

## A Simulation Training to Prepare Camp Counselors for Working With Children at Camp HOPE America

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### Abstract

*Camp has proven to be an effective positive youth development strategy for children and youth who experience trauma and adversity. However, training camp counselors who are prepared to meet the needs of trauma-exposed youth in these settings are less understood. This pilot evaluation study provides the results of a social simulation-based training for counselors who will work with children who have witnessed family violence through Camp HOPE America. Survey data (N = 76) and content analysis from video recorded training sessions in simulation that used standardized actors and scenarios from the 1<sup>st</sup> year (n = 37) were conducted. Repeated measures ANOVA results indicated statistically significant improvements from pre- to post-instruction simulation in counselors' hope scores ( $p < .001$ ); their knowledge and confidence in recognizing and reporting physical/sexual abuse, and self-harming behaviors ( $p < .001$ ); as well as significant increases in their knowledge and confidence in de-escalation, preventing difficult situations, and building campers' hope ( $p < .001$ ). Further, analysis of simulation videos suggests that camp counselors used new skills from the training during the simulation experience.*



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*Participants showed gains in knowledge, confidence, use of skills, and an overall increase in hope after completing the simulation training.*

Key words: simulation, hope, camp counselor, intimate partner violence, children exposed to domestic violence

### Introduction

Camps are an important means to promote various positive youth development goals and are often designed to address a specific population of children and youth. Camps are increasingly seen as an opportunity to enhance a child's social, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive skills using the tools of the camp experience: nature, challenging and new activities, and mentor relationships (Garst et al., 2011). Camps provide children and youth a way to seek out new information and test positive new skills in a safe environment (Garst et al., 2011). To achieve the desired goals, camps need to train camp counselors for the unique needs of the children. Research suggests that one of the most important aspects of camp programs is the relationship youth develop with staff (Halsall et al., 2016; Rubin et al., 2018; Thurber et al., 2007), but the young adults who often serve as camp counselors may not be adequately prepared to meet some of the needs of children and youth who have faced adversity and trauma. Supportive relationships for campers with unique emotional, behavioral, and social needs require training to help the camp counselors and staff accomplish the best experiences, maintain a safe environment, and achieve the camp outcomes or aim.

High-quality training should result in sustained improvement for staff performance (Birdi et al., 2008). Staff should be able to recall their training and apply it to specific camp situations. Researchers have suggested that camp training should be intentional for both returning counselors and new counselors be able to effectively learn and manage camp expectations (Baldwin et al., 2010; Galloway et al., 2013). Simulation training provides one possible enhancement of the training experience beyond traditional training modalities that focus on knowledge development by helping camp counselors learn how to achieve camp objectives and to rehearse those skills in a simulated learning environment (Bragg et al., 2017).

The current literature of specialty camps focuses predominately on children with medical issues or children who have experienced grief and loss, and rarely addresses camps for children who experience violence (Clute & Kobayashi, 2017; Hellman et al., 2017; Neville et al., 2019; Willis et al., 2017). Additionally, there is a gap in the camp evaluation literature for training programs designed for counselors and staff who may not have previous experience in working with

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special populations of children (McClatchey & Wimmer, 2017; Neville et al., 2019; Silliman & Shutt, 2010). National data on child maltreatment indicates that 68.6% of reported abuse occurs in settings where children routinely interact with trusted professionals and childcare programs (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2021). With roughly 14 million children attending camps each year in the United States (American Camp Association [ACA], 2016), camps are well suited to facilitate positive youth development for children who experience adversity and trauma.

This study aims to evaluate a pilot training using social simulation for new camp counselors for Camp HOPE America. Camp HOPE is a summer camp for children and youth who have witnessed family or intimate partner violence (IPV) in their homes. Given the complex trauma of children and youth at Camp HOPE, it is imperative that camp counselors are appropriately equipped to interact with children in a manner that is trauma-aware and supportive while responding to campers who may be expressing distress and difficulties with self-regulation. Additionally, camp counselors must consistently communicate the core components of hope framed as positive future expectations, as nurturing hope is the aim of Camp HOPE. In order for camp counselors to achieve the aim of Camp HOPE, they must have the capacity to match camp goals of nurturing hopeful thinking among campers. An increase in camp counselor hope may signal their capacity to nurture, enhance, and model hope to campers. Further, a key component of positive youth development in camps is the relationship between camper and counselor that is supportive (ACA, 2016) and has the capacity to build intentional high-quality bonds (Futch Ehrlich et al., 2016). For children and youth who experience trauma, the capability of the counselor to effectively manage an emotional crisis may be the key to creating and sustaining the bond between counselor and camper. This study provides the findings from a training program designed to equip camp counselors to support children and youth with a trauma-informed approach, using simulation as a mechanism for development. The authors will explain the nature of the problem for children and youth who witness intimate partner violence and the aim of Camp HOPE programs to support the development of campers. Finally, the authors will share the methods for training camp counselors using a simulation approach, the findings from survey data, and provide an analytic review of the simulation videos.

