The Influence of Work Stress and Coping Strategies on Burnout Among Guidance and Counseling Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to measure the impact of work stress and coping strategies on burnout among guidance and counseling teachers. A total of 583 respondents, who are guidance and counseling teachers in secondary schools, participated in this study. The study uses a survey research design, where data was collected through questionnaires. The questionnaires used in this study include the Occupational Stress Inventory Revised Edition (OSI-R), Brief COPE Inventory, Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS), and the School Counselor Burnout Inventory (SCBI). The findings of the multiple regression analysis indicate that the predictor variable, work stress, is a significant predictor with a correlation and contribution towards burnout. These findings reject the assumption that emotion-focused coping strategies, problem-focused coping strategies, and avoidance coping strategies are predictors of burnout. The implications of the study suggest that a supportive work environment is necessary to reduce work stress among guidance and counseling teachers. This study emphasizes the need for school administrators to recognize the pressures faced by counselors and provide adequate resources and support to reduce burnout.

Keywords: Work Stress, Coping Strategies, Burnout.

INTRODUCTION

Guidance and counseling teachers require strong support not only from students but also from all members of the school, particularly administrators, teachers, and parents, in order to effectively carry out their services in the school. The responsibilities, duties, and roles of guidance and counseling teachers vary depending on the workload and outcome expectations set by the school administrators. The school principal is the most powerful individual in the school, and guidance and counseling teachers must comply with and adhere to the principal's instructions from time to time.

Work stress occurs when an employee must fulfill two or more conflicting roles, when the expectations related to tasks differ from the actual duties, and when there are too many tasks to be completed by an employee, with insufficient resources to carry out these tasks (Freeman & Coll, 1997). School counselors experience high levels of work pressure when they strive to manage different roles and provide services to students (Kolodinsky et al., 2009; McCarthy et al., 2010; Wilkerson, 2009).

McCarthy et al. (2010) found that school counselors experience high levels of work stress when they struggle to manage different roles and provide services to students. In carrying out these duties and responsibilities, counselors often experience high levels of stress due to various job responsibilities, role ambiguity, heavy workloads, lack of resources to address issues, and insufficient clinical supervision. The findings of this study are concerning, as school counselors often face unclear tasks, inconsistent role expectations, and conflicts in their job expectations (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Lambie, 2007). Even more worrying is that prolonged stress can lead to emotional and physical health problems (Sapolsky, 2004) as well as an increased likelihood of leaving the profession (DeMato & Curcio, 2004). The stress experienced by guidance and counseling teachers can also lead to burnout. According to Maslach (2003), burnout results from sustained stress and can lead to a

decline in the quality of the services provided. Bardhoshi's (2012) study shows that non-counseling tasks, cases that need to be managed, and principal support contribute to burnout among school counselors.

Burnout refers to a widespread feeling closely associated with fatigue, pessimism, inefficiency, and other negative factors at the workplace (Maslach & Leiter, 2017). Burnout has serious effects on employees, clients, and the organization itself. These effects include a deterioration in the services provided to clients, job turnover, absenteeism issues, and employees becoming less motivated (Maslach, Leiter & Jackson, 2012). Guidance and Counseling teachers face a high risk of burnout, similar to other mental health professionals. They have various demands placed upon them to integrate education and mental health. These demands include dealing with heavy cases, role ambiguity, and lack of supervision (Brewer & Clippard, 2002; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Moyer, 2011). As a result, these demands lead school counselors to shoulder various responsibilities that are unrelated to counseling, and they are more exposed to emotional and physical exhaustion, which in turn leads to burnout (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006).

Riley's (2018) study shows that school counselors with higher work stress levels experience burnout more frequently across all five dimensions of burnout compared to those with lower work stress levels. The five dimensions of burnout are exhaustion, incompetence, negative work environment, devaluing clients, and deterioration in personal life. Meanwhile, Dean's (2014) study found a positive relationship between the number of years as a licensed counselor, the counselor's age, the number of cases to be handled, and burnout. Mullen and Gutierrez's (2016) study showed that the burnout rate of school counselors negatively affects their direct services to students. The study found that the stress experienced by school counselors is significantly related to burnout but not significantly related to the smoothness of services to students. Zuraida and Zainal's (2015) study indicated that burnout can contribute to depression and anxiety.

