

Perceived availability and efficacy of in-school prevention programs: Association with school
counselor well-being

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Abstract

School counselors are at risk of burnout, stress, and poor job satisfaction because of high caseloads and perceived lack of support in the form of school-wide programs. This study examined the relationship between school counselor perceptions of availability and efficacy of in-school bullying and substance abuse prevention programs and the positive and negative emotions, accomplishment, and engagement they experience in the workplace. A total of 814 school counselors completed an online questionnaire about perceived availability and efficacy of bullying and substance abuse programs and their own positive emotions, negative emotions, engagement, and accomplishment of their workplace experiences. The study found that positive emotion was significantly associated with the perceived availability of bullying prevention and substance abuse prevention programs, such that school counselors perceiving more availability of these programs reported more positive emotions related to their work. A significant relationship between availability of programs and negative emotions, engagement, and accomplishment was not supported.

Introduction

School counselors are an important figure in the American school system. Augustine (2016) describes their job to involve the relations and interactions between students and their school environment with the expressed purpose of reducing the effect of environmental, institutional and familial barriers that impede students' academic success. A school counselor's main objective is to provide assistance to students; whether it be with college applications, issues at home, bullying etc. Collins (2014) describes school counselors as "a well-positioned resource to reach the significant number of children and adolescents with mental health problems" (Collins, 2014). According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, in a given year, approximately 13 to 20 percent of children experience a mental disorder; many times school counselors are the closest resource for these school-age children (CDC, 2013). School counselors hold a very important responsibility of helping students and they need more support in this sometimes daunting task.

Unfortunately, one of the negative aspects of being a school counselor is the potential for burnout. Burnout is defined as the physical or emotional hardship that develops as a result of helping others (Mullen, Blount, Lambie & Chae, 2018). Along with being academic counselors they are being tasked with listening and helping students with difficult emotions, hostile behavior, hopelessness etc. and these aspects of the job can take a toll. Burnout is a serious risk for mental health professionals. Issues such as large client caseloads and unhappiness with their job effectiveness, 21 to 67 percent of school counselors may experience high levels of burnout (Kim & Lambie, 2018). In addition to burnout, 21 to 48 percent of these professionals report high levels of emotional exhaustion and school counselors can be specifically at risk for burnout because of the demands placed on them (Kim & Lambie, 2018). Burnout symptoms can include

depersonalization, fatigue, and feeling hopeless (Kim & Lambie, 2018). Prevention of burnout can come from having more resources for school counselors. Kim and Lambie describe issues such as negative job perception and insufficient resources to increase the likelihood of school counselors' reporting feelings of burnout. More resources, such as programs that aim to prevent problems such as bullying before they are seen by the counselor, for school counselors can improve their mental health and the outlook they have on their job.

It is also important to consider school counselor health from a strengths based approach, not only focusing on negative outcomes such as burnout, but also understanding how to foster a sense of well-being. Well-being can be defined as a feeling of happiness, satisfaction, gratification with one's life experiences and responsibilities (Augustine, 2016). In one's work this can be shown as their sense of belonging and achievement. Well-being is multidimensional feeling about one's life and the better the well-being, as described, the better one will feel about their life being comfortable and happy. Augustine (2016) completed a study on the factors of psychological well-being amongst school counselors and found that to help school counselor well-being, there is a big need for social and work supports (Augustine, 2016). Findings from this study identified school resources and social supports of colleagues and administration as vital for improving school counselors' positive feelings about their work and work environment. Thus it is possible, that schools with greater resources and supports such as programs for preventing school bullying and substance use; this could lead to more manageable caseloads and supports for school counselors. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to determine examined the relationship between school counselor perceptions of availability and efficacy of in-school bullying and substance abuse prevention programs and the positive and negative emotions, accomplishment, and engagement they experience in the workplace.

