

The Relationship between Work Stress, Coping Strategies, Job Satisfaction, and Burnout among Guidance and Counselling Teachers

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the relationship between work stress, coping strategies, job satisfaction, and burnout among Guidance and Counselling Teachers. A total of 583 respondents, who are Guidance and Counselling Teachers in secondary schools, participated in this study. The study employed a survey research design, with data collected through questionnaires. The questionnaires used in this study include the Occupational Stress Inventory Revised Edition (OSI-R), the Brief COPE Inventory, the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS), and the School Counsellor Burnout Inventory (SCBI). The findings of the study show that there is only a significant relationship between problem-focused coping strategies and job satisfaction. The implication of this study indicates that problem-focused coping strategies can help improve job satisfaction. Therefore, Guidance and Counselling teachers need to develop personal resilience to enhance their self-competence in carrying out their duties.

Keywords: Work Stress, Coping Strategies, Job Satisfaction, Burnout

Introduction

Guidance and Counselling Teachers are among the key individuals who contribute to the personal development of students in schools. To deliver their services effectively, they require strong support not only from students but also from the entire school community, especially administrators, teachers, and parents. They need support in terms of materials and physical facilities to implement the programs and activities planned in the school. Guidance and Counselling Teachers are professionals who hold a unique position within the school. Although their responsibilities are clearly defined, there are times when the role of a Guidance and Counselling Teacher can vary greatly from one school to another, even when the schools are located within the same district.

The responsibilities, duties, and roles of Guidance and Counselling Teachers vary depending on the workload and the expected outcomes set by the school administration. The school principal is the most authoritative figure in the school, and Guidance and Counseling Teachers must comply with and adhere to the principal's instructions from time to time, in

addition to fulfilling various duties outlined by the Ministry of Education Malaysia. This situation can lead to job stress for Guidance and Counselling Teachers.

Work stress occurs when an employee must fulfill two or more conflicting roles, when expectations related to tasks differ from the actual duties, and when there are too many tasks to be completed by an employee, and the resources to carry out these tasks are unavailable (Freeman & Coll, 1997). School counsellors experience high levels of work pressure when they struggle to manage different roles and provide services to students (Kolodinsky et al., 2009; Wilkerson, 2009). There are school counsellors who are forced to perform non-counselling duties due to school requirements or because they are comfortable and volunteer to take on these tasks (Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2008). School counsellors experience high levels of stress when they do not have enough time to meet with students, when faced with various work demands, and when they are required to perform excessive non-counselling duties (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011; Lambie, 2007; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006).

The stress experienced by Guidance and Counselling Teachers can also lead to burnout. Burnout refers to a widespread feeling closely related to fatigue, pessimism, incompetence, and other negative factors in the workplace (Maslach & Leiter, 2017). Burnout has serious effects on employees, clients, and the organization itself. These effects include a decline in the quality of services provided to clients, job turnover, absenteeism, and reduced employee motivation (Maslach, Leiter & Jackson, 2012).

Guidance and Counselling Teachers are at high risk for burnout, similar to all other mental health professionals. Riley's (2018) study shows that school counselors with higher levels of work stress experience burnout more frequently across all five dimensions of burnout compared to those with lower levels of work stress. The five dimensions of burnout are exhaustion, incompetence, negative work environment, devaluing clients, and deterioration in personal life. Lopez's (2013) study indicates that self-efficacy and the counselor-to-student ratio are predictors of the burnout dimension, particularly personal accomplishment, with self-efficacy being the strongest predictor.

Stress among Guidance and Counselling Teachers is also correlated with job satisfaction. There is research that directly links the increased fatigue of school counselors when they are asked to complete tasks labeled as non-counselling duties or tasks that conflict with the training they have received as school counselors (Fye et al., 2020; Mullen et al., 2018). When school counselors experience burnout, their job satisfaction also decreases (Mullen et al., 2018). Guidance and Counselling Teachers who experience job stress and subsequently burnout need to have coping skills strategies to help them reduce stress while performing their duties. Research shows 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, Guidance and Counselling Teachers need to take steps to strengthen their coping strategies when facing work stress. The study by Wan Salwina, Raynuha, Ainsah, Idayu, and Aniza (2009) shows that task coping is the most commonly used problem-solving method

among psychiatric staff. Meanwhile, according to Butler and Constantine (2005), efforts to promote and maintain the well-being of school counsellors are crucial when they work effectively with students and can help prevent burnout. Driven by the rising challenges faced by Guidance and Counselling Teachers in managing work stress and burnout, this study explores the understudied role of coping strategies within the Malaysian education context. It contributes empirical evidence on how specific coping mechanisms relate to job satisfaction and burnout, offering practical implications for strengthening support systems and enhancing the effectiveness of counselling services in schools.

