child life students during the child life internship application process. Using an online survey, information about your experience will be collected, examined, and reported about. Thank you in advance for your participation.

You are being asked to take part in a research study titled, A Qualitative Descriptive Analysis of Student's Experiences with the Child Life Internship Application Process. I am asking you to participate in this study because you have gone through, or are in the process of completing, the internship application process.

If you decide to participate, you will complete a survey. The survey will ask questions about your experiences with the internship application and interview process. You will have four weeks to complete this survey. The survey will take approximately 10 to 20 minutes.

Taking part in this study is voluntary. By completing this survey, you give your permission to be included in the study. If you do not wish to complete the survey, just close your browser. If you decide to take part but later change your mind, you may have your answers deleted at any time. If you decide to stop, you do not have to give a reason and there will be no negative consequences for ending your participation.

There is little to no risk to you for participating in this study. Your identity will not be associated with the study. Group information will be gathered and used rather than individual responses. You will not benefit directly from this study. However, the information from this study will be shared with the ACLP in hopes of improving the application process. Your privacy and confidentiality will always be maintained. No personal information will be released or identifiable in the thesis research study. Your name and academic program will not be released or used within this research. After the research study is completed, all data will be destroyed.

The researcher conducting this study is Haley Reeves. The research advisor is Dr. Denise Cunningham in the department of Childhood Education and Family Studies at Missouri State University. If you have questions, feel free to contact Haley at Haley95@live.missouristate.edu or Dr. Cunningham at DeniseCunningham@MissouriState.edu.

I agree to participate (1)

I do not wish to participate (2)

End of Block: Informed Consent

Q1 What is your gender?

Male (1)

Female (2)

Other (3) _____

Q2 What is your age?

Q3 What is the highest level of school that you have completed?

Some college, but no degree (1)

2-year college degree (2)

4-year college degree (3)

Graduate-level degree (4)

Q4 Have you completed a practicum?

- Yes (1)
 - No (2)
 - In the process (3)
-

Q5 Have you met the course requirements to apply for an internship?

- Yes (1)
 - No (2)
 - In-progress form needed (3)
-

Q6 Is this your first time applying for a child life internship?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: Q7 If Q6 = 2

Skip To: Q8 If Q6 = 1

Q7 How many times have you applied for a child life internship?

Q8 How many locations have you applied to?

Q9 How helpful was the ACLP's information about the application process?

- Not helpful (1)
 - Helpful (2)
 - Extremely helpful (3)
-

Q10 What was your stress level before starting the application process?

- No stress (1)
 - Moderate level of stress (2)
 - High level of stress (3)
-

Q11 Did the writing and editing of documents required for the application process cause you stress?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: Q12 If Q11 = 1

Skip To: Q14 If Q11 = 2

Q12 Describe your stress from the writing and editing of documents required for the application process and provide examples of how the stress impacted you.

Q13 Was the cost of the application process a stressor for you?

- Not a stressor (1)
 - Moderate level of stressor (2)
 - High level of stressor (3)
-

Q14 How many interview offers did you receive?

Q15 How were the interviews conducted? Check all that apply.

- In-person Interview (1)
 - Phone Interview (2)
 - Virtual Interview (3)
-

Q16 What was the format of your interviews?

- Multi-mini interview (1)
 - Panel (2)
 - Both (3)
-

Q17 Did your interview require travel to a location outside the city where you live?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Skip To: Q18 If Q17 = 1

Skip To: Q19 If Q17 = 2

Q18 How far did you have to travel for an interview?

Q19 Did you incur travel expenses with the interview process?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q20 How much did you spend on application fees, printing, postage and shipping, and traveling for interviews?

Q21 Did you experience stress during the application process?

No stress experienced (1)

Moderate level of stress (2)

High level of stress (3)

Skip To: Q24 If Q21 = 1

Q22 Did you experience stress during the interview process?

- No stress experienced (1)
- Moderate level of stress (2)
- High level of stress (3)

Skip To: Q24 If Q22 = 1

Q23 Did you experience stress during the four-day offer period?

- No stress experienced (1)
- Moderate level of stress (2)
- High level of stress (3)

Q24 What were your feelings (or stress) during the four-day offer period?

Q25 Describe your feelings (or stress) during the application and interview process.

Q26 Do you believe the application process needs to be standardized?

Q27 Do you have suggestions to make the child life internship applications process better?

End of Block: Child Life Internship Survey