### ***Background***

Every year roughly two to eight million children in the United States witness intimate partner violence in their home (Hamby et al., 2011). Children exposed to IPV are at a higher risk for abuse and neglect (Fantuzzo & Morh, 1999) or other forms of victimization (Finkelhor et al.,

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2007; Finkelhor et al., 2011). Children exposed to IPV are at higher risk for short- and long-term difficulties emotionally, socially, and behaviorally. Studies find that children express a variety of concerning internalizing and externalizing behaviors, including more depressive symptoms and anxiety than children who have not been exposed (Graham-Bermann, 1996; Sternberg et al., 2006). Exposure to IPV is linked to trauma-related symptoms such as flashbacks and re-experiencing, hyperarousal, and emotional withdrawal (Graham-Bermann & Levendosky, 1998; Kilpatrick & Williams, 1998; Lehmann, 1992; Margolin & Vickerman, 2007; Robbie Rossman & Rosenberg, 1998). Additionally, children who have been exposed to IPV rated higher on post-traumatic stress disorder scales (Robbie Rossman, 2001). Aggression is the most frequently identified externalizing behavior associated with IPV exposure (Bourassa et al., 2017; Jouriles et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2012; Parker et al., 2006). Older youth exposed to both physical abuse and intimate partner violence are more likely to exhibit externalizing behaviors such as aggression and internalizing behaviors such as anxiety, depression, and withdrawal from social settings and peer relationships.

***Hope Theory***

Snyder's (2002) hope theory has emerged as one of the most recognized frameworks conceptualizing hope as both a coping resource and psychological strength that promotes well-being. In this context, hope is a future-based orientation to identify the pathways to goal achievement and marshal the motivation or willpower to pursue those pathways. While desired goals are the cornerstone of Snyder's hope theory, the focus is on the two components of "pathways thinking" and "agency thinking." *Pathways thinking* refers to the ability to identify strategies or plans on how to achieve one's goals ("I have a plan," or "I know how to get there"). The hopeful individual is able to identify multiple pathways to the goal and effectively conceive alternative pathways or solutions to potential barriers. *Agency thinking* refers to the mental energy we deploy toward our goal pursuits ("I am ready," or "I have what it takes"). The metatheoretical idea of the agentic self incorporates motivation, self-efficacy, locus of control, et cetera., that allow us to consider the desirability of goals and the capacity to generate strategies toward goal attainment. The hopeful individual has the agency to self-regulate their thoughts, behaviors, and emotions when selecting and pursuing their desired goals. Ultimately, positive expectations regarding the pursuit of desired goals become the essence of hope.

Hope has been consistently shown to promote physical, psychological, and social well-being across the lifespan (Lee & Callagher, 2018; Marques et al., 2011; Munoz et al., 2020;

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Rasmussen et al., 2018; Ritschel & Sheppard, 2018; Valle et al., 2006). In the context of adversity and trauma, hope has been shown to buffer stress and promote positive outcomes for children and youth who have experienced trauma and adversity (Cheavens et al., 2006; Hellman et al., 2018; Long & Gallagher, 2018; Munoz et al., 2017). An important aspect of Snyder's hope theory is that hope is a cognitive process; therefore, it is taught or nurtured in childhood and throughout the lifespan. In working with foster youth and children exposed to intimate violence, targeted intervention studies have found that hope can be nurtured and increased among high-trauma survivors (Munoz et al., 2017; Sulimani-Aidan et al., 2019).

