

Support requirements and effects of supervision on telephone counsellors

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Abstract

The aim of this research was to examine the effects of the implementation of direct one-on-one supervision in a prominent telephone counselling organization and the support requirements of their telephone counsellors. Ninety-three telephone counsellors participated in this research. The results showed that more experienced telephone counsellors were more satisfied than less experienced telephone counsellors with the support offered by the organization. Furthermore, female telephone counsellors showed significantly more satisfaction with the support offered by the organisation than their male counterparts. Implications of these findings are discussed in relation to the organisation and other helping organisations within the wider community.

The telephone is proving to be an increasingly popular medium for providing counselling. This popularity is due to the telephone providing a less expensive, anonymous, control-giving and convenient alternative to face-to-face counselling (Reese, Conoley & Brossart, 2002). Furthermore, as an alternative to face-to-face counselling, it has several advantages. Telephone counselling has been identified as a useful form of support and encouragement in: (a) helping at-risk drinkers deal with their addiction (Kim, 1998), (b) reducing depression and increasing social and mental health and self-esteem in patients with minor depression (Lynch, Tamburrino & Nagel, 1997), and in (c) significantly increasing smoking cessation rates (Lichtenstein, Glasgow, Lando & Ossip-Klein, 1996).

There are numerous telephone counselling organizations throughout Australia providing both general and specialized services through paid and volunteer staff. The focus of this study is one telephone organization that recently implemented a process of direct one-to-one supervision of the volunteer counsellors by a senior member of staff.

Effects of Supervision - Level of Experience of Supervisee

Supervision in the counselling domain plays an integral role in counsellor development (Borders & Usher, 1992), counsellor education (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998) and promotion of trainee skill development in understanding and managing client-counsellor interactions (Barletta & Fuller, 2002; Sternitzke, Nixon & Ponterotto, 1988). Due to the critical nature of the supervisory relationship in a counsellor's development, the quality of supervision is important for the supervisee's growth and development (McMahon, 2002).

The supervisory relationship has been shown to be significantly affected by the level of experience of the supervisees with less experienced counsellors often requiring more

support and guidance in the initial stages of their development as counsellors (Kraus & Allen, 1988; Worthington & Stern, 1985). This is particularly relevant to the organisation that was examined, as its volunteer telephone counsellors have a vast range of experience. There have also been several studies that have focused on the effects of counsellor experience (Worthington & Stern, 1985; Rickards, 1984) with the general finding being that more experienced counsellors are more critical, and as a consequence, less satisfied with the supervisory relationship.

Supervisee's Perceptions of Supervision

Krause and Allen (1988) proposed that a supervisee's satisfaction towards the supervisory relationship was not based on what occurred in the supervisory session (i.e. what issues were discussed), but on more intangible attributes such as the supervisor's general style, theory and assumptions. Schiavone and Jessell (1988), using a sample of 86 masters level counselling education students across eight universities, found that supervisees' perceptions of their supervisors are dependent upon the subjective measures of perceived attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertness. Through their manipulation of perceived level of expertness in supervisors, Schiavone and Jessell found that those supervisors who were perceived to be "experienced" were rated more favourably and had greater influence than the "inexperienced" supervisors. The authors concluded that due to the subjective nature of the supervisor's perceived level of experience, supervisors should avoid behaviours, attitudes and appearances that do not convey professionalism and expertise.

Another important issue related to the supervisee's perceptions of the supervisor is power. Stoltenberg, McNeill, and Crethar (1995) observed that a supervisor's power is derived from expert and referent power where expert power is built from specific knowledge

and skills while referent power is derived from having had similar experiences to the supervisee. Although it is assumed that a person employed in a supervisory role within the organisation being examined has relevant training in that role, thus equating to some degree of expert power, the supervisor's referent power is more questionable because of his/her limited experience as a telephone counsellor. This raises the issue of whether telephone counsellors with more experience than the supervisor attribute adequate levels of both expert and referent power to the supervisor. In fact, it is predicted that more experienced telephone counsellors will be more critical and less likely to integrate suggestions made by the supervisor, will perceive the supervisor as having low levels of expert and referent power, and lower on trustworthiness than less experienced telephone counsellors.

