

Relationship between Functions of Counselor Supervision and Level of Burnout: The Case of Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) Counselors in Selected Counties in Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between the functions of counsellor supervision and level of burnout among VCT counsellors in selected counties in Kenya. An ex post facto correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of 1050 VCT counsellors out of which a sample of 175 counsellors was selected using purposive, proportionate and simple random sampling. Data was collected using a questionnaire and was analysed using descriptive statistics namely frequencies and percentages and inferential statistics including the Chi-square and Factor Analysis. Findings of the study indicated that a statically significant relationship existed between education, supportive and administrative functions of counsellor supervision and level of burnout among the VCT counsellors in the selected counties in Kenya. It was recommended that counsellor supervisors should incorporate all functions of counsellor supervision in their practice including educational, support and administrative functions.

Key Words: *Counsellor Supervision, Functions of Counsellor Supervision, Education Function, Support Function, Administrative Function, Burnout*

1.0 Introduction

Counsellors work closely with people in shock, emotional pain and turmoil, depression, stigmatization, trauma, grief and bereavement which infects the counsellor with a patient's sadness, a condition Jones (2003) referred to as psychic poisoning or vicarious traumatization. This leads to a form of stress called burnout which is a state of emotional depletion, lost ideals and purpose. Gerald and Gerald (2001) note that counselling is an emotionally- draining occupation. Their views are echoed by Bond (2007) who notes that there is always a risk of emotional burnout when working closely with the pains and problems of others. The British Association of Counsellors (BAC, 1998) acknowledges that by its very nature, counselling places a considerable demand upon the counsellor. Indeed, Stress, emotional and physical ill health is

common in human service organizations.

Counsellors need to be aware of their own vulnerability and monitor their well being. They should appreciate their human nature and seek help in their day to day challenges. The counselling profession provides for a self care mechanism for the practitioners in the form of counsellor supervision. The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP, 2004) defines counsellor supervision as a formal arrangement for counsellors to discuss their work regularly with someone who is more experienced in counselling and counsellor supervision. The task is to work together to ensure and develop the efficacy of the counsellor/ client relationship. The agenda is the counselling work, and the feelings about that work, together with the supervisor's reactions comments and confrontations (BACP, 2004).

Mearns (2004) says that counselling relies heavily upon the emotional health and development of its practitioners, and it is supervision which monitors and serves to maintain that health. Emphasizing the need of counsellor supervision Gerald and Gerald (2001) state that counsellors need supervision to help them resolve their own issues and avoid burnout in what is an emotionally draining occupation. They assert that as well as providing a sounding board for the counsellors' concern, a supervisor is in a good position to spot the onset of any symptoms of burnout and assist the counsellor in dealing with them. Corey, Corey and Callan (2007) suggest that supervision is perhaps the most important component in the development of a competent practitioner.

The National Aids Control Programme acknowledges that stress and burnout has been evident among VCT counsellors, which has been reflected in decreased efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery (NAS COP, 2000). Cases of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, unethical practices, and inappropriate interventions including misdiagnosis of clients' sero status, all which are indicators of burnout have often been reported among VCT counsellors. In Kenya, the National Aids Control Programme has recommends at least one supervision session every two to four weeks and has put in place at least one counsellor supervisor in every district. Major associations for counsellors all over the world are in agreement that burnout in counselling is inevitable and for this reason they make counsellor supervision a compulsory part of their code of ethics. Without adequate supervision, counsellors suffer burnout, may get impaired and fail to contribute optimally to the client.

Counsellor supervision plays three main

functions, which include educational, support, and administrative functions. Functions of supervision refer to the role that supervision serves in the practice and personal life of the counsellors. In the educational function, the supervisor allows supervisees to reflect on their own work with clients in the presence of an experienced person who facilitates this reflection. This function helps the counsellor to understand the client better, become more aware of their own reactions and responses to the client and understand the dynamics of how their clients are interacting. Educational function also helps the counsellor to look at how they intervened and the consequences of their interventions. The counsellor also learns other ways of working with different client situations (Hawkins & Shohet 2000). In the educational function of counsellor supervision, the counsellor has space to reflect upon the content and process of their work. Counsellors are helped to develop understanding and skill in their work. Further, he receives information and another perspective concerning their work. The work process involves receiving both content and process feedback. Educational function is primarily informed by welfare of the client. Supervisors inevitably fill in gaps in knowledge, increases skills, make practical what is only abstract knowledge but what must become working knowledge. A link is established between theory and practice.

