SACES Research & Practice Grant Final Report 2017-2018

Title of Funded Project: An Investigation Examining the Association Between Counselor Burnout, Personal Resilience, and the Supervisory Relationship

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Rationale

Counselors experience physical, mental, and emotional challenges which leave them susceptible to developing burnout, leading to a loss of professional perspective and satisfaction (Lee et al., 2007; McCann et al., 2013). If not monitored, the emotional exhaustion and stress of counseling may contribute to professional impairment that jeopardizes both the counselor's wellbeing and the effectiveness of client care (Lee, Cho, Kissinger, & Ogle, 2010). Therefore, it is critical that counselors and counselor educators and supervisors establish research-based methods for monitoring and mitigating counselor burnout (Roach & Young, 2007; Young & Lambie, 2007). Strengthening resources such as personal resilience and high quality supervisory relationships may serve as a buffer between counselors and the development of professional burnout. Therefore, the guiding research question in this study was: What is the influence of the quality of supervisory relationships and personal resilience on burnout in a sample of licensed counseling supervisees? Our hypothesis was that the quality of supervisory relationships and personal resilience would have a positive influence in reducing levels of counselor burnout.

Methodology

Participants and Procedures

A national sample of professional and mental health counselors were invited to participate in this study via e-mail addresses obtained from public directories of state licensing boards. Eligible participants included: (1) fully or provisionally licensed, master's-level (or higher) counselors; and (2) counselors who had provided direct counseling services during the previous 30 days. Participants were given the opportunity to opt-in to a drawing for gift cards as an incentive to complete the online survey.

All regions of the United States were represented in this sample of licensed counselor supervisees ($n = 286$). Participants ranged in age from 25 to 74 years ($M = 39.21$; $SD = 11.85$) with post-master's practice experience from less than one year to 42 years ($M = 4.65$; $SD = 6.17$). Nearly half of participants ($n = 138$; 48.3%) had two years or less of practice experience. Thirty-seven percent ($n = 105$) of participants reported being fully licensed to independently practice counseling, and 63% ($n = 181$) indicated they were provisionally licensed. Participants reported receiving from 1 to 20 hours of supervision per month ($M = 4.29$; $SD = 2.90$).

Instruments

We used three instruments to collect data in this investigation where the outcome variable was counselor burnout and the predictor variables were the quality of supervisory relationships and personal resilience. We employed four subscales of the Counselor Burnout Inventory (CBI; Lee et al., 2007) to measure levels of counselor burnout among participants: (1) *exhaustion*, (2) *incompetence*, (3) *devaluing client*, and (4) *deterioration in personal life*. To assess levels of resilience among participants, we used the CD-RISC-10 (CD-RISC-10; Campbell-Sills & Stein, 2007). We used the Short Supervisory Relationship Questionnaire (S-SRQ; Cliffe, Beinart,

& Cooper, 2016) to evaluate the quality of supervisory relationships from the perspective of supervisees. Additionally, a general demographics form was used to collect descriptive information about the participants.

Analyses

First, we examined correlations between the variables for statistically significant relationships using SPSS (Version 24). Second, we employed structural equation modeling (SEM), using the MLM estimator in M*plus* (Version 8), to evaluate the influence of the quality of supervisory relationships and personal resilience on counselor burnout. With 286 participants and 19 free parameters in our specified structural model (i.e., 15 participants per free parameter), we determined that the number of participants in our sample was more than adequate to estimate the relationship between the variables and to assess model fit.

Results

We found moderate to strong, statistically significant, positive relationships among all the subscales of the CBI (r_s = .21 to .58, $p < .01$). The subscale which reflected the highest level of burnout was exhaustion ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.04$), followed by deterioration of personal life ($M = 2.38$, $SD = .82$), incompetence ($M = 2.37$, $SD = .68$), and devaluing client ($M = 1.42$, $SD = .53$), suggesting that participants had experienced low to moderate levels of burnout during the past month. Quality of supervisory relationship scores (r_s = -.19 to -.27, $p < .01$) and personal resilience scores (r_s = -.21 to -.32, $p < .01$) had moderate, statistically significant, negative correlations with the four subscales of the CBI, revealing that higher quality supervisory relationships and higher levels of personal resilience are associated with lower levels of counselor burnout. Finally, there was a moderate, statistically significant, positive association between the quality of supervisory relationship scores and personal resilience scores, indicating that higher quality supervisory relationships are correlated with higher levels of supervisees' personal resilience.

