



Journal of Applied Sciences

ISSN 1812-5654

science
alert

ANSI*net*
an open access publisher
<http://ansinet.com>

The Effect of Structured Peer Consultation Program on School Counselor Burnout in Turkey

¹Aysel Esen Çoban and ²Ayhan Demir

¹Sokullu Mehmet Pasa Cad. Nakis Sok. 3/20, Dikmen, Ankara, Turkey

²Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey

Abstract: The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of Structured Peer Consultation Program on school counselor burnout in Gaziantep city, Turkey. A pre-test and post-test control group design was used to investigate the effect of the program. Maslach Burnout Inventory was administered for the pre-test and the post-test. The structured peer consultation program was applied to the experimental group for 5 weeks. ANCOVA was used to test the significant treatment effect of the Program on counselor burnout. The results of ANCOVA indicated that ANCOVA's examining the treatment effects was significant on the dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment.

Key words: Peer supervision, peer consultation program, burnout, school counselor

INTRODUCTION

School counselors have been mostly working in a variety of professional roles within school systems (Paisley and McMahon, 2001). Especially, it was assumed that school counselor provide individual and group counseling, educational testing and academic advising and complete various administrative tasks in schools (Fitch *et al.*, 2001). Because of their myriad professional roles, increasing workloads and role ambiguity in their role responsibilities (Freeman and Coll, 1997), school counselors can be particularly susceptible to experiencing burnout (Paton and Goddard, 2003; Rutter, 2007). In addition, lack of understanding and insight among administrators, teachers and parents towards guidance and counseling services, the roles and the responsibilities of the counselors create conflict among school counselors, which causes burnout (Doğan, 1998).

Freudenberger (1980) defined burnout as a state of fatigue or frustration resulting from having failed to produce the expected reward. Maslach and Jackson (1982) described burnout as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and lack of personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals working with people. According to Pines and Aronson (1988), burnout is a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion, caused by long-term involvement into situations that are emotionally demanding.

In many studies, it has been stressed that counselor burnout is inevitable. If counselors are vulnerable to burnout because of their myriad professional roles and

functions within school systems, some intervention and prevention techniques should be used to decrease level of burnout. Some research studies related to counselors' burnout have proposed some strategies to intervene or prevent burnout. Some of them are clinical supervision (Agnew *et al.*, 2000; Crutchfield and Borders, 1997), peer consultation and supervision (Benshoff and Paisley, 1996; Benshoff, 1992; Borders, 1991) and social support (Haddad, 1998; Ross *et al.*, 1989; Clark, 1995).

As it was mentioned earlier supervision can be used to decrease stress and burnout and to develop professional and personal skills for job and life satisfaction. For example, one of the studies was conducted by Agnew *et al.* (2000). The purpose of their study was to assess the effects of clinical supervision on school counselors. They found that the participants had positive counseling skills, professional gains and personal gains and also the counselors in the peer group clinical supervision program had high job satisfaction and significantly low burnout levels. Furthermore, Werstlein (2001) mentioned that supervision groups provide an opportunity to counselors to experience mutual support, share common experiences, solve complex tasks, learn new behaviors, participate in skills training, increase interpersonal competencies and increase insight. Butler and Constantine (2006) examined Web-based peer supervision group in increasing school counselor trainees' collective self-esteem and written case conceptualization ability. Results showed that school counselor trainees who participated in a Web-based peer supervision group reported significantly higher collective

self-esteem and case conceptualization skills than did school counselor trainees who did not participate in Web-based peer supervision. As a result, these studies showed that practicing supervision to the counselor provide a strong positive impact on their personal and professional growth and development and life and job satisfaction.

However, according to Agnew *et al.* (2000) Two peer group, clinical supervision programs have been described and tested in the literature: Borders (1991) Systematic Peer Group Supervision and Benschoff and Paisley (1996) Structured Peer Consultation Model for School Counselors. There are few studies on the effect of supervision on school counselors (Agnew *et al.*, 2000). In addition, in the literature there are few study that mentioned importance of supervision and social support to decrease burnout of school counselors, in Turkey researchers have devoted no attention on this topic. Even, there was no study on this topic. Therefore, in order to pay attention on supervision and effectiveness of peer supervision on counselor burnout, this study was conducted.