Bullying Prevention

The varying availability and efficacy of in school programs to support students could have an impact on school counselor well-being. A deeply troublesome and all too common part of school for students is bullying. Almost one out of every four students in the United States reports being bullied (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015). School counselors have the responsibility of being a resource to these bullied students and the bullies themselves (Bowllan, 2011). With bullying being such a prevalent aspect in schools, programs designed to decrease bullying and help student victims of bullying may help ease the workload of school counselors. An example of a program is the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP). During this one-year intervention, the researchers found that there were statistically significant findings for 7th grade female students who received 1 year of the OBPP. This included prevalence of bullying and exclusion by peers (Bowllan, 2011). Though the intervention seemed to work for the 7th grade female student population, results concerning males in 6th through 8th grade and females in 6th and 8th grade were not consistent. In an evaluation of 100 school bullying intervention programs researchers found that 19 to 20 percent of school-bullying is reduced by effective anti-bullying programs and reduce bullying victimization by approximately 15 to 16 percent (Gaffney et al, 2019). Programs cannot prevent all bullying in schools, but these examples show the promising effects for preventing bullying. Thus, it is possible that in addition to helping prevent student bullying, such programs may also help reduce the caseload of school counselors, a vital role in the school.

Substance Use Prevention

There is a plethora of substance prevention and intervention programs in American schools. Many of these programs see successful in preventing students from using illegal drugs

as well as legal prescription drug abuse. School counselors work with students who may be using drugs, alcohol, or tobacco (Ryzin & Roseth, 2018). This counseling can be a particularly trying task because of the stigma and legal consequences of this issue. According to the Centers for Disease Control and the National Institute of Drug Abuse (2016), one in five teens have abused prescription medications, 21 percent have tried marijuana by 12th grade and 20 percent have binged alcohol by 12th grade. Many programs tell of the dangers of using illicit drugs and alcohol, especially at such a young age. Ryzin & Roseth reviewed (2018) prevention programs in 15 schools in the Pacific Northwest and concluded that there was a significant reduction in use by using conventional prevention methods and also using peer mediators. In sum, prevention programs can work to prevent drug and alcohol use, and it is possible that such programs will also help reduce the caseload of school counselors.

The Current Study

This study is needed because school counselors are such an important figure in a school setting for students. They are at risk for burnout and it is important to understand how a school can prevent it. One such possibility is perceived efficacy and availability of prevention programs to help the counselors in their day-to-day work. If a program is perceived to be effective, it is possible that the overall amount of caseloads and responsibilities would decrease to a more manageable amount. This manageable amount may relieve stress and it is also hypothesized that positive perceptions of availability and efficacy of school programs to support students will demonstrate a positive and significant relationship with school counselor well-being. Therefore, this study explores if school counselor well-being is associated with perceived availability and efficacy of in-school programs to support students. It is hypothesized that positive perceptions of availability and efficacy of in-school prevention programs such as bullying and substance abuse

programs are significantly related to positive perceptions of workplace experiences; the positive emotions, negative emotions, engagement, and accomplishment of the counselor in the workplace.

Methods

Participants

A nationwide anonymous online questionnaire was distributed using a school counselor professional association listserv. A total of 814 participants consented into the study, of which 617 completed the primary measures of this study and were included as the final analytic sample. Of this sample, 84% of participants identified as female, 16% identified as male, and none of the participants identified as another gender. A total of 96% of the participants identified as school counselors while the other 4% identified as either retired or working in professions aligned to school counseling (e.g., Dean of Guidance, Counselor Specialist, Student Services Coordinator, School Social Worker, etc). The mode of the participant's years of working was 5-10 years. Regarding ethnicity, participants self-identified as white (n=690; 80%), (n=6, 0.01%) as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, (n=69, .08%) as Black or African American, (n=9, .01%) as Asian, (n=15, .02%) as American Indian or Alaskan Native, and (n=25, .03%) as other.

Procedure

This study uses a secondary dataset from a larger study examining school counselor perceptions about professional actualization and mental health services. Researchers sent an email to members of a school counseling listserv with an invitation to complete an online questionnaire. The recruitment email contained a link to informed consent procedures and an anonymous, self-report questionnaire. The anonymous online questionnaire was distributed to

over 15,000 school counselors through email. This study was reviewed and approved by the institutional review board of the first author's university.

Measures

Authoritarian School Climate Survey (ASCS).

This study uses the Authoritative School Climate Survey (ASCS) (Cornell, 2016) to measure personal experiences in the school in terms of quality and character of life within the school. The study used items pertaining to school program effectiveness. Respondents were instructed to rate the availability and effectiveness of each of the in-school programs by selecting from the following response options: "Don't have it;" "I don't know if we have it," "Not effective," "Somewhat effective," "Moderately effective," "Very effective," or "I don't know how effective it is." Accordingly, responses were coded into two separate variables: availability of program ("yes" indicating program is available, regardless of efficacy and "no" or "don't have it"), excluding responses of "I don't know"; and perceived efficacy of program, from 0 "Not effective," 1 "Somewhat effective," 2 "Moderately effective," to 3 "Very effective."

Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Achievement (PERMA).

The PERMA questionnaire is a validated questionnaire examining positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, achievement with adequate psychometric properties. This study uses the means of the following pillars as a proxy for well-being: positive emotion, negative emotion, engagement, and accomplishment. These subscales pertain to how positive professionals feel at work, how negative they feel about themselves and their job, how adequate they feel to accomplish their job, and how engaged they are in their work. The scale for these questions go from 0 (never) to 10 (always). Using these measures, the study can gain a better

insight on how the school counselors feel about themselves, their co-workers, their work environment, and the work that they do.

Results

To examine the relationships between perceived availability of bullying prevention and substance abuse prevention programs at schools with school counselors' perceived positive emotions, engagement, accomplishments, and negative emotions independent-samples t-test were run. Specifically, the independent variable was whether or not school counselors reported having a bullying prevention in place. School counselors that reported having bullying prevention programs in their schools (N=418) were significantly more likely to report higher scores on the positive emotions pillar, (M=7.35, SD=1.44), $t(496) = -3.29$, $p = .001$, compared to school counselors reporting no bullying programs (N=89). Results were not statistically significant for engagement, (M=7.65, SD=1.34), $t(496) = -1.69$, $p = .093$, accomplishment (M=7.83, SD=1.22), $t(496) = -1.42$, $p = .157$, or negative emotions (M=3.47, SD=1.79), $t(496) = 1.96$, $p = .051$.

Next, an independent-samples t-test was run to examine the relationship between perceived availability of substance abuse prevention programs and school counselor positive emotions, negative emotions, engagement and accomplishment within the workplace. With school counselors that reported bullying prevention programs in their school, N=295, there was statistical significance with positive emotions, (M=7.39, SD=1.49), $t(494) = -2.46$, $p = .014$. There was not statistical significance with engagement, (M=7.69, SD=1.37), $t(494) = -1.66$, $p = .097$. Accomplishment was also not statistically significant, (M=7.87, SD=1.23), $t(494) = -1.78$, $p = .076$. Lastly, negative emotions were not statistically significant with substance abuse prevention programs with (M=3.48, SD=1.80), $t(494) = .641$, $p = .522$.

To examine perceived efficacy of bullying and substance abuse prevention programs and the school counselor's positive emotions, negative emotions, accomplishment, and engagement in the workplace a bivariate Pearson correlations were conducted (see Table 1 for correlation matrix). Positive emotions were significantly correlated with bullying prevention efficacy ($r=.30$, $p<.001$) and with substance abuse prevention efficacy with ($r=.28$, $p<.001$). Engagement was significantly correlated with bullying prevention efficacy ($r=.18$, $p<.001$) and with substance abuse prevention efficacy ($r=.17$, $p=.005$). Accomplishment was correlated with bullying prevention efficacy ($r=.28$, $p<.001$) and with substance abuse prevention efficacy ($r=.21$, $p=.001$). Negative emotions were correlated with bullying prevention efficacy ($r=-.12$, $p=.020$) and with substance abuse prevention efficacy ($r=.18$, $p=.004$).

Discussion

In this investigation, we explored school counselors' relationship between their perceived availability and efficacy of school bullying and substance abuse prevention programs with school counselor positive emotion, negative emotion, engagement, and accomplishment within the workplace. In this current study, school counselors answered questions about their experiences in their school; how joyful, angry, anxious, etc. they felt as well as how much support they perceived in their school, with programs and other staff.

We found a statistically significant correlation between the school counselors' positive emotions with the availability of these two in-school programs while engagement, accomplishment, and negative emotions were not statistically significant to the perceived availability of bullying and substance abuse prevention programs. Previous studies discussed the importance of well-being among school counselors as well as the prevention of burnout so they can successfully do their job (Kim & Lambie, 2018). Burnout, as described, is the emotional,

mental, and physical exhaustion caused by excessive stress, usually at a place of work (Collins, 2014). Burnout can lead to a deteriorated well-being. Therefore, having a good perceived support system for school counselors such as in-school prevention programs can greatly help their well-being within the workplace.

