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The Effects of Role Stress Elements on Primary School Counselor's Perceived General Self-Efficacy

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Introduction

In an ever-changing society where primary-aged children's exposure to circumstances that can potentially and negatively impact their social-emotional well-being has become the norm. Therefore, primary school counselors are essential in providing prevention, early identification, and intervention to help students not only achieve academic success but also develop the necessary social emotional skills to respond appropriately to issues they face. School counselors play a crucial role in fostering an inclusive, equitable school culture that excites, invigorates, and encourages the achievement of the complete child. This is performed through maximizing interpersonal and intrapersonal efficacy while rigorously working, leading, and advocating to develop a rigorous comprehensive counseling program that is conducive to the overall success of students. (Holman, Nelson, Watts, 2019). American School Counseling Association (ASCA) National Model (2019a) defines a comprehensive counseling program as *one that is developmental, methodical, sequential, clearly defined, and accountable in satisfying students' priority needs via four delivery system components.*

According to the American School Counselor Association (2019a), school counselors should devote at least 80% of their time to direct services, and their responsibilities should be centered on the delivery of the total program through guidance curriculum, individual student planning, system support, and responsive services. Yet, school counselors are frequently assigned non-counseling-related responsibilities that do not correspond with the needs of students and inhibit the availability of implementing a comprehensive counseling program (Scarborough & Culbreath, 2008; Fye, 2018).

Although the ASCA National Model (2003) was initially developed to decrease the experiences of role stress and increase clarity as it relates to the counseling profession, many school counselors, specifically those serving as primary counselors, experience role stress elements due to the misunderstanding of the primary school counselor's role which contributes to the inappropriate use of primary school counselors' time by administrators and educational stakeholders (Culbreath, Scarborough, Banks-Johnson, & Soloman, 2005; Riggs, 2020).

Literature Review

The evolution of the counseling profession has created a framework for the identity, function, skills, and responsibilities of the counselors. However, this evolution has increased experiences of role stress elements due to the incongruences as it relates to the roles and expectations of counselors. The role discrepancies among the counseling profession, specifically, for those serving on primary campuses, has resulted in the ineffectiveness and imbalance of comprehensive counseling programs. Fye, Cook, Baltrinic, & Baylin (2020) asserts that primary school counselors' job performance, professional commitment, and stress levels are significantly correlated to the ability of being able to engage in appropriate counseling duties as defined by the ASCA National Model.

Role stress is the unpleasant state of emotion experienced when an individual's work role expectations are unclear and incompatible with the expected behaviors and demands of the single role. When school counselors experience role stress, the overall quantity of student services implemented through a comprehensive counseling program are reduced (Bardhoshi, Edford, & Jang, 2019). Implementation of a comprehensive

counseling program has been found to be negatively impacted by role ambiguity and role conflict (Fye, 2017) when there is not an identifiable balance between the implementation of the counseling program and assigned professional tasks.

Primary school counselor's self-efficacy affects the credibility and overall ability in the delivery of a comprehensive counseling program that is effective, equitable, and impactful in the achievement of students. Bardhoshi & Um (2021), indicated that primary school counselors with higher self-efficacy have greater levels of commitment, motivation, resilience, and perseverance as it relates to the counseling profession and position. Frequently engaging in non-counseling related tasks negatively impedes primary school counselors' level of confidence, increases their experienced role stress, and decreases the time allocated for providing the necessary supports to students. The less primary school counselors experience role stress elements, the more likely primary school counselors will have higher general perceived self-efficacy. As primary school counselors feel more confident in their roles, they have greater self-efficacy and self-confidence, leading to higher overall well-being and counselor performance (Bryant & Constantine, 2006; Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008). When primary school counselors are afforded the opportunity to focus on the roles and responsibilities specifically related to their respective position, and adequately prioritize the need of students through the implementation of a comprehensive counseling program, their general perceived self-efficacy increases which leads to the overall effectiveness of the primary school counselor. The primary school counselor performance and overall student success are dependent on self-efficacy and the confidence that counseling goals can be met through the implementation of the comprehensive program (Grossman, 2019).

Increased role stress elements diminish primary school counselors' ability to effectively implement a comprehensive counseling program, which in turn, perpetuates the decrease in primary school counselors' self-efficacy (Mullen & Gutierrez, 2016). Primary school counselors should be allowed to actively advocate and promote professional roles that are aligned with the American School Counselor Association National Model (2019). With a comprehensive school counseling program that follows the guidelines of the ASCA National Model, primary school counselors can ensure the implementation of a comprehensive counseling program while decreasing role stress elements and increasing perceived general self-efficacy.

Primary School Counselors' Role Stress Elements

This study characterized role stress elements as role ambiguity and role conflict. Contradictory requirements of primary school counselors that are unclear and not linked with the ASCA National Model result in an unbalanced comprehensive counseling program, which is referred to as role ambiguity. Role ambiguity is the confusion and uncertainty over an individual's expected role conduct and intended role performance in the role of primary school counselor (Katz & Kahn, 2003). Mullen, Blount, Lambie, and Chae (2018) note that inconsistencies between the position of primary school counselor and expectations of the position results in decreased performance, high levels of role stress, and counselor burnout. Clarifying the role of the primary school counselor is pivotal in ensuring that students receive the appropriate academic and social-emotional support through a complete school counseling comprehensive program that is proactive, preventative, and purposeful.