The potential benefits of hope may be useful beyond the camper. Camp staff and counselors are likely to experience positive benefits from camp settings that draw from hope theory. Prior studies have shown that camp counselors who serve in leadership often experience positive life skills development themselves during the camp experience (Garst et al., 2011). Research has demonstrated that camp staff report the experience of participating as camp staff enhances their own personal standards for behavior and increases the confidence of staff and counselors (Garst & Johnson, 2005), and also enhances their own communication skills (Duerden et al., 2014). Given the significance of training counselors to enhance hope in the camp environment, designing and evaluating a training curriculum that can be deployed to equip counselors to improve the hope and well-being of campers who are trauma survivors would be highly valued.

### ***Camp HOPE***

[Camp HOPE America](http://www.camphopeamerica.com) ([www.camphopeamerica.com](http://www.camphopeamerica.com)) focuses on children and youth who have been exposed to intimate partner violence. Operated by the Alliance for Hope International, the evidence-based camp program is operating in 25 states. Camp HOPE is the first camping and mentoring initiative in the United States to focus on children exposed to IPV with the aim to shatter the generational cycle of family violence by offering hope and healing to children and youth who have witnessed family violence.

Camp HOPE adopts a values-based summer camp and mentoring model. Programming consists of a 6-day overnight summer camp with monthly follow-up programs. The camp brings together therapists, health professionals, and camp counselors who execute an evidence-based model designed to address the unique emotional, social, and behavioral needs of children exposed to IPV. The key elements of Camp HOPE philosophy include (a) challenge by choice activities; (b) affirmation and praise for developing observed character traits; and (c) themed, small group discussions and activities designed to help campers set and pursue goals.

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The challenge by choice encourages children to set daily achievement goals and engage in personal challenges by pursuing activities that have some perceived danger and risk (e.g., zip line, canoeing, etc.). Campers are allowed the opportunity to opt out of the activity if it creates too much stress. Camp activities are designed to bolster creative thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, mutual support, self-esteem, self-management, and goal setting. In addition to the “challenge by choice” activities, children participate in routine group activities and other constructive recreational events.

Camp HOPE participants are children receiving services from existing family justice centers, child welfare system-involved children in group homes or foster care, and others identified from local social service organizations. All children attending Camp HOPE had been exposed to and/or witnessed family violence before coming to Camp HOPE (Hellman & Gwinn, 2017; Jackson-Stowe et al., 2020). Camp counselors supervise all camp activities with specialized programs and therapeutic components managed by trained Camp HOPE professionals. All Camp HOPE professionals are employed by the Alliance for Hope International. Prior studies of a subset of children over the age of 11 ( $n = 64$ ) who attend Camp HOPE were administered the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) questionnaire with an average ACE score of 5.51 (Hellman et al., 2017). This average was significantly higher than the national average ACE score of 1.61 (Ford et al., 2014).

### ***Social Simulation Training***

Simulation-based learning is an emerging and innovative method for teaching new skills in field of practice such as nursing (Kaakinen et al, 2009), social work (Logie et al., 2013), and in health care (Alanazi et al., 2017). Simulation is a teaching tool historically used in medical and allied health education, involving high-technical or high-fidelity mannequins. In social work education, simulation learning is an experiential method that utilizes actors trained in specially designed scenarios to simulate specific real-world experiences (Kourgiantakis et al., 2020). Training scenarios may include individuals, families, teams, or group experiences across various contexts and disciplines. Social simulation allows for the creative use of facilities to best fit the contexts in which trainees practice. It can also involve sophisticated technology that allows for observation of learners by instructors and peers who can review and annotate recordings of the simulation lab event.

Good simulation experiences frequently involve debriefing and feedback, often with a video review of the trainee using new skills in the simulated setting. One benefit of social simulation is

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the opportunity to design experiences to promote, develop, reinforce and/or test key skills in a low-stake environment. Evidence suggests that well developed and designed social simulations can enhance trainee self-confidence, provide opportunities to practice new skills in a safe yet realistic setting, and help trainees think critically and intentionally about the integration of knowledge and skills before they need to be deployed in real-life settings (Bragg et al., 2017; Havig et al., 2017; Issenberg et al., 2009; Leake et al., 2010, Manning et al., 2016; Miller-Cribbs et al., 2020; Randall et al., 2020).