Problem Statement

The main issue that causes Guidance and Counselling Teachers to experience work stress, low job satisfaction, and burnout is the lack of effective coping strategies to overcome problems, particularly those at the workplace. Studies have shown that stress, work dissatisfaction, and burnout are caused by ineffective coping strategies within an individual. According to Moate et al. (2018), stress occurs when school counsellors fail to meet the expected level in performing their duties. The heavy workload received by school counsellors burden them (Mullen & Crowe, 2017) and leads to burnout (Kovac et al., 2017). According to Maslach and Jackson (1986), burnout among workers such as school counsellors can be considered a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. The study by Fazel et al. (2014) shows that school counsellors are likely to experience emotional exhaustion and depersonalization at moderate to high levels.

Holman et al. (2019) state that school counsellors are an important resource in helping students succeed academically, maintain social-emotional regulation, prepare for life after school, and become contributing members of society. When school counsellors experience high levels of stress and burnout in their work, there is potential for negative effects on students/clients, such as the counsellor's ability to provide more ethical and practical counselling services (Holman et al., 2019; Kim & Lambie, 2018). Effective coping strategies are crucial for reducing stress and improving an individual's job satisfaction (Endler & Parker, 1999; Wallace et al., 2010; Welbourne et al., 2007). Wilkerson and Bellini (2006) suggest several specific coping strategies that can encourage individuals to combat burnout. School counsellors who specifically use problem-focused coping skills, in addition to emotional coping skills, are able to reduce their level of burnout.

The negative effects of work stress can be reduced or increased depending on the coping strategies used by a school counsellor (Wilkerson, 2009). Work stress commonly occurs due to role incongruity, role conflict, and role ambiguity, which increase the tendency towards burnout (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; Butler & Constantine, 2005; Nelson, Robles-Pinter & Nichter, 2008). School counsellors experience high levels of work stress because they struggle to manage multiple roles/responsibilities and provide services to students (Kolodinsky et al., 2009; McCarthy et al., 2010; Wilkerson, 2009). Based on the studies listed, research in our country has rarely linked coping strategies to helping Guidance and Counselling Teachers reduce work stress, increase job satisfaction, and address burnout. Given the importance of coping strategies in reducing job stress and burnout, a study on the influence of coping strategies on the relationship between stress, job satisfaction, and burnout among Guidance and Counselling Teachers needs to be conducted. This study also

measures job stress, coping strategies, job satisfaction, and burnout among Guidance and Counselling Teachers.

Research Objectives

The study was conducted to measure the relationship between work stress, coping strategies, job satisfaction and burnout among Guidance and Counselling Teachers.

Methodology

This study was conducted using a quantitative approach with a survey research design. The study was carried out on Guidance and Counselling Teachers in secondary schools across Malaysia. The survey method was chosen because the study involved a large sample size and information could be directly collected from the respondents. Data were gathered through questionnaires completed by the study participants. The research instrument used for data collection in this study was a set of questionnaires. The questionnaire consisted of five sections: Section A: Personal Biodata; Section B: Occupational Stress Inventory Revised Edition (OSI-R); Section C: Brief COPE Inventory; Section D: Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS); and Section E: School Counselor Burnout Inventory (SCBI). The Occupational Stress Inventory Revised Edition (OSI-R) was developed by Osipow (1998). The Brief COPE Inventory (Carver, 1997) was used to identify coping styles (emotion-focused coping, problem-focused coping, and avoidant coping). The Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) was developed to measure job satisfaction levels and aspects of employment (Spector, 1997). The School Counsellor Burnout Inventory (SCBI), developed by Lee, Kissinger, and Ogle (2010), was used to identify types of burnout.

Findings

A total of 583 respondents, who are Guidance and Counselling Teachers, participated in this study. Of that number, 470 (80.6%) were female Guidance and Counselling Teachers, while 113 (19.4%) were male. Pearson Correlation Analysis was conducted to measure the relationship between work stress, coping strategies, job satisfaction, and burnout.

