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Professional Resiliency and Self-Care Practices of Filipino School Counselors

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Abstract: School counselors play an integral role in the efficient and effective delivery of guidance and counseling services. Although school counselors are vulnerable to heightened risks of stress, fatigue, burnout, and poor mental health due to the nature of their work, they are also protected by their sheer professional resiliency and self-care practices. This study examined the level of professional resiliency and self-care practices among a sample of 51 Filipino school counselors. The respondents were 21-59 years of age, most of whom (86%) were females. Findings reveal that, across four subscales (i.e., professional vitality, personal vitality, professional stress, and personal stress), school counselors were found to have a high level of professional resiliency and of self-care practices. The data suggest that, rather than be weakened by the challenges stemming from their work, the school counselors appeared to have been strengthened in performing their job as a result of their professional resiliency and effective self-care strategies. The implications of these findings for counselor development program are immense.

Key Words: guidance and counseling; resiliency; self-care; Filipino school counselors

1. INTRODUCTION

School counselors play an integral role in the delivery of guidance and counseling services. As defined by the Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004, guidance and counseling "is a profession involving and integral approach to the development of a well-functioning individual primarily by helping him/her to utilize his/her potential to the fullest and plan his/her present and future in accordance with his/her abilities, interests, and needs" (IRR Republic Act 9258, Rule 1, Section 3). Furthermore, the American School Counseling Association (ASCA, 2003) also stated that school counselors are expected to design and implement a comprehensive school counseling program that will address the academic, social-emotional, and career developmental needs of all students. The role of school counselors has evolved over the years due to the complex characteristics and developing concerns of students (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). Major responsibilities of school counselors include conducting individual and group counseling sessions, facilitating classroom interventions or group guidance classes, consulting and collaborating with parents, teachers, administrators and other school stakeholders

(Paisley & McMahon, 2001). More so, counselors are accountable to promote positive mental health in the whole school community and expected to effectively attend to the mental health issues and concerns of the students (Dahir, 2009).

It is an innate personality trait of guidance counselors to be service-oriented and a heart-person. They find satisfaction and fulfillment in helping others. Moreover, they usually enjoy being with other people, talking, listening, and doing something for them (Reardon and Lenz, 1999). Counselors are naturally sympathetic and friendly. These qualities complemented the nature of counselor's work. On the other hand, Lambie (2006) opined that as a human service provider, counselors are susceptible to stress, compassion fatigue and burnout. Often times, counselors deal with people who are experiencing high level of stress and in challenging situations wherein they are expected to build therapeutic rapport, display empathy with genuine concern, and design an appropriate counseling intervention plan to assist the client with his presenting problem. As supported by Lawson (2007), he stated that counselors are at-risk and has a higher percentage to experience burnout due to the emotional nature of the counseling profession that involves face to face



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contact with the client to develop therapeutic relationship and show empathy which also involves emotions not only by the client but also from the counselor.

According to Maslach (2003), there are different factors that cause burnout among school counselors. This can be brought by varying environmental reasons such as too much workload, unsupportive and unhealthy relationship with peers, lack of formal supervision from the supervisor, and poor program support from the teachers and administrators. On the other hand, it can also be caused by internal factors since counseling is a process that includes emphatic attachment, active involvements, and emotional investment focusing on the needs of the client, some counselors may experience difficulties in balancing self-care and prioritizing personal wellness (Skovholt, Grier, & Hanson, 2001).

In this regard, resiliency and self-care activities of those who are in the helping profession are essential in order for them to combat stress, fatigue, and burnout. Resilience has been defined as “the potential to exhibit resourcefulness by using available internal and external resources in response to different contextual and developmental challenges” (Pooley & Cohen, 2010; p.34). Counselors are prone and exposed to secondary stress brought by therapeutic compassion and at-risk to be emotionally drained due to the nature of the counseling process (Meyers, 2018). It is of prime importance that while the counselor is helping his client develop resilience, he should also nurture his own resiliency skills by engaging in different self-care activities in their daily schedule. Taking care of his/herself will help the counselor manage personal and work-related stress, prevent burnout and maintain positive well-being.