## Method

### *Research Context: Training and Simulation*

A social simulation training program for Camp HOPE counselors was developed and implemented over 2 years for two Camp HOPE sites. The training included a didactic lecture that focused on the following elements: typologies of child abuse and trauma, impacts on children and development, typical challenges faced by camp counselors when working with children who have experienced trauma, and strategies for working with campers and handling disclosures of abuse and trauma in a camp setting. Following the lecture, the camp counselor trainees participated in a simulation in one of three scenarios involving a camper in distress. These included: (a) a camper disclosure of abuse and self-harm; (b) a camper who is out of control and angry, demonstrating externalizing behaviors of emotional distress; and (c) a camper who discloses a history of parental sexual abuse to a counselor. Each camp counselor trainee participated in one scenario and observed other counselors in two different scenarios. All trainees participated in a large group debriefing of the simulation experience and an overall discussion of learning gained from the simulation activity.

### *Participants*

Data for this study were collected in the summer of 2018 and 2019 from two cohorts of camp counselor trainees employed at two locations of Camp HOPE in a south-central state. All Camp HOPE counselors ( $N = 90$ ) received simulation-based training before summer camp. Additionally, they were all asked to participate in an ongoing assessment of using simulation for training. While both cohorts participated in the simulation training, only Cohort 2 simulation recordings were used for this analysis ( $n = 37$ ). Pre- and post-training data were also collected from the trainees. Of those who participated in the pre and post surveys, seven were under the age of 18 and were excluded from analysis, and seven did not complete the evaluation, resulting in a final sample of 76 participants. A full breakdown of the demographics of the final

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sample is illustrated in Table 1. IRB for the evaluation was granted from the University of Oklahoma, and written consent for participation was completed by each participant.

**Table 1. Participant Demographics**

	Mean	SD
Age (minimum: 18, maximum: 60)	23.20	7.13
	<i>N</i>	%
Sex		
Male	19	25.0
Female	57	75.0
Race		
White/Caucasian	36	47.37
Latinx	16	21.05
Black/African American	12	15.79
Other	12	15.79

*Note.* Due to small cell sizes, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Middle eastern/North African, and those indicating more than one background were collapsed into "Other."

## Measures

### Adult Hope Scale

To assess the levels of hope of the participating camp counselors, the Adult Hope Scale was utilized (Snyder et al., 1991). Given that hope is the aim of Camp HOPE, measuring the counselor's individual hope may signal the capacity to enhance or model hope for campers. The Adult Hope Scales consists of eight statements on an 8-point Likert scale (1 = *definitely false* to 8 = *definitely true*). These eight statements are designed to measure overall hope and the subscales of agency and pathways. Calculation of hope is accomplished through the summation of all eight responses. The Adult Hope Scale has demonstrated acceptable reliability, having been used widely in the social sciences (Bragg et al., 2017; Hellman et al., 2013). Within the current study, the Adult Hope Scale had acceptable reliability on pre-assessment ( $\alpha = .739$ ) and post-assessment ( $\alpha = .771$ ).

### Modified Toby Scale

To assess changes in knowledge and self-confidence of participants in dealing with physical and sexual child abuse disclosure, a modified version of the questions used by Farrell & Walsh

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(2010) were used. These questions are referred to as the Modified Toby Scale. These questions originally were designed to assess students' confidence in identifying, ability to report, knowledge of indicators, and knowledge about reporting child abuse (Farrell & Walsh, 2010). The format of the questions (knowledge and self-confidence) remained unchanged, with changes making the questions more specific to physical abuse and sexual abuse. Responses were recorded to the eight statements on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *great deal of knowledge/confidence* to 5 = *no knowledge/confidence at all*). Possible scores range from a low of 8 to a high of 40, with *lower* scores indicative of higher knowledge or self-confidence. Within this study, the Modified Toby Scale was demonstrated to have acceptable reliability at pre assessment ( $\alpha = .892$ ) and post assessment ( $\alpha = .828$ ).

*Single Item Questions*

In keeping with the format of the Toby Scale, a series of single-item questions assessed counselors' self-reported knowledge and belief in their abilities regarding (a) self-harming behavior, (b) de-escalation techniques, (c) preventing difficult situations, and (d) building or enhancing hope in campers. Each of these questions was assessed on 5-point Likert scales (1 = *great deal of knowledge/confidence* to 5 = *no knowledge or confidence at all*). With *lower* scores indicative of greater knowledge and/or confidence.