Guidance and Counseling teachers who experience work stress and subsequently burnout need to have coping skills strategies to help them reduce stress while carrying out their duties. Studies show that individual coping strategies are an important factor in the increase or decrease of burnout levels (Duli, 2015; García-Arroyo, 2017; Shin et al., 2014). Coping strategies are behavioral and cognitive efforts to manage stress and situations that require patience (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis & Gruen, 1986). Therefore, a study needs to be conducted to measure the influence of work stress and coping strategies on burnout among Guidance and Counseling teachers.

Problem Statement

The main issue causing Guidance and Counseling teachers to experience work stress, low job satisfaction, and burnout is the lack of effective coping strategies to address problems, especially those at the workplace. Studies have shown that stress, job dissatisfaction, and burnout are caused by ineffective coping strategies within an individual. Kim and Lambie (2018) state that burnout occurs at varying levels due to both individual and organizational factors. These individual factors include the stress experienced at the workplace.

School counselors experience a discrepancy between the training they receive and the actual job expectations as counselors in schools (Mullen et al., 2018). This role conflict has negative effects in various forms, including an increase in role confusion, stress, and burnout (Holman et al., 2019; Mullen et al., 2018). In addition to the perspectives and understanding of the Guidance and Counseling teachers themselves regarding their duties and roles, various stakeholders also have their own perspectives and understanding, which are often inconsistent. Stakeholders in the field of education, including administrators, teachers, parents, and guardians, each have different understandings of the role of school counselors (Mullen et al., 2018; Ruiz et al., 2019). School administrators are also found to have differing views on the role of school counselors (Fye et al., 2020; Lane et al., 2020).

The lack of understanding by principals and administrators regarding the role of school counselors results in counselors being assigned non-counseling tasks, which contribute to their burnout levels (Chandler et al., 2018; Fye et al., 2020; Holman et al., 2019; Kim & Lambie, 2018). Job-related stress affects job satisfaction (Mcrae et al., 2015) and decreases the mental and physical well-being of employees, making them more likely to leave their jobs early (Griffiths et al., 2020). According to Moate et al. (2018), stress arises when school

counselors fail to meet the expected level in performing their duties. The heavy workload faced by school counselors burdens them (Mullen & Crowe, 2017) and leads to burnout (Kovac et al., 2017). Maslach and Jackson (1986) state that burnout among workers, such as school counselors, can be considered a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Fazel et al. (2014) show that school counselors are likely to experience emotional exhaustion and depersonalization from moderate to high levels.

Fye, Kim et al. (2022) found that the percentage of time spent on counseling tasks has a negative relationship with affective distress. In this study, well-being was found to have a significant negative relationship with burnout and affective distress. From this information, it can be concluded that a Guidance and Counseling teacher who is more involved in counseling tasks tends to show higher levels of well-being. Holman et al. (2019) state that school counselors are an important resource in helping students succeed academically, socially-emotionally regulated, prepare for life after school, and become contributors to society. When school counselors experience high levels of stress and burnout in their work, there is a potential negative impact on students/clients, such as affecting the counselor's ability to provide more ethical and practical counseling services (Holman et al., 2019; Kim & Lambie, 2018).

School counselors who experience severe fatigue, depression, or extreme exhaustion are associated with a lack of productivity, changing intentions, and lower commitment to their work (Kim & Lambie, 2018). Identifying and understanding burnout in school counselors can support educational organizations in establishing and providing assistance to help counselors manage their well-being and self-care. Mullen et al. (2021) found that a higher caseload is associated with higher burnout levels, higher work stress, and lower job satisfaction. The study found that principals and supervisors have the ability to reduce the risk of work fatigue, stress, and job dissatisfaction by caring for counselors' well-being and self-care, which can reduce turnover. Mullen suggests that the developmental stage of school counselors be considered when distributing caseloads and tasks so that less experienced counselors are not overburdened, which could contribute to burnout and turnover.

Effective coping strategies are crucial for reducing stress and increasing individual job satisfaction. Dix (2017) found a significant relationship between emotional exhaustion and emotion-focused coping, as well as dysfunction in coping strategies. Similarly, depersonalization and dysfunction in coping strategies are interrelated. Dysfunction in coping strategies is a significant predictor of burnout. Coping strategies serve as a mediator in the relationship between mental disturbances (psychopathology) and burnout. According to Butler and Constantine (2015), efforts to promote and maintain the well-being of school counselors are essential for them to work effectively with students and to prevent burnout. Researchers also found that certain types of coping strategies are specifically effective in reducing burnout. Given the importance of coping strategies in reducing work stress and burnout, studies on the influence of coping strategies on work stress and burnout among Guidance and Counseling teachers need to be conducted.

