

BURNOUT AMONG SCHOOL COUNSELLORS IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

Noorsofiana Affandi¹, Nor Zaiham Midawati Abdullah²

^{1,2}Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Brunei Darussalam

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Keywords	Abstract
School counsellors Burnout Wellbeing Coping strategies Mental health	<i>This study aims to explore the factors that causes burnout among school counsellors, the effect of burnout among school counsellors, as well as to identify the coping strategies applied to manage burnout. This study uses one-on-one semi-structured interviews with eight school counsellors from seven different government secondary schools within the Brunei-Muara district in Brunei Darussalam. The interviews identified three themes in relation to the issues related to burnout, namely the causes of burnout, the effects of burnout, and the coping strategies for burnout. Implications regarding the importance of the relevant authorities to acknowledge and show appreciation towards the school counsellors' effort in carrying out their roles, along with establishing effective coping strategies, and having frequent mandatory sharing session or facilitative programmes are further discussed in this study.</i>
Corresponding Author Noorsofiana Affandi Universiti Brunei Darussalam Brunei Darussalam Email: sofianaaffandi@gmail.com Phone: +6738860477	

INTRODUCTION

School counsellors play a vital role in the process of supporting a student's mental health. They are certified counsellors and are appointed in schools to work with students, parents and school staffs in order to provide support for students' mental health and social-emotional development (Ministry of Education, 2013). They have their own set of rules and responsibilities to comply with, together with their own job scope and requirements to accomplish.

School counsellors often face several challenges which may increase their vulnerability to developing burnout. Burnout is recognised as an impending problem to a variety of occupations. Burnout may often be viewed as a mental distress revolving around persistent physical and psychological exhaustion (Wardle & Mayorga, 2016). It can also be argued to represent the inability of school counsellors to not only meet their needs, but also their clients' needs, within a high-pressured environment (Maslach, 2017).

A study by King, Subotic-Kerry and O'Dea (2018) found that 50% of 145 school counsellors in Australia were reported to have had experienced burnout due to the provision of care outside school hours, low workload manageability, and low satisfaction in the way their school addressed student mental healthcare. Similarly, Bain et al. (2011) stated that 89% of the school counsellors in South Texas had experienced some level of burnout when providing any form of mental health services due to their

involvement in administrative duties. By experiencing feelings of burnout, it may influence the school counsellor's ability to provide optimal ethical counselling services to the students.

Despite the existence of a relative job scope, over time there has been an evolvement of the professional identity of school counsellors. According to the Ministry of Education (2014), it is the school counsellors' responsibility to not only provide support, guidance and motivation within the school community individuals, but also to offer an extension of counselling towards students, teachers and parents, as well as to provide counselling services to teachers, parental departments, Ministry and private sectors.

Aside from performing administrative tasks, the roles of the school counsellors vary and are not merely limited to the provision of support to all members within the school community (Daniels, 2013). However, certain challenges faced by school counsellors include those concerning the lack of human resources, lack of support and workload (Boitt, 2016). This may be due to the relatively small size of the counselling community within the country, along with the minimal professional understanding of the multiplicity of the roles performed by school counsellors.

According to Schmaltz (2016), examining the perceived stress and stressors in relation to the work of school counsellors is one of the first steps in recognising whether counsellor impairments exist. Therefore, with this, it is necessary to recognise the effect of burnout among school counsellors, as the factors causing stress could be investigated and the implication into practice can further be explored. This is essential as prolonged and untreated work-related stress may lead to burnout, which in turn may lead to a high likelihood risk of lowering and impacting the quantity and quality of productivity in any work environment. Thus, by highlighting the issue of burnout, it is anticipated to bring about an improvement within the professional practice.

Therefore, the objectives of this study are to explore the factors that causes burnout among school counsellors, to explore the effects of burnout among school counsellors, and to identify the coping strategies the school counsellors implement in order to handle burnout.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative methodology approach as it interprets and constructs meaning in order to provide justification about a particular phenomenon with regards to human experiences in their natural setting (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). Therefore, a qualitative approach allows the obtaining of the theoretical aspect in gaining a deeper insight into actually understanding the views of burnout among school counsellors (Krauss, 2005).