Support for Counsellors

Baron and Cohen (1982) state that due to the nature of telephone counselling (i.e. lack of physical cues, unknown treatment outcome, strong performance pressures due to the one off nature of telephone counselling) can "lead to a heightened sense of frustration and disillusionment" (p508). They also noted that working overnight shifts, counselling in high intensity situations (i.e. crisis intervention), or a lack of self-efficacy towards counselling, which is common to volunteer counsellors, could magnify these feelings. All of these issues are directly relevant to the telephone counsellors within the organisation which was examined. In fact, exit questionnaires conducted by the organisation have identified a perceived lack of support from telephone counselling incumbents.

In addition, telephone counsellors struggle with other issues such as: high initial levels of ambiguity due to the limited amount of nonverbal information telephone counsellors

receive; time pressures to reach a solution; lack of opportunities for follow-up assessments of treatment success; and finally, the emotional intensity of the situations that telephone counsellors have to handle (Ross, Altmaier, & Russell, 1989). These specific stresses all apply to the telephone counsellors who were examined within the organisation. Furthermore, Mott (1975) highlights the discrepancy between the close supportive relationships that exist in the counselling training environment and the loneliness of the counselling position. As such, the more experienced counsellors can suffer symptoms which are synonymous with burnout (e.g. feeling tired, drained and jaded) due to their extended exposure to counseling.

Counselling and Burnout

Haddad (1998) states that people who work in occupations that provide services to other people are especially vulnerable to burnout. Burnout has been defined as a syndrome that is comprised of three factors such as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment which results from excessive amounts of work related stress (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Consequently, it could be argued in the present study that if there are not adequate levels of support in place within this organisation to help the telephone counsellors cope with work-related stresses, then there could be resulting levels of burnout within this telephone counselling community.

There have been numerous studies conducted on the relationship between social support and burnout (Kruger, Botman & Goodenow, 1991; Ross, et al., 1989; Russell, Altmaier & Van Velzen, 1987) with mixed results (Haddad, 1998). These studies generally support the negative relationship between social support and burnout that was established by Maslach and Jackson (1984) with research establishing a significant negative relationship

between family and colleague support (Haddad, 1998), high levels of co-worker support, increased counsellor experience, being male (Kruger, Botman & Goodenow, 1991), being single and a receiving adequate levels of supervisor support (Ross, Altmaier & Russell, 1989), with the dimensions of burnout.

Effect of Level of Experience on Counsellor Stress/Burnout

Experience plays an important role in counsellor emotional exhaustion, with younger counsellors being more susceptible than older counsellors (Ross, et al., 1989). This is due to the beginning counsellor being unfamiliar with the job role and suffering stress as a result of this ambiguity while, in contrast, more experienced counsellors may develop more realistic expectations, which, in turn, helps to reduce possible emotional over involvement with clients (Kruger, et al., 1991).

In a study of 40 telephone counsellors, Bobevski and McLennan (1998) suggested that a significant stressor to telephone counsellors is the perceived inability to effectively control the client-counsellor interactions which are directed towards assisting the client. However, greater objectivity on the counsellor's behalf resulted in more effective counselling. This finding compliments the research on counsellor effectiveness being positively related to experience (Lambert, 1989) as it is logical to hypothesize that less experienced telephone counsellors would suffer more emotional involvement related stress than experienced counsellors who have had more time and opportunity to determine task-appropriate levels of emotional involvement with clients. Furthermore, if less experienced telephone counsellors suffer more stress, logically, they would need more support than their more experienced counterparts.