It is in this light that this study intends to explore resiliency and self-care practices among Filipino school counselors. Generated results from this study may lead to the development of comprehensive development programs for school counselors that will specifically address the personal and professional needs of this human service vocation.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

The present study employed the quantitative descriptive research design in exploring

the data gathered. Specifically, the quantitative descriptive method presents the sociodemographic profile of the respondents and their level of resiliency and self-care practices based on the four subscales. More so, this will also confer if there is a significant difference in the level of professional resiliency and self-care practices if/when the school counselors are grouped according to their sociodemographic profile.

2.2 Respondents

A total of 51 Filipino guidance counselors in different schools participated in this study. The researcher made use of the purposive sampling method wherein the only qualification set by the researcher in order to be part of the study is that the respondent should be a practicing school counselor as their present profession. In gathering the data, the instrument was distributed purposely to identified school counselors during the annual convention intended for mental health practitioners (i.e., psychologist, psychometrician, and guidance counselors) in the Philippines.

2.3 Instrument

The researcher made use of the Skovholt Practitioner Professional Resiliency and Self-Care Inventory (Skovholt, 2014). The checklist is composed of 38 items which is divided into four sub-scales namely: professional vitality (items 1-8), personal vitality (items 9-19), professional stress (items 20-28), and personal stress (items 29-38). Specifically, professional vitality means that the individual performs expected tasks with passion and commitment to help clients, exhibits an inner driving force to persevere and to enhance skills, and experience a feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction in doing his/her job (Baruch, Grimland, Vigoda-Gadot, 2014). Likewise, personal vitality is characterized by a sustainable energy elicited in an individual through a positive relationship with significant people, healthy life style, optimistic outlook about life and active self-care activities (Skovholt, Grier, and Hanson, 2001). On the other hand, professional stress are concerns that an individual experience in relation to his/her work which causes a person to feel inadequate, pressured and distressed while personal stress are issues related to personal relationship outside work environment such as friends and family, health problems, and poor personal values and self-care (Borhani, Abbaszadeh, Nakhaee, and Roshanzadeh, 2014). Operationally in the



instrument, the professional and personal stress is described as how the mental health practitioner was able to manage different work-related and personal-related stress effectively.

The inventory was designed to encourage self-reflection from the raters through the items which was scored in a positive direction using a Likert scale from 1 that means strongly disagree to 5 indicating strongly agree. According to the T. M. Skovholt (personal communication, March 5, 2019), items of the inventory were added slowly through years of reading relevant researches, personal practice as psychotherapist and understanding gained by giving workshops and seminars.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedures

The researcher secured the approval of the convention officer to distribute the questionnaire during convention's break time/free time. Respondents' consent was asked through letter distributed to all identified school counselors. Once agreed to participate, respondents were given 15 to 20 minutes to complete the inventory. The researcher retrieved the questionnaire at the end of the convention.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

The research goal was discussed through the consent letter. It was explained that their participation in this study was completely voluntary and they may decline from answering any question in the inventory. Respondents were also assured that their answers will be treated with high confidentiality and that there will be no personal identifiable information will be shared.

2.6 Data Analysis

The data gathered were encoded and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science version 16 (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as mean score and standard deviation were used to identify the level of professional resiliency and self-care practices of school counselors based on their demographic profile and four sub-scales. In addition, inferential statistics such as the multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was utilized to determine the significant difference of the professional resiliency and self-care practices of school counselors when grouped according to age, gender, marital status, educational attainment, level handled, and years of service.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section shows the level of professional resiliency and self-care practices of school counselors based on the different variables such as their sociodemographic profile and four sub-scales. Likewise, it also presents the significant difference of these variables in the level of professional resiliency and self-care practices of school counselors by employing the f-value using significance level of $p < .05$.