One-on-one semi-structured interviews were used in this study. This kind of interview allowed participants the freedom to express their thoughts and enable deeper exploration on certain responses in a more conversational approach (Horton, Macve & Struyven, 2004). A semi-structured interview was carried out to gain an in depth understanding of the burnout issues related to the school counsellors' counselling performance in government secondary schools within the Brunei-Muara district.

During data collection, the participants were given a set of Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form which provided an explanation to the study purpose and procedure. Consent was obtained both verbally and via written consent form given prior to the interview. The participants were informed regarding the need for their interview to be audio recorded and that it was transcribed for data analysis.

A Pilot study was conducted prior to the commencement of the data collection for the Main study. The purpose for the Pilot study was to ensure the feasibility of the interview questions (Leon, Davis & Kraemer, 2011). This allowed for any possible changes that may need further modification, in the event that the interview content are not aligned with the research questions. Two school counsellors from two different

government secondary schools were selected, and that no modifications were required to be made to the semi-structured questions.

Eight school counsellors from seven government secondary schools within the Brunei-Muara district were recruited for the Main study. These participants were recruited via purposive sampling. The selected school counsellors were qualified and certified school counsellors, and have been carrying out roles and responsibilities as school counsellors for at least one year. Recruited participants should also be those who are able to speak in either English or Malay, to minimise the risk of misinterpretation during data analysis.

Individual one-on-one interview sessions were conducted for each of the participants. The total duration of the interviews range between thirty minutes to an hour, until the data collected is sufficient. The interview was conducted within a quiet and comfortable setting within their allocated schools, for the convenience of the participants. The setting was specifically within a closed environment, ensuring the confidentiality to be maintained and minimising the possibility of background and external noises during the audio recording of the interviews.

The data collected from the semi-structured interviews conducted was transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method for identifying, examining, classifying and reporting themes which is found within a data set, which enables to initiate profound findings. The audio recorded interviews with the participants were fully transcribed to address the themes. Confidentiality was also ensured in transcribing the information provided by the participants. Subsequently, the thematic analysis was done in six sequential phases, namely familiarise with the data, generate initial codes, search for potential themes, review of the themes, and finally produce a report.

RESULT

Causes of Burnout

Based on this study, all of the participants' responses stated that the main cause of their burnout relates to expectation and demand from the relevant authorities. This can also be related to the pressure of time restrictions and close overlapping deadlines. Participants 3 and 6 added that the unavailability of proper support, guidelines and resources also play a role in influencing the factors in causing burnout. Additionally, similar with Participant 7's view regarding restrictions to effectively carry out counselling responsibilities, Participant 2 added that:

...capabilities are sometimes out of self-expertise... Also, for the programs and activities, we are restricted to carry out tasks during study periods and can only touch on certain subjects or have afternoon sessions... also having to gain specific permission through relevant authorities in order to conduct counselling-related programs involving international parties.

In addition, school counsellors facing other existing personal commitments and those having difficulty in managing their coping mechanism may also view these as potential causative factors (Participants 1, 5, and 6). Participant 1 further shared her views of burnout, suggesting that certain factors, as well as the "lack of time management skills and lack of mental health management" which may also play a role in influencing burnout. Participant 1 added:

...too much demand from relevant authorities, lack of appreciation for action despite efforts to meet requirements, being overburdened with multiple clients' different cases, the outcome of sessions may not be as predicted, expected changed behaviors from referred parties, pressured from pressing deadlines to provide relevant data for relevant authorities...

Moreover, another factor that was quite common among the participants (Participants 1, 2, and 7) was the lack of acknowledgement and appreciation from the relevant authorities. Participant 7 commented on “*Acknowledgement...and if there’s teamwork and cooperation... because that’s what makes it hard to carry out our role...*”

Respectively, four participants (Participants 1, 2, 3, and 8) identified that burnout can also stem from being too focused in the involvement of non-counselling duties, and organising programmes outside of counselling matters. Participant 2 mentioned that “counsellor work hours are counted by sessions, which is limited due to involvement in non-counselling duties making it hard for counsellors to expect any relative salary increase.” However, Participant 8 stated that being “too focused on the fact that the tasks are not within the counselling scope” can also lead to further burnout. Furthermore, with regards to having to switch or move schools, Participant 7 shared that it “could be an overwhelming process as it takes time to adjust to a particular environment.” Participant 8 added that school counsellors could be affected with it if they are “too emotionally attached to their current school.” The event in which the counsellor was not granted to move schools despite requesting to move due to an existing conflict was also highlighted as another possible cause of burnout.