Given the critical role supervision plays in the growth and development of counsellors, the present study aims to determine firstly, the support required by telephone counsellors and secondly, their perceptions of their supervision needs within the organization. The following three hypotheses are to be addressed by the present study:

1. Less experienced telephone counsellors will express more satisfaction towards the supervisor than telephone counsellors with more experience. It is predicted that this will translate to less experienced telephone counsellors scoring more highly on the supervision component of the questionnaire.
2. Less experienced telephone counsellors will perceive the supervisor as having higher levels of expert and referent power than more experienced telephone counsellors. It is predicted that this will translate to less experienced counsellors rating the supervisor more highly on levels of perceived trustworthiness and expertness than more experienced counsellors.
3. Less experienced telephone counsellors will need more support than more experienced telephone counsellors. It is predicted that this will translate to less experienced counsellors scoring lower on the support component of the questionnaire than more experienced counsellors.

Method

The Organisation

The part of this organisational change that will be examined by this study, is the implementation of direct one-to-one supervision of the volunteer telephone counsellors,

which was conducted by a paid staff member. After approximately one-and-a-half-years (depending on the number of shifts attended) telephone counsellors become accredited. Accreditation has been deemed a requirement for all telephone counsellors by the national governing body of this organisation. In addition to fulfilling their shift requirements, telephone counsellors must also be deemed competent in areas pertinent to telephone counselling performance within the organisation. This competency assessment is a recent addition to the accreditation process within the organisation and is performed by the paid staff member who conducts the one-to-one supervision.

Participants

There were 267 telephone counsellors within this organisation with an age range of 20 to 76 years. However, as each telephone counsellor's availability may vary, it has been estimated by the organisation that approximately two thirds of the total telephone counsellors' community (i.e. approximately 175) would have had the opportunity to participate in the research within the data collection period.

A total of 93 telephone counsellors who were on the active roster at this organisation completed the questionnaire. There were a total of 18 males, 50 females and 25 unknowns with an age range of 20 to 76 years ($\underline{M} = 43.93$ years, $\underline{SD} = 14.90$ years). The participants ranged in their level of experience from 5 months to 30 years and 6 months ($\underline{M} = 3.09$ years, $\underline{SD} = 4.85$ years).

Instrument

A two-part questionnaire was specifically developed for this study to gather information from the volunteer counsellors on their support needs and their supervision requirements within the organization. The questionnaire was informed by previously constructed instruments (e.g., Supervisory Working Alliance Inventory, SWAI; Supervisory Styles Inventory, SSI; Supervisor Rating Form, SRF; Maslach Burnout Inventory, MBI) which, in part, were relevant to the present research but did not accurately consider the differences in the telephone counselling situation. Five experienced counselors who had worked with the organization for more than three years were also interviewed on their perceptions of the support and supervision needs of counsellors within the organization. The information obtained was collated into a series of themes. These themes, in combination with

the relevant literature and previously constructed questionnaires, formed the basis for the final two-part questionnaire. The first part of this questionnaire dealt with counsellor support needs and consisted of 15 statements. Responses were made by using a 6-point Likert format (1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agreed). Examples of items in the Support Needs part of the questionnaire included: "The organization provides adequate levels of support to enable me to do my job on the telephone."; "I feel acknowledged by the organization for what I have done well as a telephone counsellor." The second part of the questionnaire dealt with Counsellor Supervision Needs and consisted of nine statements, each of which asked respondents to rate on the basis of their perceptions of the issue and its importance to them. Once again, a 6-point Likert rating scale was used. Examples of items in his part of the questionnaire included: "I think receiving direct supervision is beneficial to me."; "My supervision session clarified certain areas of policy and procedure within the organization." In addition to the questions in each part of the questionnaire, three questions sought responses on such demographic information as age, gender, and level of telephone counselling experience.

The two-part questionnaire was then distributed to the experienced counsellors (mentioned previously) for their assessment on how well it measured their interview responses and to suggest any other changes that needed to be made to the questionnaire. This iterative process was conducted three times until all agreed that it captured the essence of the interview. The questionnaire was then presented to the organisation for approval and feedback, with alterations made to meet the organisation's needs.