Table 1. Profile of the respondents based on their sociodemographic profile

| Variable | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| -Age- | | |
| 21-30 years old | 19 | 37% |
| 31-40 years old | 15 | 29% |
| 41-50 years old | 8 | 16% |
| 51-60 years old | 9 | 18% |
| -Gender- | | |
| Female | 44 | 86% |
| Male | 7 | 14% |
| -Marital Status- | | |
| Single | 25 | 49% |
| Married | 26 | 51% |
| -Educational Attainment- | | |
| Bachelor's degree | 21 | 41% |
| Master's degree | 18 | 35% |
| Post-graduate degree | 12 | 24% |
| -Level Handled- | | |
| Pre-school | 1 | 2% |
| Elementary | 10 | 20% |
| High School | 15 | 29% |
| College | 23 | 45% |
| Graduate school | 2 | 4% |
| -Years of Service- | | |
| 1-5 years | 20 | 39% |
| 6-10 years | 6 | 12% |
| 11-15 years | 9 | 17% |
| 16-20 years | 8 | 16% |
| 21 years and above | 8 | 16% |

In table 1, respondents' demographics revealed the following: ages ranged from 21 to 60 years old, with the majority of respondents are in 21 to 30 years age bracket ($n = 19$; 37%), followed by 31 to 40 years old ($n = 15$; 29%), 51 to 60 years old ($n = 9$; 18%), and 41 to 50 years old ($n = 8$; 16%). The far majority of respondents are 44 females (86%) and only 7 males (14%). Furthermore, 26 respondents are



single (49%) and 25 are married (51%). In terms of educational attainment, 21 (41%) are bachelor's degree holder, 18 (35%) finished master's degree, and only 12 (24%) earned doctoral degree. For the handled level, 23 (45%) counselors were assigned in college level, 15 (29%) in high school, 10 (20%) were in elementary, 2 (4%) in graduate students, and only 1 (2%) in pre-school. Lastly, 20 (39%) of the respondents served as a school counselor between 1-5 years, 6 (12%) worked between 6 to 10 years, 9 (17%) rendered their service between 11 to 15 years, and 8 (16%) respondents were experienced counselors from 16 to 20 years and 21 years and above.

Table 2. Level of professional resiliency and self-care practices of school counselors based on four subscales

| Sub-scale | Mean | Standard Deviation | Interpretation |
|---|------|--------------------|----------------|
| Professional Vitality | 4.35 | 0.34 | High |
| Personal Vitality | 4.11 | 0.42 | High |
| Professional Stress | 4.10 | 0.32 | +High |
| Personal Stress | 4.31 | 0.39 | +High |
| Professional Resiliency and Self-care of School Counselor | 4.22 | 0.28 | High |

Table 2 illustrates that respondents have high level of professional resiliency and self-care practices based on the four subscales namely, professional vitality, personal vitality, professional stress, and personal stress. It is important to note that for professional stress and personal stress, a high score indicates that the respondents were able to positively manage adversities brought by their work and personal experiences. In general, the high mean scores in the four subscales pointed out that respondents were able to perform expected task, have high motivation to help clients, display strong passion to what they do, manifest willingness to learn and improve skills, have positive perspective and relationship towards self and other, value the importance of self-care and wellness, and satisfied with both professional and personal life (Baruch et al., 2014; & Skovholt et al., 2001). This result supported the study of Crane and Searle last 2016 with mental health practitioners in which data revealed that exposure to challenging stressors in fact encourages a person to develop high resiliency level and decrease work-related pressure.

Table 3. F-value of the professional resiliency and self-care practices of school counselors grouped by demographic profile

| Variable | Mean | Standard Deviation | f-value |
|--------------------------|------|--------------------|---------|
| -Age- | | | 1.397 |
| 21-30 years old | 4.22 | 0.33 | |
| 31-40 years old | 4.23 | 0.28 | |
| 41-50 years old | 4.33 | 0.17 | |
| 51-60 years old | 4.06 | 0.17 | |
| -Gender- | | | .004 |
| Female | 4.22 | 0.26 | |
| Male | 4.21 | 0.42 | |
| -Marital Status- | | | .085 |
| Single | 4.23 | 0.32 | |
| Married | 4.21 | 0.24 | |
| -Educational Attainment- | | | 1.081 |
| Bachelor's degree | 4.16 | 0.27 | |
| Master's degree | 4.20 | 0.33 | |
| Post-graduate degree | 4.22 | 0.18 | |
| -Level Handled- | | | .559 |
| Pre-school | 4.16 | 0.27 | |
| Elementary | 4.23 | 0.29 | |
| High School | 4.26 | 0.26 | |
| College | 3.99 | 0.22 | |
| Graduate school | 4.09 | 0.30 | |
| -Years of Service- | | | .759 |
| 1-5 years | 4.22 | 0.33 | |
| 6-10 years | 4.38 | 0.30 | |
| 11-15 years | 4.22 | 0.24 | |
| 16-20 years | 4.14 | 0.26 | |
| 21 years and above | 4.19 | 0.19 | |