Next, we used SEM to examine the association between the quality of supervisory relationships and counselor burnout. We employed the two-step approach to SEM proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) which recommends using confirmatory factor analysis to: (1) develop a measurement model that specifies the relationship of observed variables to latent constructs, and then (2) specify the posited relationships among the constructs in a structural model. Following our confirmation of the measurement model (i.e., the latent construct of counselor burnout was adequately measured by the observed variables of exhaustion, devaluing client, incompetence, and deterioration of personal life), we tested our theoretically derived structural model to examine the influence of the quality of supervisory relationships and personal resilience on counselor burnout. Although the Satorra-Bentler chi square test indicated a poor fit to the data (S-B $\chi^2 = 28.20$, $df = 8$, $p < .01$), other fit indices suggested the structural model was an acceptable fit for the data: RMSEA = .09 (90% CI = .06, .13); CFI = .92; and SRMR = .05.

Both the quality of supervisory relationships and personal resilience had a statistically significant, negative effect on counselor burnout. The quality of supervisory relationship scores accounted for 7% (β = -.26, $p < .01$) of the variance in counselor burnout, while personal resilience contributed 13% (β = -.36, $p < .01$) to the variance in counselor burnout. Further, there was a statistically significant, positive correlation between the quality of supervisory relationship scores and personal resilience scores which explained 3% ($r = .18$, $p < .01$) in counselor burnout scores. Combined, the predictor variables accounted for 23% of the variance in counselor burnout in this model. These results indicate that the level of a supervisee's burnout decreased as

the quality of a supervisory relationship and the supervisee's level of personal resilience increased.

Limitations

Findings from this study should be interpreted in light of its limitations. Although we utilized measures that demonstrated validity and reliability, the measures were self-report which makes them sensitive to counselor mood, feelings, environment, and impression management. Additionally, Tangen and Borders (2016) noted that the potential psychometric soundness and potential usefulness of the S-SRQ has not been previously confirmed in a sample of counselors. Similarly, the CD-RISC-10 has not been validated in a sample of professional counselors; however, the instrument has been used to assess resilience among other helping professionals (e.g., surgeons, nurses, paramedics; Davidson & Connor, 2016). It is also possible that counselors experiencing an elevated level of burnout avoided participation in this study as a symptom of their exhaustion. Lastly, the study results cannot be generalized to counselors who are not receiving supervision, counseling students, counselors without master's degrees, or unlicensed counselors.

Implications for Future Research

Future researchers should replicate this study with various samples of professional counselors at differing levels of training, specialties, and demographic characteristics. We also suggest that future research examine other aspects of supervision, such as theoretical approach, modality (i.e., individual, triadic, group), and format (i.e., face-to-face, online). In addition, future researchers should consider exploring the attitudes and behaviors which contribute to counselor resilience. Finally, we believe that experimental research could help to facilitate a better understanding of strategies for increasing the quality of the supervisory relationship and levels of personal resilience among counselors.

Implications for Counselor Education and Supervision

The findings of this study have the potential to offer insight into strategies for mitigating the development of counselor burnout by: (1) informing counseling practitioners, supervisors, and educators about the importance of building personal resilience, and (2) informing clinical supervisors about the importance of fostering high quality relationships with supervisees in order to increase the effectiveness of supervision. In addition, mitigating the development of counselor burnout may ultimately contribute to more positive treatment outcomes for clients through the healthy professional engagement of counselors and their provision of high-quality and competent services.

Plan to Disseminate Findings

The investigators will seek to disseminate the findings as a research manuscript to be submitted for publication in the *Counselor Education and Supervision* journal. In addition, the authors submitted a proposal to present the findings at 2018 SACES Conference.

Final Budget

Item	Cost	Quantity	Amount
Fee to use CD-RISC-10	$30.00	1	$30.00
Gift card incentive	$25.00	8	$200.00
Total Budget			$230.00

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