The concept of role conflict was used to identify the numerous functions primary school counselors are expected to complete, but which do not match the requirements of the single post of primary school counselor. Role conflicts are incongruences that arise when the responsibilities and expectations of one role differ from or contradict those of another role (Wickham & Parker, 2007). This contradiction often leads to conflicts of interest among primary school counselors and are often not aligned with best practices and ethical standards. Fye, Cook, Baltrinic, & Baylin (2020) contends that school counselors are particularly susceptible to counselor burnout and compassion fatigue within the counseling profession when they experience higher levels of role stress elements due to barriers of non-counseling related duties that impedes the ability to implement a comprehensive counseling program.

Unfortunately, primary school counselors frequently engage in inappropriate roles, non-counseling-related responsibilities, and find themselves compelled to enact and manage a multiplicity of contradictory professional tasks. School counselors are expected to deliver excellent services, even though their work might be stressful and have unclear criteria and expectations as it relates to the prioritizing of student needs (Mullen, Blount, Lambie, & Chae, 2018). Role stress influences school counselors' effectiveness and capabilities (Gulliver, 2010), which in turn affects the primary school counselors' perceptions of their own self-efficacy and exacerbates the elements of role ambiguity and role conflict.

Purpose of Study

The aim of this study was to evaluate the relationship between role stress elements and primary school counselors' perceived general self-efficacy. This study was specifically interested in the predictability of role stress elements (role ambiguity and role

conflict) on primary school counselors reported self-efficacy in delivering a comprehensive counseling curriculum with fidelity. This research aimed to address the following question:

1. Do role stress elements (role ambiguity and role conflict) have any predictive validity regarding the perceived general self-efficacy scores of primary school counselors?

Methodology

A quantitative research design was chosen for this investigation. Specifically, a correlational study approach was utilized. Using correlational statistics allows the researcher to explore the link between two or more variables (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). The association between role stress elements (role ambiguity and role conflict) and primary school counselors reported self-efficacy was investigated. This study's population was comprised of primary school counselors working full-time in Texas public schools, serving students in grades Kindergarten through Fifth grade, and implementing an ASCA-aligned comprehensive counseling program. Counselors in secondary schools have a unique set of role responsibilities and role tensions. While secondary school counselors may encounter identical components and elements explored, secondary school counselors were excluded from this study.

This study aimed to investigate and comprehend primary school counselors' experiences. Face-to-face interaction and digital evaluation were employed to recruit subjects for the research project. The accessible population consisted of 90 elementary

school counselors currently serving in public schools in the Houston metropolitan and neighboring areas. Each participant was provided with an overview of the study and a consent form to determine whether they wished to participate. Signing the consent form allowed permission to complete the survey and self-report the demographics of role stress experienced and self-efficacy perception.

The method of purposive sampling was used to obtain data from primary school counselors. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sample selected depending on demographic characteristics and the purpose of the investigation. To enhance the number of respondents who would respond to the required characteristics of the study and the general perceived self-efficacy test, purposive sampling was chosen.

Instrumentation

The variables of role stress elements and perceived general self-efficacy were measured using two data collection methods. Participants completed both the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (SCARS) and the School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale (SCSES) to assess role stress elements and primary school counselors' self-efficacy. Primary school counselors' role stress elements (role ambiguity and role conflict) were examined using the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (SCARS) developed by J. Scarborough (2005).

The School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (SCARS) is a 48-item questionnaire designed to examine how school counselors use their time against how they would prefer to spend their time in relation to executing an ASCA-defined rigorous comprehensive counseling program. The SCARS used a five-point ranking system and provided

participants with two columns for scoring each statement: Actual role/task vs Preferred role/task (Scarborough, J.L., 2005).

The School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale (SCSES), developed by Bodenhorn and Skaggs (2005), was used to specifically examine the reported self-efficacy of primary school counselors to effectively implement a demanding comprehensive counseling. The SCSES is a 43-item, five-point Likert scale intended to measure the self-efficacy of primary school counselors in carrying out activities connected to school counseling (1 = not confident to 5 = highly confident).

Statistical Analysis

The following null hypothesis was generated from the research question.

H₀1: There is no statistically significant relationship between role stress elements (role ambiguity and role conflict) and the general perceived self-efficacy scores of primary school counselors' ability to effectively implement a comprehensive counseling program.

The statistical method chosen for this investigation was a conventional multiple regression analysis. The purpose of this regression analysis was to explore the predictability of role stress elements (role ambiguity and role conflict) on primary school counselors reported self-efficacy in implementing a rigorous comprehensive counseling program. This statistical technique was chosen because it permits the researcher to determine the link between independent factors and the dependent variable. This statistical technique was used to examine whether linear relationships exist between the variables and the accuracy of the prediction based on these relationships. (Hinkle, Wiersman, and Jurs, 2003). The hypothesis addressed was evaluated at an alpha level of

0.05 or higher. The effect of both independent variables (role ambiguity and role conflict) on the dependent variable (general perceived self-efficacy) was evaluated and assessed to determine the contribution of each variable to the prediction of the dependent variable. (General perceived self-efficacy).