Design

The fixed elements of supervision proposed by Worthington and Stern (1985), specifically the factors of age, gender and level of counselling experience of the telephone counsellors, were examined as independent variables in this research. Level of counselling experience was comprised of two levels: more and less experienced. It was decided that the cut-off between these groups should be based on whether the telephone counsellors had accumulated enough experience to be considered for accreditation by the organisation (i.e. approximately 18 months).

The extracted factors for each component of the questionnaire, namely 'organisational support', 'present and proposed future support', 'current training opportunities', 'importance of supervisory issues' and 'perceptions of supervisory issues' and additionally participants' mean scores on their perceptions of the supervisor as being trustworthy and experienced were analyzed as dependant variables.

Procedure

The completed questionnaire with a covering letter attached outlining the purpose of the study was placed in a common area which is frequented by counsellors when they are on shift with the organisation. Data collection continued for a period of approximately ten weeks.

Results

Two separate factor analyses were conducted on the two parts of the questionnaire. A Principal Axis Factoring was performed on questions 1 to 15, which comprised the 'support' part of the questionnaire. Through listwise deletion of cases, the total sample of 93 telephone counselors was reduced to 87 cases. This sample size is small but acceptable because there were at least five participants per question (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989). Three factors were extracted using the eigenvalue greater than 1 rule, based on the literature reviewed and the interviews conducted with the experienced counsellors. This three-factor solution explained 51.4% of the total variance.

The decision was made to obliquely rotate the factors based on the factors being related in the literature, the moderate correlation between the factors and ease of interpretability. An examination of the pattern matrix revealed that when a .3 factor loading cut-off was used seven questions loaded on the first factor, three questions loaded on the second factor, and three questions loaded on the third factor. Two questions had factor loadings of $< .03$ and were excluded from further analysis.

The first factor was defined as ‘organisational support’, the second factor was defined as ‘current training opportunities’ and the third factor was labeled ‘present and proposed future support’. Table 1 presents the statements and the associated loadings for each of the three factors.

Table 1: Factor analysis of the ‘Support’ part of the questionnaire

Question	Factor		
	Organisational Support	Training Opportunities	Present and Future Support
There is adequate support for me to do my job	.83		
The organisation is aware of my professional needs	.88		
The organisation is aware of my social needs	.84		
I feel acknowledged by the organisation	.68		
I feel connected to the organization	.49		
The SOC provides adequate support	.38		
Current support caters to less experienced counsellors	.35		
Current training caters for all levels of experience		.68	
Opportunities for skill development are diverse		.97	
There is adequate in-service		.79	
In-service should be compulsory			.61
Completing a feedback form is useful			.55
I think supervisors provide valuable support			.43

A Principal Axis Factoring was also performed on the nine questions which comprised the 'supervision' component of the questionnaire. Two factors were extracted using the eigenvalue greater than 1 rule and these factors explained 43.5% of the total variance.

The decision was made to obliquely rotate the factors based on the factors being related in the literature, the moderate correlation between the factors, and the ease of interpretability. Furthermore, an examination of the pattern matrix revealed that when a .3 factor loading cut-off was used all questions, except two, loaded on the first and second factors respectively.

The labelling of the two extracted factors for the 'supervision' is made relatively easy by part 'b' of the questions loading on factor 1 and part 'a' of the questions loading on factor 2. Part 'a' of these questions was designed to measure the telephone counsellor's perceptions of several issues pertinent to supervision, while part 'b' of the questions was designed to assess the perceived importance of these issues to the telephone counsellor. Consequently, factor 1 will be labeled 'importance of supervisory issues' and factor 2 as 'perceptions of supervisory issues' (see Table 2).

Table 2: Factor analysis of the ‘Supervision’ part of the questionnaire

Question	Factor	
	Importance of supervision	Perceptions of supervision
Perceived benefits of direct supervision		.46
Importance of direct supervision	.55	
Importance of receiving enough supervision	.61	
Perceived professionalism of supervision		.65
Importance of professional supervision	.76	
Perception that supervisors have had enough training		.71
Importance that supervisors have had enough training	.80	
Perception that supervision allows understanding		.62
Importance that supervision allows understanding	.57	
Perceived trustworthiness of supervisor		.70
Importance of trustworthiness of supervisor	.77	
Perceived experience of supervisor		.74
Importance of experience of supervisor	.65	
Importance of feeling assessed during supervision	.38	
Perceived clarity of policy and procedure after supervision		.61
Importance of clarify of policy and procedure after supervision	.35	

A Reliability analysis was also conducted on both components of the questionnaire omitting those questions that did not have a factor loading above .3. The results revealed a $\alpha = .87$ for the support component and $\alpha = .89$ for the supervision component.