We also explored the relationship between perceived efficacy of bullying and substance abuse prevention program and school counselor report of positive emotions, engagement, accomplishment, and negative emotions as they relate to their work and found them all to be statistically significant. This finding indicates that school counselors have more positive emotions in the workplace and positive feelings about their work when there is higher perceived efficacy of in-school programs.

Findings from the current study indicated the presence of positive emotions about the workplace among school counselors when there are bullying and substance abuse prevention programs available in their schools. This increase of positive emotions is vital for the school counselor and their fight against burnout and to support their well-being because stress and a lack of support are the huge cause for counselor burnout (Mullen et al, 2018). The other variables of negative emotions, accomplishment, and engagement are important with preventing burnout and helping well-being and further research needs to be conducted to find ways of improving these among school counselors.

Implications

The practical implication of this study is to show support for the need of prevention programs for schools. When programs are used and they are perceived to be helping then it brings about positive emotions among the school counselors. They are better able to do their jobs.

Limitations

The limitations of this study lies in the self-report aspect of the questionnaire. There is no measure of actual efficacy of the prevention programs, but we relied on the perceptions of efficacy. More studies need to be done with the actual efficacy measured. This will provide more conclusive data.

Conclusion

This study explored the relationship between school counselors' and their well-being and of the availability and efficacy of bullying and substance abuse prevention programs. School counselor positive emotions were significantly related to report of availability of these programs, but negative emotions, engagement, and accomplishment were not found to be significant in this study. Positive emotion, negative emotion, engagement, and accomplishment were all significant with perceived efficacy of prevention programs. Burnout and stress are very likely to happen among school counselors which is detrimental to their well-being and their ability to conduct their job to the best of their abilities. The prevention of burnout and stress are vital to having effective school counselors and this study found part of the piece; the availability and efficacy of these prevention programs may be a promising way to support these professionals considering in the present study they significant with their positive emotions related to their work. Future studies should take this and determine the actual efficacy of prevention programs in a school and determine if these findings of positive emotion, negative emotion, engagement, and accomplishment are significant.

References

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Table 1

Correlations

		BullyAvail	SubAvail	BullyEffic	SubEffic	PositiveEmotionMean	EngagementMean	AccomplishmentMean	NegativeEmotionMean
BullyAvail	Pearson Correlation	1	.115 [*]	. ^b	.105	.146 ^{**}	.075	.064	-.088
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.012	.000	.096	.001	.093	.157	.051
	N	498	475	398	251	498	498	498	498
SubAvail	Pearson Correlation	.115 [*]	1	.155 ^{**}	. ^b	.110 [*]	.075	.080	-.029
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.012		.002	.000	.014	.097	.076	.522
	N	475	496	378	258	496	496	496	496
BullyEffic	Pearson Correlation	. ^b	.155 ^{**}	1	.357 ^{**}	.300 ^{**}	.181 ^{**}	.278 ^{**}	-.117 [*]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.002		.000	.000	.000	.000	.020
	N	398	378	398	212	398	398	398	398
SubEffic	Pearson Correlation	.105	. ^b	.357 ^{**}	1	.279 ^{**}	.174 ^{**}	.211 ^{**}	-.178 ^{**}
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.096	.000	.000		.000	.005	.001	.004
	N	251	258	212	260	260	260	260	260
PositiveEmotionMean	Pearson Correlation	.146 ^{**}	.110 [*]	.300 ^{**}	.279 ^{**}	1	.651 ^{**}	.619 ^{**}	-.468 ^{**}
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.014	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	498	496	398	260	544	544	544	544
EngagementMean	Pearson Correlation	.075	.075	.181 ^{**}	.174 ^{**}	.651 ^{**}	1	.450 ^{**}	-.200 ^{**}
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.093	.097	.000	.005	.000		.000	.000
	N	498	496	398	260	544	544	544	544
AccomplishmentMean	Pearson Correlation	.064	.080	.278 ^{**}	.211 ^{**}	.619 ^{**}	.450 ^{**}	1	-.373 ^{**}
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.157	.076	.000	.001	.000	.000		.000
	N	498	496	398	260	544	544	544	544
NegativeEmotionMean	Pearson Correlation	-.088	-.029	-.117 [*]	-.178 ^{**}	-.468 ^{**}	-.200 ^{**}	-.373 ^{**}	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.051	.522	.020	.004	.000	.000	.000	
	N	498	496	398	260	544	544	544	544