Research Objectives

A study was conducted to measure the influence of work stress and coping strategies on burnout among guidance and counseling teachers.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted quantitatively using a survey research design. The study was conducted on Guidance and Counseling teachers from secondary schools in Malaysia. A survey was chosen because it involves a large sample size and allows direct information collection from the study respondents. The data for the study were collected through a questionnaire answered by the study respondents. The research instrument used for data collection in this study was a set of questionnaires. The questionnaire consists of five sections: 1) Section A: Personal Biodata; 2) Section B: Occupational Stress Inventory Revised Edition (OSI-R); 3) Section C: Brief COPE Inventory; 4) Section D: Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS); and 5) Section E: School Counselor Burnout Inventory (SCBI). The Occupational Stress Inventory Revised Edition (OSI-R) was developed by Osipow (1998), and the Brief COPE Inventory (Carver, 1997) was used to identify coping styles (emotion-focused and problem-focused coping) as well as avoidant coping. The Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) was developed to

measure job satisfaction and aspects of work (Spector, 1997). The School Counselor Burnout Inventory (SCBI), developed by Lee, Kissinger, and Ogle (2010), was used to identify types of burnout.

FINDINGS

A total of 583 respondents, consisting of Guidance and Counseling teachers, participated in this study. Of this total, 470 were female GBKs (80.6%), while 113 were male GBKs (19.4%). Multiple regression analysis (Stepwise) was conducted to measure the influence of work stress and coping strategies on burnout.

Variable		Beta				
	B	ß	t	R²	F	P
Work Stress	0.115	0.139	3.383	0.019	11.446	0.001**

*p<0.05

Table 1 Multiple Regression Analysis (Stepwise) for Independent and Moderator Variables Influencing Burnout.

The results of the multiple regression analysis indicate that the predictor variable, work stress, is a significant predictor with a correlation and contribution (1.9%) to burnout ($p < 0.001$). These findings reject the assumption that emotion-focused coping strategies, problem-focused coping strategies, and avoidant coping strategies predict burnout. The predictor for burnout among Guidance and Counseling teachers is work stress (ß = 0.139, t = 3.383, and p = 0.001), with a contribution of 1.9%. This indicates that for every one-unit increase in work stress, burnout increases by 0.139 units. This means that individuals with high work stress scores also tend to have higher levels of burnout. The variance analysis results were [$F_{(1,581)} = 11.446$, $p < 0.005$], which is significant at the 0.001 confidence level. The R-squared value ($R^2 = 0.019$) shows the contribution of work stress to burnout. The stepwise regression analysis found that only work stress has a correlation and contributes to burnout.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The results of the multiple regression analysis show that the predictor variable, Work Stress, is significantly correlated and contributes to Burnout. The findings indicate that Work Stress is a significant predictor of Burnout among school counselors. This means that higher levels of work stress are associated with a greater likelihood of experiencing burnout, which can have serious effects on the counselors' well-being and their professional effectiveness.

The analysis shows that work stress is the primary predictor of burnout, as the ongoing pressure to meet emotional and administrative demands can erode a counselor's resilience. When work stress is not addressed, counselors are more likely to experience burnout, which in turn affects their job satisfaction, effectiveness, and overall mental health (Rayle, 2006). Furthermore, burnout can negatively impact the quality of counseling services provided to students, as counselors may feel disconnected or ineffective in their work (Bardhoshi et al., 2014).

Research shows that problem-focused coping strategies, such as seeking social support, time management, and actively problem-solving, can help reduce work-related stress and mitigate burnout among school counselors. By directly addressing the causes of stress, counselors can regain a sense of control over their work environment, thereby reducing the risk of burnout and enhancing job satisfaction (McCarthy et al., 2010; Zhou et al., 2020). To address burnout among school counselors, it is crucial to understand the role of work-related stress. Providing adequate resources, creating a supportive work environment, and promoting effective coping strategies can help counselors manage stress and prevent burnout. This, in turn, can improve their job satisfaction and the quality of support provided to students.

The implication is that a supportive work environment can reduce stress. Counselors who feel they have access to professional support, such as mentorship and a collaborative work environment, report lower stress levels and higher job satisfaction. A strong support system in the workplace can mitigate the negative effects of stress, thereby improving job satisfaction and perceived effectiveness. This study emphasizes the need for school administrators to recognize the stress experienced by counselors and provide adequate resources and support to alleviate burnout. This includes addressing the mismatch between job expectations and actual duties, offering professional development, and fostering a collaborative and supportive work environment. By doing so, schools can enhance the well-being of their counselors and the effectiveness of their services.

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