Effects of Burnout

Participants in this study stated that there are various effects of burnout on them. For example, Participants 1, 3, 5 and 8 associated burnouts to experiencing certain levels of stress and tiredness, resulting in low motivation and their inability to focus on their tasks assigned to them. Relatively, Participant 5 mentioned that “...burnout because of several factors, so they cannot carry out their work, their task, maybe they’re always on MC (Medical Certificate), or always being MIA (Missing in Action), and so on.”

On the other hand, Participants 1 and 6 mentioned about conceivably facing anxiety, while Participant 5 relate the impacts of burnout to possibly developing depression and marital issues (conflict between spouses and divorce). To a certain extent, Participant 6 stated that burnout can lower an individual’s self-esteem and self-efficacy, while other participants (Participants 1, 5, and 8) suggested that there are certain impacts of burnout towards health-related issues. Participant 8 shared:

...especially in terms of health, not only mental health, our ‘uri’ (worry) arises, stress or depression is possible, anxiety is also possible, and then at one point it can lead to health [complications], it can be high blood pressure. When it leads to that and you think too much, it can even lead to stroke, so everything is interrelated. And another thing, it will lead you to lose focus on your work, lose your commitment, your interest, everything will be affected. Your interest, your passion with your job, it’s no longer fun.

Nonetheless, Participant 6 shared that having experienced burnout previously was enough for it to generally “make [me] feel ‘jara’ (once is enough) to ever experience it again that it made [me] more cautious and aware of self-limitations in order to not go through it ever again.” Having previously experienced burnout taught Participant 6 the importance of knowing and being aware of the self-limitations when it came to carrying out the individual counselling responsibilities in order for it to not further develop into burnout. The experience also enabled the participant to establish a level of readiness, should they face similar situations in the future.

All participants shared the same view in the sense that burnout tend to bring about a negative influence towards the counselling practice. Counselling sessions will be ineffective if school counsellors do it in a ‘jangan inda’ (bare minimum) manner (Participant 1), and if they only carry out the task to simply fulfil demands (Participant 2). Participant 1 further stated that school counsellors “may end up ranting about

personal issues to their clients instead”, which were similar to views shared by Participant 8.

Correspondingly, Participant 7 added that counselling sessions will also be ineffective due to the lack of effective listening skills implemented throughout the counselling sessions, which may also be influenced by the unstable emotional state of a burnout counsellor, therefore suggesting that counselling sessions should be avoided altogether for the time being if one is in a state of emotional imbalance. Participant 3 further shared that:

...emotions are unstable. Sometimes we as counsellors, we're also human. It's hard to manage sometimes, to self-motivate ourselves, because we have our own personal problems as well... When we're not in the mood, the session would become less effective, we'll also emotionally influence the session...despite maintaining professionalism and trying to maintain our emotions.

Furthermore, trying to maintain professionalism while experiencing burnout would lead the school counsellors to “only take up light cases or reschedule sessions to some other time” (Participant 6). Participant 8 also stated that school counsellors would possibly “deviate their responsibilities in order to minimize their workload”, such as giving suggestions to the teacher referring the potential client on what actions could be implemented instead of taking in the client for further counselling. Additionally, when school counsellors are too involved with non-counselling duties, such as administrative tasks, clients face difficulties in meeting with these school counsellors and it is equally as difficult for them to follow through with their client’s progression as well. This is reflected in the comment provided by Participant 2:

Sometimes when clients want to meet, we're out (conducting non-counselling duties), so sometimes they give up... and because we rarely meet with our clients, by the time we get around to calling them, they're already doing fine... it's like a missed opportunity to follow through with the client's progression...

By not being able to follow through with the client’s progression throughout the process of having regular counselling sessions, it may considerably feel like a missed opportunity from the school counsellors’ end as they will not be able to fully take on their counselling role in better understanding and helping the clients with their problems, thus establishing their counselling session to be less effective.