*Video Content Analysis Coding*

This study uses a conceptual content analysis approach to analyze the recorded video content of the simulation. Conceptual content analysis is a research tool that helps to quantify the number of times certain events or activities occur. Content analysis is unique because it can be used in either qualitative or quantitative methodology (Bengtsson, 2016). For our study, the purpose of the conceptual content analysis is to determine if the learners' skills were applied to the simulated camp setting. The research team established a group of training content-specific codes to evaluate the presence of skill demonstrations during the training. The measure was developed using a coding scheme that is a nominal variable (demonstration of skill yes/no) to create a measure for observation frequency. We did not design the measure to rate the effectiveness or quality of the skills, only the frequency to which the camp counselor trainee attempted to use the new skill in the simulation. Due to a large amount of video data, only videos from the 1<sup>st</sup> year (2018) were used in the analysis. Three coders from the research team reviewed a total of 37 simulation videos from the summer of 2018. The research team began with a list of preliminary codes which explored the primary learning objectives of the simulation and training. Using a deductive–inductive strategy for developing categories, a coding structure

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for reviewing the videos was created from the theoretical constructs of hope and the learning objectives of the training (deductive). The research team then selected the most relevant training concepts that could be identified by demonstrating a skill by the trainee in the simulation. After establishing an initial coding scheme, three research team members conducted several rounds of preliminary coding on a sample of videos. The informal comparison of the code patterns and inclusion of video content revealed any problems with code definitions or interpretations. Throughout this iterative process, researcher team members changed, eliminated, and collapsed subcategories into new categories while remaining focused on the main concepts of hope theory and learning objectives (inductive step). Definitions were created for the categories and provided anchor examples to serve as a guide to help the coders distinguish between categories.

Using the main categories and subcategories, two research team members independently reviewed and coded 37 simulation recordings. Coding was completed using the simulation software Learning Space (CAE Learning Space, 2019), which allows a reviewer to time stamp the skill within the video and tag the event using the code item title. Tagging the skill within the simulation recording allowed for more contextual analysis, such as how camp counselors adjusted the tone of voice or changed physical location in the space. Digitally tagging the skill within the video also allowed for comparisons between reviewers to improve inter-coder reliability. The final code items reflect the core features of the training and the frequency that the researchers observed the skills in the video review. A final coding set was constructed and tested until consistency was established between the research team members (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Common observed behaviors were organized across three skill-based themes: (a) demonstration of basic interpersonal skills with the campers (building rapport, expressing empathy, focused attention to feelings, and maintaining boundaries); (b) demonstration of hope skills, including goal-seeking and pathways-building strategies to support motivation; and (c) responding in ways that were discouraged in the training, which we refer to as problematic interactions. During this analysis, the researchers were aware that training is an iterative process; they expected the demonstration of new skills to increase and of less desirable interactions with the child actor to decrease. Therefore, the final codes reflect both the desired learning objectives and the responses that may be less helpful when working with children who have experienced trauma.

## Results

### *Survey Results*

All pre-and post-assessment data from the survey were matched and entered into the software IBM SPSS (version 24) for analysis. Repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted to determine if there were significant differences in participants' self-reported levels of hope and knowledge and confidence in dealing with physical and sexual abuse, self-harming behaviors, preventing difficult situations, and building or enhancing hope in campers. There were no outliers, and the data had approximately normal distribution at each point in time as assessed by boxplot and Shapiro-Wilk test ( $p > .05$ ).

### *Pre and Post Survey Results*

Results of the repeated measures ANOVA accounting for Bonferroni correction were indicative of statistically significant changes in all measured constructs from pre- to post-training assessment ( $p < .05$ ). First, in relation to counselors' levels of hope, there were statistically significant increases in hope from pre to post assessment ( $p < .001$ ). Utilizing the Modified Toby Scale, results illustrated that counselors' self-reported knowledge and confidence related to reporting physical and sexual abuse had significantly improved (demonstrated by *lower* scores on post-assessment;  $p < .001$ ). Utilizing the same format as the Modified Toby Scale, results of the single-item questions demonstrated significant improvements in counselors' knowledge and confidence in reporting self-harm behavior, de-escalation techniques, preventing difficult situations, and building or enhancing hope in campers ( $p < .001$  for all measures). Additionally, effect sizes for all measures indicated the magnitude of change was large, even accounting for bias ( $\eta_p^2$  and  $\omega^2 > .014$ ; Cohen, 1988; Hayes, 1963). Results of this study suggest the potential benefit of using high-fidelity simulations in preparing camp counselors who will be working with children with complex traumatic backgrounds. See Table 2 for complete ANOVA results.