*p<.05

The results revealed that there is a significant difference in the level of professional resiliency and self-care practices of school counselors when grouped by age, marital status, educational attainment, handled level, and years of service except for gender wherein the computed f-value .004 is lower than the p<.05. This result indicates that both female and male school counselors have almost the same level of resiliency and self-care practices.

Specifically for age, those who are in 41 to 50 years old were found to have the highest level of resiliency and self-care compared to the other age group. It is likely because in this age group, the individual already attained a sense of stability both in professional and personal life. This may include recognized and accomplished in work, attained



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professional growth, established positive relationships, and financially secured. For the years of service, those who worked as a school counselor between 6 to 10 years have the highest level of resiliency and self-care practices. Literature supports that as once career progresses an individual attained a greater level of well-being and burnout also decreases with age. More so, novice counselors may experience a lot of ambiguity towards work and professional skills that may cause stress and anxiety. On the other hand, these uncertainties may give opportunities for cognitive and emotional maturity, improvement of resiliency skills, and higher value in the importance of self-care practices as one progress with age and experience (Dorociak et al., 2017; Skovholt & Ronnesta, 2003).

Meanwhile, data revealed that counselors who are single have high level of professional resiliency and self-care practices. It is possible that unmarried counselors have more time for work, self and others in terms of priorities such as regular self-care activities. Likewise, in the area of educational attainment, those who have post-graduate degree were found to have the highest level of resiliency and self-care. Getting an educational advancement may help a school counselor to develop skills in managing cases and other counseling-related tasks thus this may lessen sources of stress. Lastly, school counselors handling high school students were found to have the highest level of resiliency and self-care practices. It may be associated with diverse approach of school counselors in handling professional and personal responsibilities and that they have unique developmental phase that led to varying level of resiliency and self-care.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the current study presented the level of professional resiliency and self-care practices of Filipino school counselors. Data revealed that based from the four subscales, Filipino school counselors have high level of professional resiliency and self-care practices. Results indicate that Filipino school counselors were able to manage challenges successfully by being resilient and that they give much importance to their own well-being by practicing effective self-care strategies. Likewise, results also revealed that there is a significant difference in the level of professional resiliency and

self-care practices of school counselors based on their demographic profile except for gender.

Clearly, the overall well-being of a counselor is vital in the delivery of the guidance and counseling service. A counselor with stable mental and emotional state will be able to build effective therapeutic relationship with his/her client, can bounce back amidst trials in professional and personal life and intensely passionate in doing his/her roles. Therefore, this indicates that the counselor's level of resiliency and self-care practices have a great impact on the counseling profession. If the counselor has a positive outlook, satisfied, happy, finds meaning and purpose to what he/she does, he/she may be able to apply effective coping strategies in managing daily stresses and challenges brought by both personal and professional demands.

In this regard, it is highly recommended that all counseling centers should prioritize and be committed in the development of a comprehensive development program for counselors that will aid to enhance resiliency and self-care strategies such as: 1) promote positive relationship among colleagues and family that will serve as a strong support system, 2) regular case supervision and consultation to boost the confidence and skills of the counselors in designing effective intervention program, 3) continues education in the field of work to enhance professional and personal well-being of the counselors, 4) regular self-care activities incorporated in the development program for counselors to facilitate wellness and positive mental health.

In addition, a qualitative study can also be done in future researches that will explore on the well-being and specific self-care strategies of mental health practitioner. This may help identify the specific needs of school counselors and may aid in development of comprehensive program for all school counselors. Furthermore, it is also suggested to look into the exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis of the tool used in local setting to make it more applicable to Filipino culture and attributes.

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