

The Relationship between Role Conflict and Burnout among Secondary School Counselors in Sarawak

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Abstract

Purpose: Despite the relatively high degree of research on counselors in schools, there remain lack of research on the relationship between role conflict and burnout among secondary school counselors. School counselors are by far the increasing sub-group in the school community, yet little is known about the counselors' well-being in schools. Three aspects of burnout, i.e. emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment were measured in this study and their relationship with the role conflict was explored.

Design/methodology/approach: Statistical analyses using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) revealed that there was a significant positive relationship between Role Conflict and Emotional Exhaustion and also between Role Conflict and Depersonalization.

Findings: Nevertheless, there was no significant relationship between Role Conflict and Personal Accomplishment. Qualitative survey also indicated that role conflict influenced burnout among secondary school counselors in Sarawak. The results of the three dimensions of burnout revealed that emotional exhaustion and depersonalization were at high level where as personal accomplishment was at low level, therefore the secondary school counselors in Sarawak are at the risk of burnout.

Research limitations: The data of this research were based on government secondary school counselors throughout the state of Sarawak, therefore, the generalizability is confined to government secondary school counselors in the state of Sarawak, Malaysia.

Practical implications: This research provides empirical data for the Ministry of Education, school administrators and curriculum experts toward Sarawak secondary school counselors who are at the risk of burnout. This study could have further implications on the prevention of burnout among secondary school counselors and on the design of educational interventions in secondary school counselors development programs that support and strengthen the development of school counselors self efficacy. It is recommended that additional research should be conducted to confirm the effect of counselor-to-student ratio on school counselor burnout.

Originality/value: The use of Structural Equation Modeling to test role conflict and burnout among secondary school counselors in Sarawak provided a venue for testing the relationships in the hypothesized model simultaneously and more accurately.

Keywords: School, Counselors, Burnout, Role Conflict

Introduction

Recently, on 17 August 2017, Malaysian Education Ministry had identified a total of 402 schools nationwide as hotspots for discipline and drugs problems. 10 schools are in Sarawak, so there is an increasing demand for secondary school counselors to effectively play their counseling roles. Nowadays, the secondary school counselors in Malaysia mandated to handle counseling services for students such as personality development, discipline, career education, psychosocial and mental health (Abdul Malek et. al., 2013). Most of the time, the work, duties and roles play by school counselors are challenging and beyond the counselors' control (Culver, 2011). Zakaria and Mohamed (2011) mentioned that secondary school counselors in Malaysia shoulder a heavy responsibility, perform a rather unrelated, overburdened, multiple-role job and at the same time they are also trained to teach. According to Salahi, Farnaz, et al. (2014) balancing self-care and other-care is often a struggle for counselors and may lead to counselor burnout. Because of the above reasons, Bardwell (2010) stated that secondary school counselors could be at risk of high levels of burnout because of too much unrelated, worry, tired, unfinished business, long hours of working, lack of staff support, and also too many non-counseling duties. Schellenberg (2012) stated that secondary school counselors' high demanding in schools could be a powerful contributor to burnout. The data of this research were based on government secondary school counselors throughout the state of Sarawak. Its generalizability, therefore, is confined to government secondary school counselors in the state of Sarawak only.

Problem Statement

According to the Theory Of Maslach's Development of Burnout (2003), having long time of stressors in the workplace, such as role conflict will cause school counselors facing burnout (Lee et al., 2010; Lent & Schwartz, 2012; Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Moyer (2011) stated that burnout may have negative and unhealthy effect on full time secondary school counselors who are repeatedly affected by unrelated, unnecessary and inappropriate role conflict. More specifically, it was said the high role conflict would reduce job satisfaction because of less self-efficacy in the organization's activities (Koustelios *et.al.*, 2004; Tang & Chang, 2010). Study by Djony Harijanto et.al (2013) found out that role conflict had significant relationship with self-efficacy, the more the level of role conflict, the higher the burnout levels, because it will decrease workers self-efficacy. Role conflict of secondary school counselors are also another main cause of burnout. So, there is a theoretical gap for this research to study whether role conflict really causes school counselors to have burnout. According to a study done by Celik (2013), role conflict is considered an issue that affect performance and lead to burnout. When people deal with role conflict, they will encounter emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a decrease in success (Karatepe & Uludag, 2008). Role conflict had a positive relationship with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, which were sub-dimensions of burnout in some studies (Piko, 2006). Lee (2004) also found that role conflict had positive relationship with emotional exhaustion, whereas peer support was positively associated with personal accomplishment. From here, there is also practical gap for this research to study whether role conflict really causes school counselors to have burnout. Finally,