The Supportive function involves offering supervisees a forum where they are encouraged to look at their own issues and ask for or be given the encouragement they need to explore their way of working with clients. Kadushin (1992) notes that counsellors are seen as facing a variety of job-related stressors which, unless they have help to deal with seriously affects

their work and leads to less than satisfactory service to the clients. Kadushin argues that the other two functions of supervision focus on instrumental needs whereas supportive function is concerned with expressive needs. The supervisor helps to prevent the development of potentially stressful situations and helps her to adjust. He communicates confidence in the work and provides opportunities for independent functioning and for probable success in tasks achievement. As part of the supportive function the counsellor is validated both as a person and as a worker and is not left to carry unnecessarily complex problems and projections alone (Hawkins & Shohet 2000)

The administrative function of supervision is concerned with quality assurance. Administrative function has an eye on all aspects of the work that contains accountability and responsibility of the supervisees and the welfare of the client. It pays heed to the ethical and professional aspect of client work and the organizational dimensions that affects clients' contact. This function enables the supervisee to monitor their own work as professionals. It is under the administrative function that the supervisors become advocates of clients and of the counselling profession, making sure that service is rendered and that ethical and professional dimensions are maintained at a high level. Counsellors are also helped to be pro-active rather than reactive and to ensure quality work (Hawkins & Shohet, 2000). According to Kadushin (1992) of concern in the administrative function is the correct, effective and appropriate implementation of agency policies and procedures. This function of supervision focuses on the structural functioning of the service unit, including personnel issues, logistics of service delivery, legal, contractual and organizational policies (Remley & Herlihy, 2001). It thus entails a

responsibility not to lose touch with the rationale of the agency.

Administrative function of supervision has a range of benefits for counselling and the organisation. Key benefits include: Maintenance of clinical skills and quality practice (Webb, 1997; Reeves, Culbreth & Borders, 1999), promotion of standardised performance of core skills across the organisation and / or field , increased job satisfaction, improved communication amongst workers, improved worker retention and reduced professional development and administration costs (Kavanagh, Spence & Crow 2002, Shanley, 1992, Milne & Westerman, 2001)

Considerable research has been carried on counsellor supervision and burnout but many studies have not focused on the functions of counsellor supervision and their relationship with burnout. The objective of the study was to investigate the relationship between the functions of counsellor supervision (educational, supportive and administrative function) and level of burnout among VCT Counsellors. The study hypothesised that there was no statistically significant relationship between the functions of counsellor supervision and level of burnout among counsellors. It hoped to contribute towards enhanced understanding of the relationship between the functions of counsellor supervision and level of burnout among counsellors. it hoped to contribute towards increased understanding of the functions of counsellor supervision and in turn influence the delivery of counsellor supervision services to the counsellors. Managing levels of burnout among counsellors would contribute towards counsellors' psychological well being and ultimately towards the client's welfare.

1.2 Research Methodology

The study adopted the *ex-post-facto* correlational research design. An accessible population of 1050 VCT counsellors and 54 counsellor supervisors in 13 counties namely Mombasa, Kwale, Kilifi , Tana River, Lamu, Taita Taveta , Siaya, Kisumu, Homabay, Migori, Kisii, Nyamira and Nairobi counties took part in the study. The sample comprised of 175 VCT counsellors. Proportionate sampling was used to ensure equitable distribution of the sample across the seven counties and to obtain the sample of VCT centres where data was obtained. Proportionate sampling was useful in ensuring that the centres from which data was collected were equitably represented. The actual VCT counsellors who participated in the study was obtained using simple random sampling. Questionnaires were used to collect data from the VCT counsellors and the counsellor supervisors. The questionnaire for VCT counsellors sought information on the various functions of counsellor supervision available to the VCT counsellors. The questionnaire included a burnout scale, which measured the VCT counsellors' level of burnout. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages and inferential statistics including the chi-square and factor analysis. The Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17.0 software package will be employed to facilitate analysis of data.