Coping Strategies for Burnout

During the interviews, the participants shared their insights on effective coping strategies they implemented in addressing burnout. Participants mostly shared similar views on the need for sharing sessions or talk therapy sessions with trusted circles as a means to cope. This can be in the form of case conferences, group therapy sessions or just sharing with peers and friends from the same practicing field, therefore encouraging the reaching out through peer support. Other than that, all participants confessed to turning to leisure activities (such as joining workout classes, cafe hopping), hobbies (such as cooking, having family time), or staying active by channeling their negative energy into something more fun and productive as a means to cope. Participant 2 also added that “having helping hands like the practicum counsellors (counsellor trainees)” help school counsellors from becoming burnout, as agreed by both Participants 1 and 7.

Relatively, according to Participant 7, school counsellors should find ways to “accept and face [their] problems first” before working to cope and overcome their burnout. Responses further suggested that the coping of burnout may also enable school counsellors to reflect and practice self-evaluation, as well as to practice existing stress managements and coping skills. Similarly, in terms of acknowledging one’s self-limitations, Participant 8 stated that by avoiding taking up client sessions during a state of burnout to possibly avoid having an emotionally affect during the counselling session

can also be a form of coping with burnout. The participant (Participant 8) further emphasized that urgent cases will still be prioritized and alternative approaches such as provision of group guidance or support programs will be initiated to facilitate client issues instead.

The interviews also found that most of the participants (Participants 1, 2, 3, 7 and 8) suggested a list of other ways in coping with their burnout, such as having positive thinking, practice affirmations (positive self-talk), have self-empowerment (boosting self-confidence) and developing a looking-for-solutions kind of attitude, all while being rational and realistic. Alternatively, Participant 2 shared that a change of environment could be considered beneficial in the long run, especially when the source of burnout has more to do with the pre-existing environmental factors.

...with burnout, you just have to continue on and persevere... but maybe consider a change of environment, a different school... that may give a new drive to motivate and remember the passion. ... regardless, always remember the true intentions of being a counsellor...

Furthermore, Participants 1, 5 and 6 shared views relating to religious practices in developing better coping of feelings of burnout, stating that practicing Muslim school counsellors should also rely on Allah and religious practices which are not limited to those that are wajib (the obligatory duty), but also Sunnah (the habitual practice) and Tahajjud (the voluntary night prayer), including regular practices of dua (prayer) and redha (acceptance), as a supplementary guide to self-preparation. Participant 6 further added that the school counsellors should “always have tawakkal (trust in God’s plan) and persevere through.” Participant 5 also shared that “...I suggest all practicing Muslim counsellors [to perform] the wajib, the Sunnah, and the bonus. This bonus (Tahajjud) I think is the greatest pill for me. All Muslim counsellors should consider this as a remedy.” Relatively, Participant 5 suggested that through the implementation of the mentioned religious practices, it can also serve as a potential existential cure for burnout.

When it comes to carrying out counselling roles, proper readiness and sincere intentions in carrying out the said responsibilities are crucial in order to ensure effective counselling practice. Conjointly, this comes together with the counsellor’s responsibility to offer help and to always be spiritually prepared. Participant 5 highlighted that “as counsellors, we face and deal with different students with different personal matters, so we should be spiritually prepared (to deal with any of the clients’ problems) at all times.” Relatively, Participant 3 stated:

We have the responsibility to help, ...we always need to remember our goal is to help the clients... the intention always has to be sincere... we have to be committed as counsellors in holding our responsibility to help and have professionalism despite facing whatever emotions...

Therefore, in order to prevent school counsellors from being susceptible to reaching a state of burnout, they need to possess certain positive qualities, such as practicing professionalism and being aware of self-limitations. Other than addressing one’s psychological well-being, Participants 1, 3 and 6 emphasized on the importance of being aware of one’s own limit in maintaining professionalism. Participant 1 commented that it is therefore crucial to “...know your responsibilities, but also know your limit... if you have your own problems, try to resolve it... you can’t help others if you cannot help yourself first.”

Similarly, Participant 8 highlighted on the need to have a more positive thinking approach towards facing any challenges, including being open-minded and flexible, having proper readiness, and having the ability to adapt to certain situations. Participant 6 added that this could further be facilitated by “having a conducive working environment, proper support from relevant authorities, and having teamwork and mutual

understanding with the client's parents." Additionally, the factor relating towards the lack of appreciation should also be addressed by the relevant authorities. Moreover, the importance of sharing sessions to gain other insights in preventing oneself from becoming burnout was also highlighted. As shared by Participant 5:

Usually if we have heavier cases, we will have sharing sessions to get the opinions from others... and networking, other than sharing sessions with friends from the same profession, we must have networking with other relevant agencies to understand better course of actions...