A review of the literature reveals that there has been limited focus on supervision with counselors. In addition in Turkey there is no study on it. These investigations have tended to work on effectiveness of supervision on counselors' burnout in Turkey. This study describes effectiveness of peer supervision program on school counselors' burnout. Also, it discusses their perspectives on how the support they gained during participation in peer group supervision decreased burnout level.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants: Out of 102 school counselors, 55 counselors who work in central schools of Gaziantep city, Turkey agreed to participate in this study voluntarily in 2003. The Maslach Burnout Inventory was administered in counselors' annual meeting to select the participants for the study. The ages of the sampling ranged from 23 to 36 years old. The sample group consisted of 23 (41%) males and 32 (59%) females. Out of 55 counselors, 33 (61%) were single, 21 (38%) were married and 1 (1%) was divorced. The mean length of counseling experience was 3.6 years. As for the type of schools where they worked, 54 counselors (98%) were from public schools and one person (2%) was from a private institution. Out of 55 counselors, 50 (91%) counselors graduated from the department of guidance and counseling, 1 (2%) graduated from the department of psychology and 4 (7%) graduated from other departments of educational sciences. Forty five (82%) of the counselors worked alone, 5 (9%) worked with one other counselor and 5 (9%) worked with two other counselors in their schools.

Participants who were involved in the study completed the Maslach Burnout Inventory as a pre-test and then, the collected data was analyzed. The mean scores of the counselors in the dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment were calculated ($M = 19.89$, $SD = 6.44$ for emotional exhaustion; $M = 6.04$, $SD = 2.63$ for depersonalization; $M = 16.36$, $SD = 3.59$ for personal accomplishment). Then, 19 counselors who had higher scores than the mean scores in the dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment were selected. Eight (4 females and 4 males) of the 19 counselors who had mutual spare time on the same day and hour agreed to participate in the Structured Peer Consultation Program as the experimental group. The remaining 11 counselors were selected as the control group and they did not receive any treatment. At the end of the study, only 8 (5 females and 3 males) counselors in the control group completed the Maslach Burnout Inventory as a post-test. The participants in the experimental group interacted with each other only during the training sessions; they did not see each other after the sessions.

The demographic data about the participants in the experimental and control groups were as follows: they worked in public high schools; they graduated from the department of guidance and counseling; the ages of the sample group ranged from 23 to 33 years old; the mean of experience as a counselor was 3.25 in the experimental group and 3.75 in the control group.

Instrumentation: Maslach Burnout Inventory was used to assess the burnout level of the counselors. It was originally developed by Maslach and Jackson (1982). The Maslach Burnout Inventory is a 22-item instrument, which is a 5-point Likert type scale with the alternatives of always (5) and never (1). A score is calculated for both frequency and intensity for each of the three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment.

Maslach Burnout Inventory was designed specifically for the members of the helping professions. Specific items from each scale include: emotional exhaustion (I feel emotionally drained from my work), depersonalization (I feel I treat some recipients as if they were impersonal objects) and personal accomplishment (I deal very effectively with the problems of my recipients).

Cronbach alpha coefficients ranging from 0.71 to 0.90 for the three subscales were reported. The reliability coefficients for the subscales were the following: 0.90 for emotional exhaustion, 0.79 for depersonalization and 0.71

for personal accomplishment. Validity for the MBI has been established by correlation with peer ratings (Maslach and Jackson, 1982).

The adaptation study for the Turkish version of the scale was made by Ergin (1992). The study for validity and reliability was carried out on 297 nurses and 255 doctors. The internal reliability (Cronbach Alpha) was rated 0.83 for emotional exhaustion, 0.65 for depersonalization and 0.72 for personal accomplishment and the test-retest reliability was rated 0.83 for emotional exhaustion, 0.72 for depersonalization and 0.67 for personal accomplishment. The validity of the instrument was evaluated by using principal component analysis with varimax rotation. The result of the factor analysis was consistent with Maslach and Jackson (1982) study.

In this present study, internal consistency (Cronbach Alpha) for counselors ($n = 55$) was calculated. The internal reliability for subscales was rated as follows: 0.86 for emotional exhaustion, 0.70 for depersonalization and 0.72 for personal accomplishment.

Procedure: In this study, a pre-test and post-test control group design was used. At the beginning and at the end of the program, the Maslach Burnout Inventory was administered to the participants. While the program was applied to the experimental group, the control group did not receive any treatment.

Before the Structured Peer Consultation Program was applied, in order to integrate the program to Turkish culture the following procedures were carried out for the program. First, five experts in the counseling area reviewed the rationale and content of the original structured peer consultation model. It was found applicable for burnout study on counselors. The model was translated into Turkish by the researcher and an expert on English language. Then, five experts reviewed it again and the Turkish version of the model was finalized.