1.3 Results and Discussions

The hypothesis of the study stated that there was no statistically significant relationship between the following functions of counsellor supervision and level of burnout among VCT counsellors:

- a) Educational function
 - b) Support function
 - c) Administrative function
- The hypothesis was tested in three parts as follows:

1.3.1 Relationship between Educational Function of Counsellor Supervision and Level of Burnout among VCT Counsellors

The researcher sought to determine whether supervision focused on the various aspects of the educational function of counsellor supervision. 41% of the counsellors reported that their supervision focused on techniques of counselling, 68 % indicated that their supervision focused on ethical issues while 52 % of the respondents reported focusing on a variety of intervention options. A further 24% reported that their supervision focused on theories of counselling.

It was important to determine whether the focus on various aspects of educational supervision had a relationship with counsellor supervision. The Chi square test was used to test the hypothesis that stated that there was no statistically significant relationship between the educational function of counsellor supervision and level of burnout among VCT counsellors. The results are displayed on table 1.

Table 1: Relationship between Education Function of Counsellor Supervision and Level of Burnout among VCT Counsellors

Test statistics	Education function	Level of Burnout
Chi- Square	48.743	83.517
Df	4	3
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.0000

$\chi^2 = 48.743$, Significance at .05

On the basis of the chi square test results on table 1 the null hypothesis stating that there was no statistically significant relationship between the education function of counsellor supervision and level of burnout was therefore rejected ($P < .05$) thus, a statistically significant relationship existed between the education function of counsellor supervision and level of burnout among VCT counsellors. A statistically significant relationship between the education function of counsellor supervision and level of burnout was expected in the light of the critical role of this function of counsellor supervision. Education function of supervision provides a “working alliance” between practitioners that is focused on enhancing the clinical effectiveness of the supervisee (Kavanagh, Spence, & Crow, 2002). The focus is also on developing the supervisee's clinical and interpersonal skills. Scaife, Inskipp and Proctor (2001) comments that effective supervision empowers therapists to acquire essential skills in order to take independent actions through sound clinical reasoning and judgement. As well, supervision helps the practitioners to integrate various technical inputs into a conceptual frame work (Gachutha, 2009). As reviewed in the literature educational function of counsellor supervision helps counsellors to understand clients better, become more aware of their own reactions and responses, learn ways of working with different client situations and as well receive both content and process feed back. An experience of all these benefits of educational functions must have played a significant role in managing the levels of burnout among VCT counsellors a factor that may explain this statistically significant relationship.

Relationship between Support Function of Counsellor Supervision and Level of Burnout among VCT Counsellors

Chi square test was used to test the hypothesis that stated that there was no statistically significant relationship between the support function of counsellor supervision and level of burnout among VCT counsellors. Table 2 presents the results.

Table 2: Relationship between Support Function of Counsellor Supervision and Level of Burnout among VCT Counsellors

Test Statistics	Support Function	Level of Burnout
Chi- square (a, b)	129.371	83.517
Df	4	3
Asymp. Sig	.000	.000

$\chi^2 = 129.371$, Significance at .05

On the basis of $P < .05$ the null hypothesis stating that there was no statistically significant relationship between support function of counsellor supervision and level of burnout among VCT counsellors was rejected. It was concluded that a statistically significant relationship existed between the support function of counsellor supervision and level of burnout among

VCT counsellors. These findings agree with the view of leading scholars in the discipline of counselor supervision. Scaieffe *et al.* (2001) asserts the significant relationship between supportive function of counsellor supervision and level of burnout among VCT counsellors. Benard and Goodyear (2004), Scaieffe *et al.*, (2001) contend that supportive function of

counsellor supervision plays a critical role in the resolution of burnout among counsellors. Referring to it as the restorative function of supervision, they assert that burned out counsellors require treatment and it is the support function of counsellor supervision that allows for self assessment, reorganization of self structure, identification of limitations and a recapturing of self efficacy. The effect of this function of counsellor supervision on level of burnout would have been felt even more strongly with an indepth focus on the the various aspects of the function of supervision. An analysis of the key aspects of supportive function covered during supervision indicate that 53 % of counsellors had their supervision focusing on management of burnout while 59% of the counsellors reported that their supervision addressed their feelings of frustration and helplessness. 42% reported a focus on personal needs and conflicts. Areas not adequately addressed included personal blockages and blind spots (39%) and personal growth and development. Focusing more on personal blockages and blind spots would contribute more towards heightened self awareness, self monitoring

and regulation which would encourage counsellors to seek more therapeutic support. This would help them to deal with the grey areas of their lives which would make them more effective therapists and able to deal with personal and professional issues that predispose them to burnout. Counsellor supervisors also need to deal more with counsellors need for growth and development. This growth should be holistic covering their physical, social, emotional, intellectual, professional and spiritual domains of their lives. Of course this is a very demanding endeavour and would call for intensive training of the counsellor supervisors in order to perform these functions effectively.