Role Stress Elements and Participants

In this study, the variable role stress elements were classified into two distinctive groups: Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict. Participants in this study described the role-related stress they encountered as primary school counselors. The researcher of this study defined role conflict (RC) as the role obligations of many roles that conflict with the single job of primary school counselor. The researcher of this study defined role ambiguity (RA) as ambiguous or uncertain expectations of the primary school counselor that are not consistent with ASCA. Thirty primary school counselors (or 33.3%) reported conflict as the experienced role stress, whereas sixty (or 66.7%) reported uncertainty as the experienced role stress. Refer to Table 1 for the results.

Variable	Number	Percent
Role Stress		
Conflict	30	33.3
Ambiguity	60	66.7
Total	90	100.0

Table 1 - Frequency Distribution of Participants by Role Stress

Examination of Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no statistically significant link between role stress elements and primary school counselors' perceived general self-efficacy in implementing a demanding

comprehensive counseling program. The connection between role stress characteristics (role conflict and role ambiguity) and primary school counselors' overall felt self-efficacy was examined using a normal multiple regression model.

The regression model produced a linear correlation of .294 as shown in Table 2. The model predictor explained 8.6% (Adjusted = 6.5%) of the variance in the scores of the criterion variable, general perceived self-efficacy. There was a linear relationship between role stress factors and primary school counselors' overall perceived self-efficacy. The independent predictor of self-efficacy among primary school counselors was shown to be role ambiguity. The generated hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Model	B	SE	Beta	t	P
(Constant)	120.541	18.821		6.405	.000
Conflict	.108	.95	.124	1.143	.256
Ambiguity	.222	.106	.228	2.100	.039

Table 2 – Standard Multiple Regression Results for the Relationship between Role Stress Elements and General Perceived Self-Efficacy. Note: R = .294; R Square = .086; Adjusted R Square = .065; F = 4.114; DF = 2,87; P = <.05

Discussion

Primary school counselors overall, face innumerable stressors due to the demands of campus and student needs during a critical time of their early developmental stages. Consistently having to experience stressors such as role ambiguity and role conflict, while advocating for the needs of students, can easily and negatively impact the perceived general self-efficacy of primary school counselors. This study investigated how

the role stress elements faced by primary school counselors impacted their self-efficacy levels in regard to implementing a comprehensive counseling program conducive to the success of the whole child. These findings support previous research conducted by Fye, Cook, Baltrinic, & Baylin (2020), who found that primary school counselors' job satisfaction, professional commitment, and stress levels were significantly correlated to the performance of appropriate versus inappropriate duties, as defined by the ASCA National Model.

This research revealed the necessity for improving the general perceived self-efficacy experienced by primary school counselors through awareness of the factors that negatively affect the implementation of a balanced and comprehensive counseling program. This study resulted in three recommendations for educational contributors based on the experiences reported by primary school counselor participants.

Recommendations for educational stakeholders are as followed:

1. Eighty percent (80%) or more of primary school counselors' time should be dedicated to meeting the specific needs of students through the implementation of a comprehensive counseling program.
2. Educational contributors should seek to align primary school counselors' duties, roles, and responsibilities with the ASCA National Model. This will grant primary school counselors an opportunity to focus solely on counseling responsibilities that directly impact students.
3. Educational contributors should make a conscientious effort in understanding the role of primary school counselors. This effort will show the support of the counseling profession.

Conclusion

Role stress elements (role conflict and role ambiguity) were revealed to be statistically significant determinants of the level of primary school counselors reported self-efficacy. This study's findings correlate closely with earlier research evaluating the effects of role stress elements on primary school counselors' perceived self-efficacy in their capacity to conduct and implement an intensive comprehensive counseling program. Many primary school counselors encounter role ambiguity and role conflict as a result of many tasks and responsibilities that are not aligned with the role of school counselor.

Role ambiguity and role conflict combined, has caused a disparity between primary school counselors' real and desired counseling responsibilities. (Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008; Holman, Nelson, & Watts, 2019). Fye, Cook, Baltrinic, & Baylin (2020) claimed that the rising number of administrative, non-counseling chores school counselors are forced to complete has contributed to role stress elements and counselor burnout. The evolving work definition of school counselors has resulted in a lack of clarity regarding the functions and responsibilities of a primary school counselor and a misunderstanding of their role in the profession.

Professional primary school counselors frequently feel significant levels of stress because of juggling the dual responsibilities of supporting the academic and social/emotional development of the students they serve and supporting the campus vision in accordance with the campus's specific needs. In addition, as stress levels rise, professional primary school counselors experience role stressors, which leads to compassion fatigue, lower self-efficacy, and emotional incongruity, which results in the

implementation of an unbalanced counseling program that does not meet the interpersonal and intrapersonal effectiveness of students.

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