The goal of the project is to understand how therapist turnover, defined as an event when a therapist leaves his/her organization, affects client engagement. Past studies have demonstrated a relationship between greater client engagement and improved clinical outcomes in therapy, if a significant association between therapist turnover and client engagement is established in this study, working to retain staff and change in policies at the agencies may become a higher priority for community mental health centers (Joe, et al., 2002).

Based on past studies observing the causes and consequences of therapist turnover, it is hypothesized that therapist turnover will impact client attendance rates to scheduled therapy sessions. This hypothesis will be tested in the first part of the study when data regarding client attendance from chart abstractions is analyzed. Although it is suspected that therapist turnover will affect client engagement (i.e. attendance), only the data will tell us if this change in therapists is positive or negative. Furthermore, it is hypothesized that clients who score higher on the CEST measure during the interviews will be the ones who have highest rates of client attendance and self-reported participation in sessions. For the qualitative information gathered from the interviews, there is no a priori hypothesis specified as per the exploratory nature of these interviews and the grounded theory methodology used.

After receiving final IRB approval from the City of Philadelphia and Penn, I focused on data collection for the first part of my project in July and August. Part 1 of the study focused on measuring TF-CBT client attendance to sessions across Hall Mercer, a community mental health center in Philadelphia (n=1). Since Hall Mercer has records of client attendance to sessions dating back to when clients first entered therapy, I acquired this data through a chart abstraction process. Additionally, Hall Mercer’s TF-CBT supervisor provided me with a list of therapists who have left the agency, when they left the agency, and which clients they were treating before they left. Using this information and data collected regarding client attendance from the chart abstractions, I will use survival analysis to see if therapist turnover is a quantitative predictor of changes in client attendance.

As I am currently studying abroad, I will resume data collection for the second part of my project in January and begin the statistical analyses of the data collected this summer. As such, I cannot currently report on the results or draw any conclusions about the data collected from this summer. Part two of the study will involve mixed methods and will use both qualitative interviews and a survey (n=35). The qualitative interviews, conducted with clients who have experienced therapist turnover (n=15), supervisors whose therapists have left agencies (n=10), and therapists who have assumed care of clients who have dealt with turnover (n=10), will help us better understand the effects of therapist turnover on a clients’ active participation in session and on their relationships with their new therapists. After listening to and transcribing these interviews, they will be coded using grounded theory to highlight important themes that may influence the relationship between turnover and client engagement. In the client interviews, we will also administer the Client Evaluation of Self and Treatment (CEST), which is a
measurement that assesses client engagement in treatment across three categories: satisfaction, participation, and counseling rapport. This measure will allow us to stratify the qualitative themes using quantitative data (e.g., clients with low satisfaction on the CEST are more likely to report feeling abandoned by their previous therapist).