Six one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted using the mean factor scores (see Table 3) to determine the importance of each individual predictor and also to test each relevant hypothesis.

Table 3

Mean Factor Scores and Standard Deviations for Each Extracted Factor

Independent Variables	Extracted Factors				
	1	2	3	4	5
Gender					
Male	4.76 (0.80)	4.35 (1.04)	4.18 (0.89)	4.99 (0.72)	4.95 (0.61)
Female	4.74 (0.85)	4.53 (1.06)	4.66 (0.92)	5.32 (0.69)	5.01 (0.80)
Age					
20-29	4.94 (0.99)	4.83 (0.73)	4.62 (1.17)	5.57 (0.43)	5.27 (0.42)
30-39	4.53 (0.84)	4.33 (1.37)	4.41 (0.89)	5.48 (0.32)	4.99 (0.57)
40-49	4.96 (0.48)	4.64 (1.23)	4.71 (0.91)	5.25 (0.64)	4.94 (0.87)
50-59	4.47 (0.91)	4.36 (0.99)	4.37 (0.90)	5.18 (0.64)	4.77 (0.95)
60 and over	4.99 (0.79)	4.29 (0.88)	4.73 (0.76)	4.79 (0.81)	5.24 (0.62)
Level of Experience					
< 20 months	4.84 (0.77)	4.59 (1.03)	4.46 (0.99)	5.16 (0.78)	5.01 (0.82)
> 20 months	4.66 (0.87)	4.39 (1.13)	4.70 (0.78)	5.29 (0.64)	5.02 (0.68)

NB. Factor 1 = Organisational Support; Factor 2 = Training Opportunities; Factor 3 = Present & Future Support; Factor 4 = Importance of Supervision; Factor 5 = Perceptions of Supervision. Scores ranged from: 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree.

The first ANOVA tested each of the independent variables (age, telephone counselling level of experience and gender) and used the 'importance of supervision' component of the questionnaire as the dependent variable. No significant differences were found for age, $F(4, 67) = 1.18, p > .05$; experience, $F(1, 67) = 0.69, p > .05$, and gender, $F(1, 67) = 0.37, p > .05$. The second ANOVA conducted used the 'perceptions of supervision' component of the questionnaire as the dependent variable, and again, the results for age, $F(4,$

67) = 1.27, $p > .05$; experience, $F(1, 67) = 0.02$, $p > .05$, and gender, $F(1, 67) = 1.07$, $p > .05$ were not significant. Hence, Hypothesis 1 which proposed that less experienced telephone counsellors will express more satisfaction towards the supervisor than telephone counsellors with more experience was not supported.

The third ANOVA was used to specifically assess Hypothesis 2 that less experienced telephone counsellors will perceive the supervisor as having higher levels of expert and referent power than more experienced telephone counsellors. Non-significant results were obtained for questions on *trustworthiness of the supervisor* ($F(1, 61) = 0.03$, $p > .05$) and *expertness of the supervisor* ($F(1, 61) = 0.41$, $p > .05$) on the supervision component of the questionnaire. The results demonstrated that there was no significant difference between less and more experienced telephone counsellors' ratings of a supervisor's perceived expertness and trustworthiness.

The fourth ANOVA used the 'organisational support' component of the questionnaire as the dependent variable. Significant results were obtained for the gender by telephone counselling level of experience interaction, $F(1, 67) = 4.58$, $p = .04$, which lends partial support to Hypothesis 3. However, simple comparisons revealed no significant difference between the groups (i.e., more experienced & less experienced counsellors).