Relationship between Administrative Function of Counsellor Supervision and Level of Burnout among VCT Counsellors

The chi square test was used to test the relationship between the administrative function of counsellor supervision and level of burnout among the VCT counsellors. The results are presented on table 3

Table 3: Relationship between the Administrative Function of Counsellor Supervision and Level of Burnout among VCT Counsellors.

Test statistics	Administrative Function	Level of Burnout	Chi square
	90.057	83.517	
Df		4	3
Asymp. Sig		.0000	.0000

$\chi^2 = 90.057$, Significance at .05

On the basis of $P < .05$, the null hypothesis was rejected, thus the conclusion that there existed a statistically significant relationship between the administrative function of counsellor supervision and level of burnout among VCT counsellors. Of the

three fuctions of supervision, administrative function seemed to have received the greatest attention. The findings of the study indicate that 61.6 % of the counsellors had their supervision focusing on logistics of service delivery including record keeping and time

management. 70% of the counsellors reported that their supervision focused on organisational policies while 65% and 61.6% respectively recorded that their supervision dealt with ethical practices and accountability to the client. Supervisors needed to help counsellors monitor their own fitness to practice. Only 47% of the counsellors reported that their supervision had monitored their fitness to practice.

Given that a statistically significant

relationship existed in the three functions of counsellor supervision and level of burnout among VCT counsellors it was necessary to investigate which of the three functions of counsellor supervision had the greatest influence on levels of burnout among VCT counsellors. To this effect a factor analysis was conducted. Table 4-5 presents the results.

Table 4: Total Variance For the Functions of Counsellor Supervision

Component	Initial EigenValues			Extaction Sum of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cummulative %
1	1.095	36.496	36.496	1.095	36.496	36.496
2	1.075	35.833	72.329	1.075	35.833	72.329
3	.830	27.671	100.000			

Table 5: Results for the Principal Component Analysis of the Function of Counsellor Supervision

Function of Supervision	Component	
	1	2
Educational Function	.782	-.310
Supportive Function	.685	.497
Administrative Function	-.115	.855

The results on table 5 indicate that administrative function of counsellor supervision scored highest on the influence counsellor supervision on levels of burnout followed by the support function. Education function had the least influence on the levels of burnout among VCT counsellors. These findings imply that much of the supervision done among the VCT counsellors placed greater emphasis on work needs than on workers needs.

However, this study cannot be used to make a conclusion that the relative influence of

the functions of counsellor supervision on burnout follows that order. The results are only a reflection of what aspects of supervision were covered more. Much of the supervision available to VCT counsellors focused more on the administrative matters. 70% Of the counsellors reported that their supervision focused on adherence to organisational policies, 65% had their supervision focusing on ethical practices and a further 61% focused on logistics of service delivery. With such a great emphasis on administrative issues of supervision, a

stronger relationship between this function of supervision and level of burnout was expected. Aspects of support function focused on included management of burnout (53 %), feelings of frustration (59 %) and personal needs and conflicts (42%). Little attention was directed towards critical issues of the supportive function such as discovering personal blockages and blind spots. On the other hand, the aspects of educational functions received less focus for instance 41% of counsellors had their supervision focusing on techniques of counselling and only 24% of the counsellors had their supervision focusing on the theories of counselling. This allows for the conclusion that all the three functions of supervision play a critical role in managing levels of burnout. This study calls for an equal attention on the three functions of counsellor supervision to contribute towards the holistic growth of the VCT counsellors. It also reflects on the need for further training of counsellor

supervisors so that they can deal effectively with all the functions of supervision in order to contribute optimally towards a holistic growth of the VCT counsellors.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Findings of this study allowed for the conclusion that a statically significant relationship existed between the functions of counsellor supervision and level of burnout among the VCT counsellors in the selected counties in Kenya. It was recommended that counsellor supervisors should incorporate all functions of counsellor supervision in their practice including educational, support and administrative functions. Educational function of counsellor supervision should enhance its focus on theories of counselling , the range of intervention options, ethical and legal issues in counselling. As well supportive function of supervision need to attend more to personal needs and conflicts, family and work balance, personal blockages and blind spots , personal growth and development.

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