Table 1

Pearson Correlation of the Relationship Between Work Stress and Coping Strategies

Variables	R	P
Emotion-Focused Coping Strategy	-0.05	0.27
Problem-Focused Coping Strategy	0.01	0.73
Avoidant Coping Strategy	0.07	0.10

Table 1 shows that there is no significant relationship between work stress and emotion-focused coping strategies ($r = -0.05$, $p > 0.05$), work stress and problem-focused coping strategies ($r = 0.01$, $p > 0.05$), and work stress and avoidance coping strategies ($r = 0.07$, $p > 0.05$). Furthermore, the study also measured the correlation between work stress and burnout among Guidance and Counselling teachers. The results show a significant relationship between work stress and burnout, with $r = 0.14$, $p < 0.01$.

Table 2

The Relationship between Coping Strategies and Job Satisfaction

Variables	r	P
Emotion-Focused Coping Strategy	0.06	0.17
Problem-Focused Coping Strategy	0.10	0.03
Avoidant Coping Strategy	-0.06	0.14

Table 2 shows that there is no significant relationship between emotion-focused coping strategies and job satisfaction, $r = -0.06$, $p > 0.05$. However, there is a significant relationship between problem-focused coping strategy and job satisfaction ($r = 0.10$, $p < 0.05$). The study also shows that there is no significant relationship between avoidant coping strategy and job satisfaction ($r = -0.06$, $p > 0.05$).

Table 3

The Relationship between Coping Strategies and Burnout

Variables	r	P
Emotion-Focused Coping Strategy	-0.05	0.22
Problem-Focused Coping Strategy	0.06	0.17
Avoidant Coping Strategy.	0.07	0.11

The findings of the study indicate that there is no significant relationship between emotion-focused coping strategy and burnout ($r = -0.05$, $p > 0.05$), no significant relationship between problem-focused coping strategy and burnout ($r = 0.06$, $p > 0.05$), and no significant relationship between avoidant coping strategy and burnout ($r = 0.07$, $p > 0.05$). (Table 3)

Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings of the study indicate that there is a significant relationship between work stress and burnout. This study supports the findings of Mullen and Gutierrez (2016), which showed that the stress experienced by counsellors has a significant relationship with the level of burnout. The results of the study also reveal that the level of burnout among school counsellors has a negative impact on the services provided directly to students.

Work stress and burnout have a strong relationship, with many studies showing that high levels of stress can lead to burnout. Work stress typically arises from factors such as excessive workload, lack of support, role ambiguity, and organizational pressure, all of which can trigger or worsen burnout. When employees experience chronic stress, it can manifest in emotional and cognitive effects, leading to feelings of exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced personal accomplishment the key components of burnout.

Burnout is seen as a prolonged response to chronic work-related stress, with symptoms including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. The effects of burnout are far-reaching, impacting not only employees' mental well-being but also job performance, satisfaction, and relationships with colleagues. Work stress, particularly excessive workload and inadequate organizational support, contributes to the onset of burnout across various professions. The findings of the study indicate that there is a significant relationship between problem-focused coping strategies and job satisfaction. Problem-focused coping, which involves efforts to address and resolve issues or challenges in the workplace, was found to have a positive relationship with job

satisfaction. This means that employees who directly tackle problems and focus on finding solutions tend to report higher levels of job satisfaction.

In conclusion, this study shows that employees who focus on solving problems in the workplace tend to be more satisfied with their jobs, whereas those who focus on managing emotions or avoiding problems may not see significant changes in their level of job satisfaction. The findings of this study can help improve and provide insights for enhancing the services of School Guidance and Counselling Teachers. This study emphasizes the importance of a supportive work environment in reducing stress.

Counsellors who feel they have access to professional support, such as supervision and a collaborative work environment, report lower levels of stress and higher job satisfaction. A strong support system in the workplace can reduce the negative effects of stress, thereby enhancing job satisfaction and perceived effectiveness. This study highlights the need for school administrators to recognize the stress faced by counsellors and to provide adequate resources and support to reduce burnout. This includes addressing the mismatch between job expectations and actual responsibilities, offering professional development opportunities, and creating a collaborative and supportive work environment. By doing so, schools can improve the well-being of their counsellors as well as the effectiveness of their services.

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