



University  
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of Master of Social Work

of

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BSW (University of Victoria, 2010)  
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**“Wounded Healer or Stigmatized Healer?  
First-Person Experience With Suicidality Among Helping Professionals  
in Suicide Prevention and Intervention”**

School of Social Work

Tuesday, February 4, 2020  
10:00 A.M.  
Clearihue Building  
Room B007

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Susan Strega, School of Social Work, University of Victoria (Supervisor)  
Dr. Jennifer White, School of Child and Youth Care, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Brenda LeFrancois, School of Social Work, Memorial University of Newfoundland

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Kieka Mynhardt, Department of Mathematics and Statistics, UVic

## **Abstract**

This study sought to explore the experiences of helping professionals who have first-hand lived experience with suicidal ideation or suicidal behaviour and who work with suicidal people.

The research is placed in the context of the wounded healer discourse. Within the helping professions, the term 'wounded healer' refers to the idea that a healer's lived experience of being 'wounded', i.e. suffering harm or violence or facing psychological or addiction challenges, is inherently helpful to their healing abilities. While a growing body of literature about the wounded healer concept exists for helping professions with some experiences, such as mental health practitioners who experience mental health challenges, this research project focuses specifically on the under-researched area of suicide.

The study was conducted from an insider perspective. It utilized narrative methodology with a feminist and intersectional lens to analyze the stories gathered from semi-structured interviews with five helping professionals from a variety of professional backgrounds who work with suicidal people.

The findings of the study indicate that, while the wounded healers who were interviewed believe that their lived experience benefits their practice and the people with whom they work, lived experience with suicidality remains a taboo among professionals in suicide prevention and intervention. Certain features of the wounded healer discourse, namely that some wounded healers can become impaired professionals and put the healing process and thus the client at risk, have contributed to this taboo.

This study aims to contribute to the conversation about what it means to be a helping professional with lived experience with suicidality in the area of suicide prevention and intervention, and thus to lessening the stigma surrounding this experience.