Apart from that, Participant 7 stated that by not having the previously set restrictions, as well as having the presence of additional supportive committees (e.g., counsellor trainees), may also be beneficial to better enhance the counselling practice in further avoiding the development of burnout.

...teamwork and cooperation, and not having restrictions for meeting clients... and having the practicum around to help." Participant 2 further shared that despite the involvement of school counsellors with non-counselling tasks; "...we should focus more on counselling sessions so that it will be more effective... you will gain more experience, you will be more skillful, ...

Furthermore, in order to better enhance the school counsellor's role in practice, they should remain staying productive and be equipped with the latest skills, therapies and approaches in practice. Participant 2 suggested that:

by attending short courses, it may revive and maintain the work passion, and by having refresher courses, it may act as a short escape for counsellors while ensuring further learning." Participant 5 further added that by attending online workshops and seminars "... knowledge stays updated and is always evolving... we need to prepare and equip ourselves with the latest skills, therapies and approaches.

DISCUSSION

Causes of Burnout

Supplementary data was first gathered to better comprehend the general perception of the school counsellor's viewpoint regarding burnout. Results obtained suggested that all the participants viewed burnout as an overwhelming and stressful state which is often derived from work-related stressors. The perception obtained was similar throughout, regardless of whether the participants have ever experienced burnout throughout their career or not. These findings were supported by previous researches which classified burnout generally as a psychosocial concept enforced by work-related factors (Montero-Marín et al., 2014). Therefore, it can be assumed that the general understanding and concept of burnout, regardless of background, is similar in nature.

Majority of the findings obtained from this current study found that the involvement of the school counsellor in non-counselling duties were found to be the major cause of the burnout experienced, which were similar to past studies (Bardhoshi, Schweinle & Duncan, 2014; Hamelin, Viviers, Litalien, & Boulet, 2022). As mentioned by Holman, Nelson and Watts (2019), school counsellors experiencing high external demands in relation to non-counselling duties, whilst having minimal support, play a major contributing role in the development of their burnout. This resonated with the findings of this current study which proved that the demands and pressure experienced by school counsellors, also relating to the lack of acknowledgement and support received from relevant authorities was another major cause towards the burnout experienced. Further studies have found that social support from relevant peers and personnel was more effective at reducing feelings of burnout (McCormack et al., 2015; Sim et al., 2016).

Additionally, Kim and Lambie's (2018) findings regarding the driving force of role conflict in increasing the feelings of burnout resulted in the tendency of taking up the energy and time of these school counsellors, thus having less time to carry out their core responsibilities as school counsellors. In relation to this, a participant also supported by sharing that being focused on tasks as not being within the counselling scope, could further cause feelings of burnout as well. Allan, Owens and Douglass (2019) mentioned that counsellors who are too cautious with their work tend to produce less meaningful work, thus, positively associating themselves more with the development of burnout.

Effects of Burnout

Initially, by relating the employment histories of the participants to those stating that they have experienced burnout, this was found to not cause any significant difference to the findings, as it was found that participants reported having experienced burnout regardless of the length of their employment histories. However, this differs to previous findings, which reported that school counsellors with longer employment histories tended to experience higher levels of burnout than peers with shorter employment histories (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Lim et al., 2010).

Majority of the participants in this current study stated that experiencing burnout, can cause a significant impact to their individual well-being. Sangganjanavanich and Balkin (2013) suggested that emotional exhaustion was among the most significant predictors of burnout (McCormack et al., 2018). Participants of this current study further shared that mental health issues, such as those relating to stress, anxiety, and depression, may also arise as a result of this burnout (Kim & Lambie, 2018; King, Subotic-Kerry & O'Dea, 2018). This issue could potentially lead to more serious health-related risks, such as hypertension (Coban & Hamamci, 2009), among other health risks, which could potentially lead the school counsellors to be medically unfit to work, or to be missing from the working field (Rodd, 2017; Kim & Lambie, 2018), which was also similarly shared by a participant.