The cases which were used in the original model were not used for the present study because in this present study, the participants' feelings, behaviors and thoughts were explored according to the three dimensions of burnout; namely, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment. The cases requested from the participants were to be from their daily life or work situation based on their experience. Also, in the original model, the peers get together once a month but in this study, peers met once a week because a five-month time frame was not practical for this present study. Finally, the participants worked as a peer group, but not dyadically, because they were not familiar with this particular dyadic model. In this program the terms peer supervision and peer consultation were used

interchangeably to refer to the same process in which counselors consulted with their peers. Situations in which peers work together for mutual benefits are most often referred to as peer supervision in literature.

The Structured Peer Consultation Program, which originally came from the work of Benshoff and Paisley (1996) and was revised by Fallon and Lambert (1998) as the Revised Restructured Peer Consultation Model for School Counselors, was applied with some changes to school counselors working in schools in Gaziantep, Turkey. In this study following new procedure was applied to the participant. The applied program is a 5 session program in which counselors work together in a group, meeting for 90 min sessions every week. The program is based on the assumption that counselors can use their communication and problem-solving skills to help each other with critical feedback on counseling skills and decision-making skills. The researcher took facilitator role in the group process and before the program was started information was given about the process by the researcher. The sessions of the program include goal setting in the first session, presenting cases which create burnout for the counselor in session two and three and helping/coping strategies in session four. Lastly, session five includes the evaluation of the program and termination.

Orientation, background information and goal setting: In the first session, which included orientation, background information and goal setting, the participants were asked to set specific goals to work on during the program. These goals helped to provide a direction and a sense of purpose as the participants worked. The researcher requested the participants to bring in cases which caused burnout for him/her. Case presentations were conducted according to the three dimensions of burnout, which were emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment.

Case study presentations: The purpose of these sessions was to examine counselors' feelings, thoughts and behaviors, to provide support and to increase the realization level that they were not alone in their problems. In these sessions, the oral case presentations were made to explore feelings, thoughts and behaviors of the participants based on the three dimensions of burnout. The participants were encouraged to think of strategies on how to handle the cases of burnout.

Coping strategies: The purpose of this session was to share strategies to handle the burnout situation which was explained in the cases. Each participant explained his or her strategies about coping with the burnout or stress

situations they faced; specifically depending on the case studies presented. They also shared their general coping techniques, their feelings and thoughts.

Evaluation and termination: In the last session, peer consultants reviewed their individual progress in reaching the goals established in the first session. The participants also shared their expectations about the peer consultation process. They discussed any modifications or adaptations for the program, as well as the strategies for maintaining or enhancing the skills developed during the peer consultation process. Then, the participants orally presented their evaluation of the program and assessed each other as a peer and also themselves individually. Finally, the program was concluded (termination) with a brief summary of the all sessions.

RESULTS

One-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the significant treatment effects of the Structured Peer Consultation Program on the different dimensions of school counselor’s burnout, namely, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment.

The result of ANCOVA indicated that there was a significant difference between the experimental and control groups’ mean post-test scores on the dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment.

The mean difference between the post-test scores of the control and the experimental groups, which were adjusted according to the pre-test scores of both experimental and control groups on the dimension of

emotional exhaustion, was found to be significant ($F_{(1,13)} = 7.58, p<0.05$) (Table 1). The strength of the relationship between the treatment and the post-test score was strong ($\eta^2 = 0.36$). Furthermore, Table 1 shows that the mean difference was significant between the post-test scores of the control and experimental groups which were adjusted according to the pre-test scores of both experimental and control groups on the dimension of depersonalization ($F_{(1,13)} = 27.80, p<0.001$). The partial η^2 of 0.69 suggests a strong relationship between the treatment and post-test scores. Thus, there is a significant mean difference between the post-test mean scores of the control and experimental groups which were adjusted according to the pre-test mean scores of both the experimental and control groups on the dimension of personal accomplishment ($F_{(1,13)} = 29.02, p<0.001$). The strength of the relationship was found very strong between the treatment and the post-test score ($\eta^2 = 0.68$).