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**Table 2. Repeated Measures ANOVA Results by Instrument**

	Pre		Post		Pairwise comparisons		95% CI	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig.	$\eta^2_p$	$\omega^2$
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	[lower, upper]					
Adult hope scale	55.86	4.87	57.09	4.65	-3.237	.467	[-4.167, -2.306]	48.016	1, 75	< .001	.390	.379
Modified Toby scale	16.00	5.11	11.22	3.65	4.776	.486	[2.306, 4.167]	96.666	1, 75	< .001	.563	.554
Self-harm - K	2.00	.78	1.51	.60	.487	.093	[0.302, 0.672]	27.579	1, 75	< .001	.269	.257
Self-harm - C	1.74	.76	1.32	.52	.421	.092	[0.237, 0.605]	20.824	1, 75	< .001	.217	.205
De-escalation - K	2.13	.74	1.37	.54	.763	.083	[0.597, 0.929]	83.543	1, 75	< .001	.527	.517
De-escalation - C	2.04	.77	1.37	.56	.671	.089	[0.494, 0.848]	57.324	1, 75	< .001	.433	.422
PDS - K	2.34	.83	1.59	.62	.750	.099	[0.552, 0.948]	57.000	1, 75	< .001	.432	.421
PDS - C	2.13	.74	1.50	.62	.632	.095	[0.442, 0.821]	43.992	1, 75	< .001	.370	.358
Building hope - K	2.14	.83	1.37	.54	.776	.100	[0.577, 0.976]	60.059	1, 75	< .001	.445	.434
Building hope - C	1.87	.68	1.36	.53	.513	.085	[0.344, 0.682]	36.621	1, 75	< .001	.328	.316

*Note.* PDS = preventing difficult situation; K = knowledge; C = confidence

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**Video Content Analysis Results**

The results of the video content analysis were organized across a total of three skill-based themes: (a) demonstrating basic interpersonal skills with the campers; (b) demonstrating hope skills of goal seeking, pathways exploration, and motivation; and (c) identifying problematic interactions to correct. In all, there were a total of 1,766 tags captured by the research team in the analysis. The most frequently observed skills demonstrated by camp counselor trainees during the simulation were basic engagement skills ( $n = 993$ ). In addition, many of the coded interactions between camp counselors and the camper focused specifically on the use of hope concepts with campers (39%). The problematic interactions between the camp counselor and the simulated camper, while having some occurrence ( $n = 76$ ), were the lowest-occurring items in the content analysis (4.2%).

**Table 3. Totals and Percentages of Simulation Coding of Camp Counselor Skills**

Codes	<i>N</i>	Percent
<b>Basic interpersonal skills</b>		
Building rapport	579	32.6%
Expressed empathy	283	15.9%
Behavior to feelings	88	5.0%
MBY (maintained boundaries YES)	43	2.4%
<b><i>Subtotal introductory interpersonal</i></b>	<b><i>993</i></b>	<b><i>55.9%</i></b>
<b>Hope skills</b>		
Hope pathways	486	27.4%
Hope agency/willpower	161	9.1%
Hope goals	50	2.8%
<b><i>Subtotal hope</i></b>	<b><i>697</i></b>	<b><i>39.2%</i></b>
<b>Problematic interactions</b>		
Poor boundaries	7	0.4%
Poor promises	60	3.4%
Investigative questioning	9	0.5%
<b><i>Subtotal problematic behaviors</i></b>	<b><i>76</i></b>	<b><i>4.3%</i></b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,766</b>	

**Demonstrating Basic Interpersonal Skills**

Overall, the learning objectives of the training introduced camp counselors to some basic interpersonal skills that can be used to establish trust, bolster the child's feelings of security,