Some participants in this study stated that burnout affects the general self-esteem and self-efficacy of an individual school counsellor, which was supported by Gam, Kim and Jeon (2016) who stated that burnout was highly influenced by cognitive factors such as the attitude toward or evaluation of a counsellor's ability. This was in accordance of which Choi (2010) found that a stronger view of counsellors' self-ability reduced the perception of burnout, therefore strengthening the self-efficacy and counsellors towards their work and self-control. Similarly, Maslach and Leiter (2016) justified that there is generally lower collective self-esteem among highly burnout school counsellors. In relation to this, Gunduz (2012) and Jacobs (2020) also found a higher self-efficacy belief among lower burnout school counsellors.

Furthermore, all participants expressed that burnout will in fact cause a negative impact towards the counselling practice among school counsellors. Common views shared by the participants suggested that while the school counsellors are experiencing burnout, it would lead to a generally ineffective counselling session if it were to be conducted. Therefore, school counsellors who are experiencing burnout should avoid taking up clients and conducting counselling sessions in fear that of it negatively affecting the session. Kim and Lambie (2018) reported that many school counsellors in their study have experienced burnout, further suggesting that being in a state of burnout may influence their ability to provide ethical and effective counselling services to their school students and potential clients (Simionato, Simpson & Reid, 2019). This supported participants' claimed statements of carrying out sessions in a '*jangan inda*' (bare minimum) manner and carrying out tasks to simply fulfil demands when experiencing burnout.

Moyer (2011) also added that school counsellors should focus their time and energy solely towards the school's counselling goals and activities in order to better enable them to show their effectiveness in their practice. A participant suggested that burnout school counsellors may minimise or deviate their counselling responsibilities in order to reduce their own workload. Mullen and Gutierrez (2016) further stated on the need to assess and manage the school counsellors' feelings of stress and burnout in fear of having to lessen the services provided for and given to the students. This was proven to what was discussed by the school counsellors about taking up only lighter cases or rescheduling and avoiding upcoming sessions, in order for it to not be influenced by the school counsellor's unstable emotional state.

Coping Strategies for Burnout

This current study found that majority of the participants resided with sharing sessions or talk therapy sessions with their closest members as a form of effective coping mechanism. This could be associated with the use of social support as a form of coping strategy. The school counsellors also highlighted the involvement of counsellor trainees in providing assistance throughout the counselling practice of the school counsellors. Several researches (Bataineh, 2009; El-Ghoroury, Galper, Sawaqdeh & Bufka, 2012; Gam, Kim & Jeon, 2016; Peterson et al., 2008) stated that seeking social support seemed to be an effective coping strategy in reducing levels of burnout. However, other studies like Shin et al. (2014) argued that those suffering from burnout tend to seek less emotion-focused coping, including seeking social support. This may be due to the acknowledgement of some studies suggesting that certain types of emotion-focused coping strategies may lead to dysfunctional outcomes instead, such as depression, anxiety, neuroticism, and low levels of life satisfaction (Marine, Ruotsalainen, Serra & Verbeek, 2006). Awa, Plaumann and Walter (2010) instead suggested that a combined person-directed (increasing the sense of personal accomplishments) and organisation-directed (teamwork, stress or job satisfaction) approach was found to be a more effective intervention in preventing the burnout experienced.

Furthermore, participants expressed the use of personal wellness activities as a means to effectively cope with their burnout. This was found to be consistent with findings from previous researches (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012; Kebbi, 2018; Sim et al., 2016) regarding the implementation of personal wellness activities, hobbies and regular exercise in relation to burnout intervention and prevention. Attending to self-care and mindfulness practices was also found to be an effective coping strategy in recognising a counsellor's self-limitations (Hendricks et al., 2009).

This study also found the importance of seeking and upholding spiritual support and well-being in further persevering through and against burnout. Wachholtz and Rogoff (2013) reported that those with higher levels of spiritual well-being and daily spiritual experiences were found to possess lower levels of psychological distress and burnout, therefore suggesting it to be a viable protective factor against burnout. Casmini, Fitri and Muaddibi (2020) also added that by prioritising the psychological well-being in applying acts of behavioural practices which are *Sunnah*, such as praying *Tahajjud* which was emphasised by some of the participants, were found to positively influence the provision of pre-, during, and post-counselling services among school counsellors.

