

Preparing behavioral health clinicians for success and retention in rural safety net practices

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Study Summary

This study assesses how, among behavioral health clinicians working in rural safety net practices, the amount of exposure to care in rural underserved communities received during training relates to confidence in skills important in their work settings, successes in jobs and communities, and anticipated retention.

Methods

This study uses survey data from Licensed Clinical Social Workers, Licensed Professional Counselors, and Psychologists working in rural safety net practices in 21 states while receiving educational loan repayment support from the National Health Service Corps, from 2015 to April 2022.

Findings and Conclusions

Of the 778 survey respondents working in rural counties, 486 (62.5%) reported they had formal education experiences with medically underserved populations during their professional training, for a median of 47 weeks.

- Collectively, most of this study's Psychologists, LCSWs, and LPCs who worked in rural underserved areas within safety net practices had lengthy exposure to care in rural underserved communities during their professional training.
- Those with greater exposure more often anticipated remaining longer in their rural practices and rural practice generally. More training also correlated with a greater sense of belonging to the community when at work, and outside work feeling better prepared to live happily in the community and finding important successes for the family there. On the other hand, amount of rural underserved training was not associated with clinicians' greater confidence in most of the skills queried that are important in rural practice, or associated with feeling more connected with patients or being more satisfied in jobs and practices.

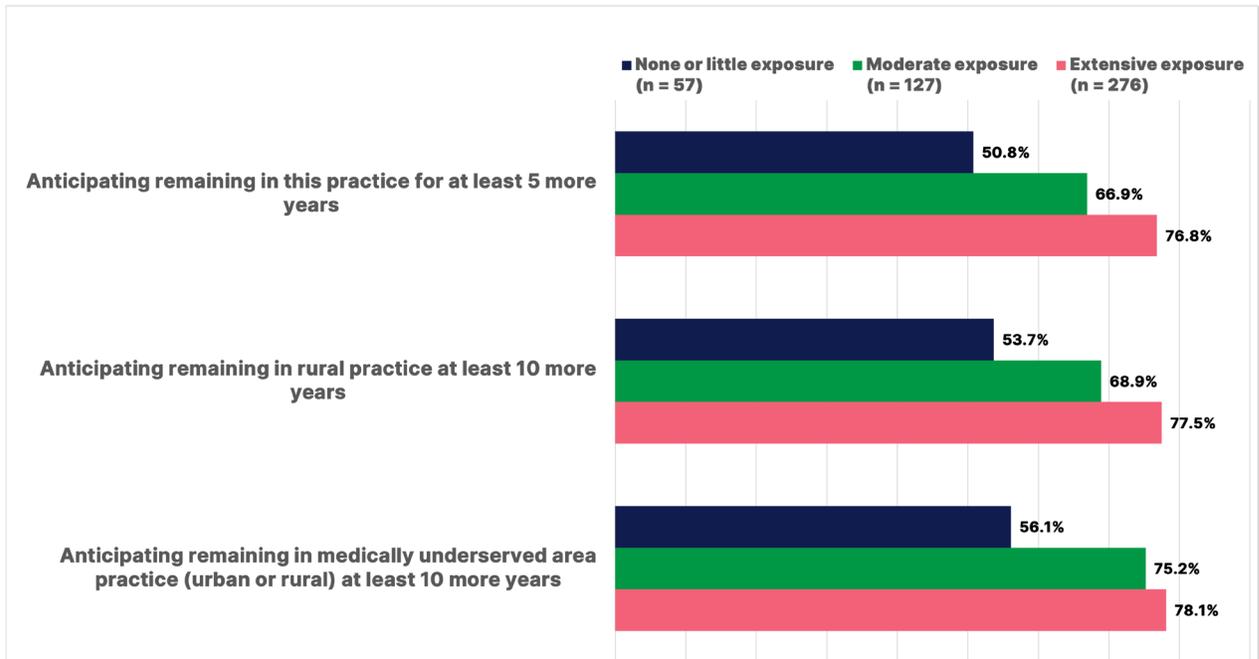
How the amount of exposure to care for rural underserved during training relates to behavioral health clinicians' agreement on a variety of statements about their successes when in practice



- The study's findings generally support the role preparation and job retention outcomes of the current behavioral health rural training programs.
- Findings suggest that behavioral health training programs whose graduates work in rural underserved settings should offer a substantial curriculum explicitly tailored to these settings.
- The favorable outcomes for this training, especially the longer anticipated retention of behavioral health clinicians within typically understaffed safety net clinics, support the federal investment in programs that help behavioral health training programs broaden curricula in these areas.
- To better prepare a potential future recruit, rural safety net practices can offer to serve as an education site for behavioral health students at nearby training programs.
- Given the strong anticipated retention of these behavioral health clinicians supported by loan repayment and the strong actual retention demonstrated by loan repayment recipients in other studies, practices should consider applying to qualify for the NHSC's and states' loan repayment programs and urge current and prospective clinicians to pursue loan repayment.



How the amount of exposure to care for rural underserved during training relates to the anticipated retention of behavioral health clinicians working in rural safety net practices



Funding Information

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; Health Resources and Services Administration, Grant/Award Number: U81HP46529-01-01

Research Conducted By

This research was conducted by the Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research and Behavioral Health Workforce Research Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partnership with PRISM, a product of 3RNET.

<https://www.shepscenter.unc.edu/programs-projects/workforce/behavioral-health-workforce-research-center/>

About PRISM

More information about Provider Retention & Information System Management (PRISM), a program provided by 3RNET, including this paper and other PRISM publications can be found at <https://3rnet.org/Prism/Resources>

Journal of Rural Health

Pathman DE, de Saxe Zerden L, Gingras M, Seel J, Fannell J, Lombardi BM. [Preparing behavioral health clinicians for success and retention in rural safety net practices](#). The Journal of Rural Health. 2024 Feb 5. doi: 10.1111/jrh.12824. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 38316680.