As shown in Table 2, the pre-test mean score for emotional exhaustion was 23.00 (SD = 6.54) in the experimental group and 24.37 (SD = 4.47) in the control group. The post-test mean score in the experimental group was 20.50 (SD = 6.30, adjusted post-test M = 21.11, SD = 0.79) and in the control group the post-test mean score was 24.87 (SD = 5.16, adjusted post-test M = 24.12, SD = 0.79).

As for depersonalization, the pre-test mean score was calculated as 7.75 (SD = 2.76) in the experimental group and as 9.37 (SD = 1.76) in the control group. In the experimental group the post-test mean score was calculated as 6.25 (SD = 1.75, adjusted post-test M = 6.60, SD = 0.54) and in the control group the post-test mean score for depersonalization was found to be 11.12 (SD = 1.80, adjusted post-test M = 10.61, SD = 0.57).

Table 1: The summary of ANCOVA comparing of the mean post-test scores of counselors for emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment in experimental and control group

Subscales of burnout	Source	df	Mean square	F	P	η^2
Emotional exhaustion	Pretest	1	401.73	82.72	0.000	0.864
	Groups	1	36.84	7.58	0.016*	0.369
	Error	13	4.85			
Depersonalization	Pretest	1	18.28	9.11	0.010	0.412
	Group	1	91.34	27.80	0.001***	0.691
	Error	13	5.28			
Personal accomplishment	Pretest	1	45.66	13.89	0.003	0.517
	Group	1	58.24	29.02	0.001***	0.681
	Error	13	2.00			

*. $p<0.05$; ***, $p<0.001$

Table 2: The mean and the standard deviation for pre-test and post-test scores

Subscales of burnout	Pretest				Posttest			
	Experimental		Control		Experimental		Control	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Emotional exhaustion	23.00	6.54	24.37	4.47	20.50	6.30	24.87	5.16
Depersonalization	7.75	2.76	9.37	1.76	6.25	1.75	11.12	1.80
Personal accomplishment	19.75	3.19	18.50	2.56	17.12	3.13	21.25	1.66

In the personal accomplishment dimension, the pre-test mean score in the experimental group was calculated as 19.75 (SD = 3.19) and the pre-test mean score in the control group was found to be 18.50 (SD = 2.56). After treatment, the post-test mean score in the experimental group was calculated as 17.12 (SD = 3.13, adjusted post-test M = 16.70, SD = 0.67) and the post-test score in the control group was found to be 21.25 (SD = 1.60, adjusted post-test M = 21.59, SD = 0.68).

To conclude, the results of ANCOVA indicated that ANCOVA's examining the treatment effects was significant on the dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment. It seems that there was a significant improvement in the experimental group's burnout level compared to the control group's burnout level.

DISCUSSION

The findings clearly indicated that peer supervision program was significantly effective on counselor burnout level. The subjects in the experimental group, who took the five week treatment, have improved in terms of their burnout level as compared to the control group. Baggerly and Osborn (2006) found that School counselors' participation in clinical supervision has predicted their career satisfaction, career commitment and self-efficacy. In addition, Agnew *et al.* (2000) found that the counselors had high job satisfaction and significantly low burnout level in the peer group clinical supervision program.

Also, during the 5 weeks the counselors using their counseling skills and decision making skills help each other how to cope with stressful events in their job. Bernard and Goodyear (2004) mentioned that receiving feedback from peers and hearing the feedback given to others has a positive impact on group members. Thus, peer group supervision offers participants an environment of support and safety in which they are able to ask questions, express common concerns, explore their thoughts and feelings. Sharing case material in a group setting can produce a sense of validation. Also, McMahon and Patton (2000) noted that they may use each other as sounding boards for clinical decision-making.

In this study participants stressed that after the peer supervision program, almost all the participants were reported to have received positive counseling skills, professional gains and personal gains. According to the feedback given by the counselors, the program was found helpful in decreasing their personal burnout level. All the participants agreed that they would like to participate in peer supervision again and that they would recommend

peer supervision to other school counselors. They also believed that peer supervision provided them with valuable support, ideas and encouragement and all agreed that it was a worthwhile experience. Also, case presentations were found to be very valuable by most of the counselors in the study. These Qualitative findings were consistent with the findings of the study by Benschhoff and Paisley (1996) and Crutchfield and Borders (1997). The study of Agnew *et al.* (2000) supported the present study findings, as well. Especially peer support was discovered to be more valuable than supervisor support (Bernard and Goodyear, 2004).