Findings from this study further highlighted the importance of one's readiness and sincere intentions. This is also inclusive of the counsellor's responsibility to offer help and to always be spiritually prepared in carrying out the assigned responsibilities of a school counsellor. Mahomed, Johari and Mahmud (2019) added that by taking early and proactive action measures, it allows the school counsellors to have the right application of knowledge and appropriate strategies to enable them to be prepared to face the challenges of their working life. The school counsellors also mentioned regarding the

need of knowing their own limitations in professionally carrying their role as a school counsellor. Woods and Moir-Bussy (2015) acknowledged the need for school counsellors to be aware of their limitations in finding the right balance in order to maintain sustainability and avoid the inevitable risk to burnout. Hendricks, Bradley, Brogan and Brogan (2009) also found that due to the existing stress and anxiety experienced by school counsellors as part of their profession, it is important for these school counsellors to attend to their wellness and limitations so as to avoid any risk of ethical violations relating to school counsellors' impairment.

Additionally, most school counsellors shared that by having a more professional and positive outlook towards their work and conducting practices of positive thinking, it is considered necessary in order to provide benefits on their well-being in order to avoid the establishment of burnout (Hilborn, 2013). Similarly, by ensuring that the working environment of the participants is conducive, it increases the overall productivity in lessening the job stress of the school counsellors (Lent & Schwartz, 2012; Ooi, Jaafar & Crosling, 2021).

Moreover, all participants addressed the lack of proper support in association to burnout at some point throughout their interview; this being regardless of support from colleagues and peers, relevant authorities, or from the students and clients' parents. Sim et al. (2016) stated that a lack of job support and resources served to influence the feelings of disengagement in the development of burnout. Lack of proper support also go hand-in-hand with the lack of acknowledgement and appreciation from those figures. Similarly, proper support also relates to the need for teamwork and mutual understanding between the school counsellors and relevant individuals (Whyte, 2014) in order to reduce the development of burnout in better facilitating the counselling practice. Guler and Ceyhan (2019) suggested that school counsellors should limit their assistance outside of school hours, act in solidarity with their colleagues, try to avoid giving too much sympathy, and try to create a healthy and supportive school environment.

By having a supportive environment among school counsellors, it would give a sense of mutual understanding over the course of action, as all school counsellors would be within the same practicing field. Not only that, when working through stressful experiences, especially when faced with difficult or more heavier client cases, it would be beneficial for the school counsellors to have regular case conferences to better address such issues (Parker & Henfield, 2012) in order to collectively conceptualise a particular case, with the hopes of having a combination of the many viewpoints and approaches incorporated by various school counsellors. Kim and Lambie (2018) added that clinical supervision from a competent supervisor was found to be essential for school counsellors to get support and learn how to intervene with their clients effectively. In addition, peer supervision or consultation from colleagues were also found to benefit school counsellors in sharing their difficulties and gaining other professionals' perspectives (Butler & Constantine, 2005).

The participants further highlighted on the need to focus on counselling sessions in becoming more efficient and gaining more experiences, therefore becoming more skilful within the counselling field. This includes the incorporation of the latest skills within practice in order to ensure that the approaches being applied are suitable with the current times. Attending additional courses, workshops and personal development activities could also further enhance these counselling skills in better increasing the school counsellors' feelings of work-related efficacy within their practice (Butler & Constantine, 2005). Ooi, Jaafar and Crosling (2021) suggested that elements of mastery experience, access to training, supervisor support during training, and job satisfaction should be taken into consideration in order to sustain a greater well-being of school counsellors. Krasner et al. (2009) also supported that by contributing to such roles and activities to better foster the development of skills could reduce burnout levels among school counsellors. Similarly, Butler and Constantine (2005) added that by participating

in professional support groups, it may assist school counsellors in augmenting their collective group identity, fostering perceived social support, and decreasing or managing symptoms of burnout related to their multiple roles and expectations.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to ensure that the school counsellors are able to provide ethical and effective services to their clients. It also aims to understand the factors causing burnout among school counsellors, and to explore how it effects the counselling practice. Findings suggest to improve the methods of monitoring, prevention, and early intervention of burnout in order to support and sustain the work quality of school counsellors. In relation to this, wellness activities should be sought and attending relevant supplementary courses are to be recommended. It is beneficial not only for the teachers and related-certified professionals, but also for the school counsellors themselves to gain awareness regarding their susceptibility to burnout as it may have an effect towards their general counselling practice.

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