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and establish rapport as overall tactics to improve interactions with the campers. The skills are focused explicitly on maintaining emotional and physical safety for the camper in the context of trauma and past experiences of maltreatment and abuse. These skills are considered to be strategies that promote trauma-informed care which results from creating safety and building connections that help children with emotion and impulse management (Barth, 2008). The trauma-informed interpersonal skills were most utilized by camp counselors and were the primary objectives of the training ( $n = 993$ ). Counselors frequently sought to establish a positive relationship with a camper during the simulation by using rapport-building skills ( $n = 579$ ) or statements designed to build trust and develop helpful communication (e.g., "If you want to share, . . ." or "Would you like to talk?"). Additionally, camp counselors used expressions of empathy ( $n = 283$ ) or made statements to intentionally communicate they could understand the camper's point of view (e.g., "That sounds scary." or "It seems like you have had a difficult day."). Or camp counselors shifted attention away from how the child was behaving or acting to draw attention to and help the simulated camper identify and express emotions or feelings ( $n = 88$ ) by using an approach provided in training (e.g., "How are you feeling right now?" or "What are you thinking about?"). Finally, camp counselors maintained appropriate physical and/or emotional boundaries during the simulation ( $n = 43$ ) and helped the simulated child focus by modeling the use of de-escalation skills (e.g., counting, deep breaths) while remaining calm themselves and maintaining physical boundaries (e.g., asking permission to provide comfort, or asking permission to sit near the child).

*Demonstrating Hope*

The central theoretical component of hope is a future-oriented mindset in which a camper can identify important goals, select appropriate pathways to the goal, and sustain the motivation or willpower to pursue the goals in the face of barriers and adversity (Snyder, 1991). During the simulation, camp counselors frequently demonstrated interactions that guided the simulated camper to focus attention to goals, pathways, or willpower/motivation as a strategy for improving the simulated camper's distress ( $n = 697$ ). The skills were most often used to help the child identify pathways to their goals ( $n = 486$ ) by asking the camper if there are possible pathways they can identify or select to achieve their desired goal (e.g., "How do you think we can make your goal happen?" or "What do you want to do next?"), and statements that helped the simulated camper look for alternative paths and ways to resolve perceived barriers (e.g., "What else do you think we could do?" or "What can we do together if you feel scared/nervous/worried?"). After pathways, the most frequent observed skills were helping the simulated child camper explore their motivation to pursue goals ( $n = 161$ ), whereas the camp counselor made statements or explored with the camper strategies to sustain their motivation

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(e.g., “Do you believe you can achieve the goal?”) or generally praised the child for their past successes (e.g., “I have watched you overcome so many challenges at camp this week.” or “You are brave.” or “You are capable.”). To be counted in this category, the reviewers agreed that the interaction could not just be general praise but must be directly associated with stated goals and pathways that the camper had identified. Finally, helping the simulated camper by exploring or offering statements to identify goals or goal-setting conversations ( $n = 50$ ). The camp counselor offered ideas for future goals or asked the simulated camper to consider their own goals (e.g., “What is one thing you would like to accomplish at camp today?” or “What are some goals you have selected for yourself this week?”).

*Problematic Interactions*

The results of the conceptual content analysis included a frequency count of the interactions with simulated campers that were discouraged in training. These behaviors may be spontaneous responses to a child experiencing distress but are considered unhelpful or potentially harmful during interactions with children who have experienced trauma or child maltreatment. In all, there were a total of 76 problematic interactions observed during the simulated child interaction (4.2%). Problematic interactions included a failure to maintain physical and/or emotional boundaries during the simulation. This could be from the camp counselor attempting comfort to a child by touching an arm or shoulder or sitting close to the child without asking the child’s permission first or making a statement that may increase feelings of shame or doubt (e.g., “You don’t have to cry.” or “There is nothing to be upset about.” or “Please don’t cry/yell, etc.”). The results indicated some evidence of problematic interactions coded as making poor promises ( $n = 60$ ). Poor promises were any statements or assurances made to a child that cannot be kept by the camp counselor outside of the camp setting or may not be legal for child maltreatment disclosures (e.g., “I promise I won’t tell.” or “Nobody will ever hurt you again.” or “I promise nobody will make fun of you.”). The final item in this group was an observation of a camp counselor asking questions about child maltreatment or sexual abuse disclosure in a way that should be left for a trained professional, such as asking details about the abuse or accused abuser ( $n = 9$ ). Camp counselors were trained to provide nurturing and empathetic responses to a disclosure (e.g., “It is good that you have told me about this, but let’s get another helper [(camp leadership)] to come.”) but refrain from asking any detailed or investigative questions.