The fifth ANOVA used the training component of the questionnaire as the dependent variable. No significant results were obtained, highlighting that there were no significant differences between the age ($F(4, 67) = 0.29$, $p > .05$), gender $F(1, 67) = 0.58$, $p > .05$), or level of counselling experience, $F(1, 67) = 0.14$, $p > .05$).

The sixth ANOVA used the present and proposed future support component of the questionnaire as the dependent variable. Significant results were found for gender, $F(1, 67) =$

9.06, $p = .004$, showing that females scored more highly on this component of the questionnaire than males. Telephone counsellor level of experience was also borderline significant, $F(1, 67) = 4.05$, $p = .05$, with more experienced telephone counsellors scoring more highly on this component of the questionnaire than less experienced telephone counsellors did, thus demonstrating support for Hypothesis 3.

Discussion

The aim of this research was to examine the effectiveness of a recent organisational change within a telephone counselling organisation, namely the implementation of direct supervision, and the effectiveness of the support structures currently provided by the organisation. This study found strong support for the constructed questionnaire used to assess the telephone counsellors within this organisation. The first hypothesis, that less experienced telephone counsellors would have higher levels of satisfaction with direct supervision than more experienced telephone counsellors, was not supported. The second hypothesis, that less experienced telephone counsellors will rate the supervisor higher on levels of perceived expertness and trustworthiness than more experienced telephone counsellors, was also not supported. The third hypothesis, that less experienced telephone counsellors will express less satisfaction with the support provided by the organisation than more experienced telephone counsellors, was partially supported.

The partial support for the third hypothesis was established in two findings. Firstly, it was found that more experienced telephone counsellors were more satisfied than less experienced telephone counsellors with the current and proposed future support offered by

the organisation. Secondly, it was found that the relationship with satisfaction for the organisation's support and level of telephone counselling experience was moderated by gender. Specifically, more experienced male telephone counsellors were more highly satisfied than less experienced male telephone counsellors, but less experienced female telephone counsellors were more highly satisfied than more experienced female telephone counsellors. These two findings further strengthen previous research conducted on the relationship between counsellor experience and support (Kruger, et al., 1991).

An important finding that was not hypothesized in this study was that female telephone counsellors showed significantly more satisfaction than males towards the present and proposed future support offered by the organisation. This gender effect adds partial support to previous research conducted in the counselling burnout domain where men are more likely to suffer burnout than women (Russell, et al., 1987).

While the significant effect of level of experience in the 'present and proposed future support' component of the questionnaire was both logical and well supported by previous research, the significant interaction in the 'organisational support' component was not. This finding has complex implications for the organisation. It could be argued that as telephone counsellors gain experience they, in turn, gain a greater appreciation and satisfaction of the organisational support provided (Griffin, Patterson, & West, 2001). Alternatively, as counsellors gain a greater understanding of their domain, they could, in turn, become aware of areas in which they are inadequately supported by the organisation and thus feel less satisfied as a result. What makes this complex is the finding that male telephone counsellors gain satisfaction with experience while females lose it. Further adding to this confusion is the finding that female telephone counsellors were significantly more satisfied than males

towards the present and proposed future support provided by the organisation. This suggests that there is something specific about the 'organisational support' that is less satisfying to more experienced female telephone counsellors.

These lower scores from the more experienced female telephone counsellors do partially support the findings of Kruger, et al. (1991), who found a gender effect for burnout for females. These lower scores could be a reflection of the negative aspects of volunteering presented by Field and Johnson (1993), or could be a reflection of the telephone counsellors' symptoms of burnout (e.g. feeling tired, drained and jaded) which ties into the work by Kruger, et al. (1991) who concluded that high levels of burnout could distort perceptions of support. Therefore lower scores by more experienced female telephone counsellors could be due to the counsellors being in the initial stages of burnout.