In addition, This is an experimental pre- and post-test control group study. It can provide more conclusive evidence of the benefits of systematic school counselor peer supervision program. This program is an innovative approach for school counselors to decrease burnout and to develop their counseling skills also; it has the potential of improving the quality of school-based counseling interventions in Turkey. Based on the findings, recommendations for future studies are as follows. First, this kind of studies and such peer supervision models should be encouraged to develop and implement for school counselors. Second, supervision needs of counselors are searched with a national survey. There is no study on it. Third, many different supervision models and techniques should be investigated on school counselors' personal and professional development and also career satisfaction. Lastly, the impact of supervision frequency, qualifications and format on personal and professional development and career satisfaction will be helpful in guiding supervisors and researchers while designing new studies.

REFERENCES

- Agnew, T., C.C. Vaught, H.G. Getz and J. Fortune, 2000. Peer group clinical supervision program fosters confidence and professionalism. *Professional School Counseling*, 4: 6-12.
- Baggerly, J. and D. Osborn, 2006. School Counselors' Career Satisfaction and Commitment: Correlates and Predictors. *Professional School Counseling*, 9: 197-205.
- Benschhoff, J.M., 1992. Peer consultation for professional counselors. Ann. Arbor. MI: ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Personnel Services. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED347476.
- Benschhoff, J.M. and P.O. Paisley, 1996. The structured peer consultation model for school counselors. *J. Counseling Dev.*, 74: 314-318.

- Bernard, J.M. and R.K. Goodyear, 2004. *Fundamentals of Clinical Supervision*. 3rd Edn., Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Borders, L.D., 1991. A systematic approach to peer group supervision. *J. Counseling Dev.*, 69: 248-252.
- Butler, S.K. and M.G. Constantine, 2006. Web-based peer supervision, collective self-esteem and case conceptualization ability in school counselor trainees. *Professional School Counseling*, 10: 146-152.
- Clark, A.J., 1995. Rationalization and the role of the school counselor. *School Counselor*, 42: 283-291.
- Crutchfield, L.B. and L.D. Borders, 1997. Impact of two clinical peer supervision models on practicing school counselors. *J. Counseling Dev.*, 75: 219-230.
- Doğan, S., 1998. Counseling in Turkey: Current status and future challenges. *The Education Policy Analysis*. Retrieved September 23, 2002 from <http://olam.ed.asu.edu/epaa>.
- Ergin, C., 1992. Burnout in Doctors and Nurses and Integration of Maslach Burnout Inventory. VII. National Psychology Symposium, Publication of Turkish Psychology Company: Ankara.
- Fallon, M.V. and L.C. Lambert, 1998. Revised structured peer consultation model for school counselors. 1997-1998, ASCA Research Grant Project.
- Fitch, T., E. Newby, V. Ballesterio and J.L. Marshall, 2001. Future school administrators' perceptions of the school counselor's role. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 41: 89-99.
- Freeman, B. and K.M. Coll, 1997. Factor structure of the role questionnaire (RQ): A study of high school counselors. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, 30: 32-39.
- Freudenberger, H.J., 1980. *The High Cost of High Achievement. Burnout*, New York.
- Haddad, A., 1998. Sources of social support among school counselors in Jordan and its relationship to burnout. *Int. J. Adv. Counseling*, 20: 113-121.
- Maslach, C. and E.S. Jackson, 1982. *Maslach Burnout Inventory Manual*. 2nd Edn., California: Consulting Psychologist Press.
- McMahon, M. and W. Patton, 2000. Conversations on clinical supervision: Benefits perceived by school counselors. *Br. J. Guidance Counseling*, 28: 339-351.
- Paisley, P.O. and H.G. McMahon, 2001. School counseling for the 21st century: Challenges and opportunities. *Professional School Counseling*, 5: 106-115.
- Paton, W. and R. Goddard, 2003. Psychological distress and burnout in Australian Employment service workers: Two years on. *J. Employment. Counseling*, 40: 15-17.
- Pines, A. and E. Aronson, 1988. *Career Burnout: Causes and Cures*. Free Press, New York.
- Ross, R.R., E.M. Altmaier and D.W. Russel, 1989. Job stress, social support and burnout among counseling center staff. *J. Counseling Psychol.*, 36: 464-470.
- Rutter, M.E., 2007. Group supervision with practicing school counselors. *Guidance and Counseling*, 21: 160-167.
- Werstlein, P.O., 2001. Fostering counselors' development in group supervision. Retrieved January 2, 2003 from <http://ericcass.uncg.edu/super/werstlein.html>.