**Conclusions and Discussion**

The goal of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of simulation training on camp counselors’ capacity to work with children and youth who have experienced significant

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childhood trauma and adversity associated with Camp HOPE America. Simulation can promote experiential learning in real-world situations to enhance training to prepare for complex interactions with campers who are more likely to react to a camp environment in unpredictable ways. The findings from the analyses show significant increases in camp counselor hope, suggesting an increased capacity to identify pathways and willpower toward goals. While Camp HOPE's aim is to nurture hope in campers, it is important that counselors have the capacity to use the components that improve hope, even when faced with challenges such as those presented in the simulation. Significant increases were also observed in counselor knowledge and confidence in responding to a disclosure of maltreatment, a disclosure of parental sexual abuse, or a child who is reacting emotionally in the structured scenarios.

In addition to the self-reported measures from the survey data, the results from the video analysis revealed that camp counselors were able to demonstrate the skills from the training in the simulation environment. The simulation revealed that in the face of challenging scenarios with campers, counselors established rapport and trust, expressed empathy, helped campers identify feelings, and maintained appropriate boundaries throughout the simulation. Additionally, they were able to use hopeful thinking with the simulated camper, which is a core value of the camp. Although the camp counselors did not eliminate all problematic interactions, those interactions were only a small percentage of the total observed, suggesting that camp counselors could model and demonstrate positive interpersonal skills and hopeful thinking as a primary strategy when presented with a camper who is in distress.

Hope is a central theme of Camp HOPE but it is likely beneficial to incorporate hope theory into any camp setting. The capacity for children or youth to consider their future selves and set desired goals, devise pathways, and overcome barriers while managing their willpower is valuable for all children, not just children who experience trauma and adversity. Because the camp setting provides opportunities for campers to try new skills that present a certain amount of positive stress, camp may be a safe setting in which to nurture hope. Research on hope suggests that hopeful thinking improves well-being and is a protective factor for all children (Kirby et al., 2021). Further, this study contributes to the existing literature that reports that hope can be enhanced by focused intention on hopeful thinking (Feldman & Dreher, 2012; Marques et al., 2011)

Camp HOPE provides a unique camp experience for children and youth who are likely to have experienced adversity and trauma, to improve their hope by way of goal setting, pathways, and willpower. Camp counselors for Camp HOPE who participated in the training were not trained to

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provide therapeutic support to campers. While camp counselors' pro-social involvement is highly valued, there are times when they do not have the sufficient training and background to be effective with the complicated and often reactive nature of children coming from violent and abusive family backgrounds. Camp leadership should consider strategies, such as simulation-based training, to improve camp counselors' preparation for difficult camp situations presented in this study or others that may be a challenge in their camp setting.

While future evaluation and a more thorough measurement are needed, this pilot program produced findings indicating that simulation-based training can be an asset in preparing camp counselors for high-stakes and complicated interactions with children. Not only were camp counselors' conceptualization of hopefulness increased, but the counselors were also able to enhance their confidence in handling issues related to self-harm, physical and sexual abuse, and the de-escalation of disruptive behavior. The analysis from the simulation suggests a positive yet challenging learning experience. In addition to the positive simulation experience, the opportunity to record and review a simulation provides an opportunity to examine areas of improvement in which camp leadership can focus efforts for future training.

This study supports the emerging knowledge of the role of training camp counselors for supporting positive youth development in camp settings. Previous studies have demonstrated that camp counselors are vital for developing the intentional relationships children and youth need to thrive in a camp setting. Other studies have found that effective counselors can successfully support the campers' development during the camp program but require essential skills such as compassion, a sense of humor, and the ability to be a positive role model (Halsall et al., 2016). These are not automatic responses that camp counselors inherently possess but rather skills that can be developed during training. Additionally, this study contributes to the call for additional research on mechanisms for training camp counselors (Thurber et al., 2007).

The experience of serving as a camp counselor provides opportunities for leadership development and can be a rewarding and transformative experience (Fermite & Flatt, 2016). While this training was created for a particular camp population, we believe the training has relevance to all camp settings, as the frequency of child maltreatment and trauma is high and there is an emerging need for all child-serving programs to be trained in trauma responses. As camps pursue goals to address specific needs of specialized groups of children and youth, camp counselors and staff development must be considered a necessary function of those camps.

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While most camp programs provide some training to prepare camp counselors for reporting and identifying child abuse, we believe that social simulation is an effective enhancement to existing training programs to offer camp counselors real-life experiences in a low-risk environment. With more than 14,000 camps that serve more than 14 million children annually in the United States (American Camp Association, 2016), it is clear there is a need for high-fidelity training to prepare camp counselors to identify, report, and prevent child maltreatment while ensuring camp is a safe and transformative environment for children and youth.

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