The significant effect of gender on satisfaction towards present and proposed future support is an intriguing result. This finding could be due to the gender imbalance within the telephone counselling community. The male telephone counsellors could be dissatisfied with being members of a minority group and possibly feel under represented in relation to the present and proposed future support offered by the organisation. Alternatively, it could be argued that, stereotypically, counselling is viewed as a female role, and therefore males entering the profession would be primed to expect a gender imbalance. Maslach and Jackson (1985) conclude from their research on gender related differences in burnout that women have more advanced coping strategies in dealing with 'people-work' related stress. This could explain why female counsellors were more highly satisfied with the present and proposed future support offered by the organisation. These support structures, in tandem with their own stress management strategies, could be more effective in dealing with telephone

counselling-related stress than their male counterparts. This result may highlight to the organisation the need for a work related, stress management strategy targeted at male telephone counsellors.

The lack of support for the first hypothesis, namely there was no difference between levels of telephone counsellor satisfaction towards supervision as a function of level of experience, is in contrast to previous research (Worthington & Stern, 1985). It could be that the instrument developed was not sensitive enough to adequately measure any true differences between the two groups, however the factor and reliability analyses conducted lend support to the instrument's validity and reliability. Alternatively, the supervisor could have altered his/her style of supervision in accordance with the telephone counsellor's level of experience, as was proposed by Stoltenberg, et al. (1995). The supervisor could have adopted a more formal, teacher-based approach with less experienced telephone counsellors, and used a less structured and more peer-based approach with the more experienced telephone counsellors. Despite the lack of difference between groups the result is positive for the organisation as it displays high levels of satisfaction towards direct supervision across the telephone counselling community as was echoed by the lack of support for the second hypothesis.

These findings have implications for support structures within the organisation examined. It may be necessary to have specific support structures targeted towards males or the less experienced telephone counsellors. The organisation may also need to consider that more experienced female telephone counsellors may be more prone to burnout and therefore need specific interventions compared to the more experienced male telephone counsellors. Mack, Nelson, and Quick (1998) propose one such intervention. They highlight how

organisations can help reduce the stress experienced by staff through education and training on stress which enables staff to work their own way through stressful situations.

Alternatively, the organisation could implement strategies which focus on providing intrinsic rewards, as this has been shown to significantly increase worker satisfaction in workers who value intrinsic rewards (Clark, 1996).

When interpreting these results it is also important to consider that this research was conducted in an applied setting. Due to this, many possible influencing variables could not be controlled by the first author and could have influenced participants' responses. One of these influencing variables could have been a large scale organisational change that occurred during the middle of data collection. This change could have influenced members of the telephone counselling community differently and thus influenced their responses to the questionnaire.

Further limiting this study was the use of single item measures used to assess perceived expertness and trustworthiness. The choice of a less time consuming questionnaire comprising a smaller number of items, was made to increase response rates and to allow factor analyses of the newly developed questionnaire. Additionally, due to the less than optimal sample size the power of subsequent statistical analyses was reduced, limiting the significant findings that could be obtained. Even with this constrained sample size, strong factor analytic support was obtained for the constructed questionnaire.

Future research could examine the applicability and development of the constructed questionnaire. Obviously, due to the specific nature of the organisation which was examined, certain items would not be relevant to other telephone counselling organisations. However, it would be of interest to see if the remaining items did generalise to outside organisations due

to the expanding demand and aforementioned advantages of telephone counselling. Further research could also explore the specific finding of interest from this research, namely the gender by telephone counsellor level of experience interaction, assessing the robustness of this finding.

In summary, it was found that firstly, more experienced telephone counsellors were more satisfied than less experienced telephone counsellors with the present and proposed future support offered by the organisation. Secondly, it was found that the relationship between satisfaction with support offered by this organisation and level of telephone counselling experience is moderated by gender. Finally, it was found that female telephone counsellors showed significantly more satisfaction than male telephone counsellors towards the present and proposed future support offered by the organisation. These findings provide valuable feedback to this organisation which is reliant upon volunteers to continue its service to the community, and highlights how members of the telephone counselling community react differently to the specific support structures offered by the organisation.

NB. The first author completed this research while studying at The University of Queensland.

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