Self-Efficacy and Burnout in Professional School Counselors

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationships between burnout and self-efficacy among school counselors. Also, the level of their burnout and self-efficacy was examined in terms of the social support, task perception and the number of students. A sample of 194 school counselors filled out the Maslach Burnout Inventory, The School Counselors Self-Efficacy Scale, and Personal Information Sheet. For the analysis of the data, Pearson correlation coefficient, regression, t and F tests were employed. The results of the study revealed that self-efficacy predicted depersonalization and personal accomplishment dimensions of burnout in school counselors. In addition, it was found that the counselors who take social support, have a positive attitude towards their profession and the lower number of students counselor provide service, the lower the burnout and higher the self-efficacy belief.

Key Words

Self-efficacy, Burnout, Social Support, School Counselors.

Today, school counselors while giving service in educational settings have many different roles as professionals. Regarding the students' academic, career, personal/social developments, on the one hand, they deal routinely with complex situations in which students have acute counseling needs, including cases of severe depression and suicid attempt, pregnancy, substance abuse, school violence, and child abuse; and on the other hand, they deal with parents, teachers and they provide consultation services to the outside agencies (Page, Pietrzak, & Sutton, 2001; Paisley & McMahon, 2001). School counselors in these situations may feel stressed and overworked and may be probably experiencing professional burnout (Kruger, Botman, & Goode-

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now, 1991; Mills & Huebner, 1998; Gökçakan & Özer, 1999). It might be proposed that providing a high quality service to the students is related directly with the positive self-efficacy belief of school counselors (Gündüz & Çelikkaleli, 2009). For this reason, present study investigates the relationship between the self-efficacy beliefs and burnout levels of school counselors.

Bandura (1986; 1995) notes that people's self-efficacy beliefs defined as their capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations are significant for people adding that they won't exert any effort to realize anything if they believe that they are not capable of yielding any result. According Bandura (1977a; 1977b), self-efficacy beliefs are based not only on people's expectations to acquire knowledge and skills but also their expectations to overcome problems and realize certain actions required to accomplish under social pressure and distress. In other words, people should have self-efficacy beliefs, apart from knowledge and skills, which enable them to put knowledge and skills into practice effectively to perform in life with success. Thus, peop-

le who carry out the same tasks and have knowledge and skills outperform one another according to their levels of self-efficacy. They may fail when they do not possess sufficient knowledge or are deprived of self-efficacy beliefs required to provide the necessary skills (Bandura, 1986, 1997).

Based on studies conducted about self-efficacy beliefs, people may develop specific self-efficacy beliefs in various areas such as mathematics, communication, science, social life, sports and professions apart from their general self-efficacy beliefs and define themselves accordingly. Accordingly, self-efficacy beliefs of school psychological counselors are defined as their judgments on their capabilities to provide psychological counseling and guiding service to students and other people related to students in an effective manner (Friedlander, Keller, Peca-Baker, & Olk, 1986; Larson & Daniels, 1998; Larson et al., 1992; Sharpley & Ridway, 1993). According to Larson and Daniels, the mechanism of counseling self-efficacy beliefs accepted as a creative skill helps school counselors use their existing cognitive, behavioral and social skills by integrating these skills with their roles as counselors.

Studies conclude that people with high levels of self-efficacy beliefs address more easily changes and difficulties arising from these changes (Hill, Smith, & Mann, 1987; Lent, Brown, & Larkin, 1987; Nease, Mudgett, & Quinones, 1999). Self-efficacy beliefs reveal to what extent people realize existing opportunities surrounding them and are vital in the selection of activities, how much effort they will exert and their perseverance against all obstacles they may during these activities (Pajares, 1997). According to Saks (1994), newly-recruited employees with higher perception of self-efficacy experience less anxiety disorder and are more satisfied with their jobs.

While school counselors contribute to students' healthy psychological, academic and professional developments, they have to address teachers', parents', managers' and the society's expectations and play different roles (Gökçakan & Özer, 1999; Gündüz & Çelikkaleli, 2009; Michelle, 2005). In such a process of growing educational and social expectations, school counselors are exposed to intense stress thus having increased levels of burnout.

The concept of burnout, which not only affects people's working performances and job satisfactions but also impairs their social and interpersonal relations, was first introduced by Freudenberger (1974) and Maslach (1976) (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Freudenberger defines the concept of "burnout" as a person's state of lacking personal accomplishments, being frazzle and exhausted as a result of excessive demand on energy, power and resources. A review of literature suggests that the burnout concept has rather generally been investigated in professionals such as physicians, teachers, social workers, those providing help to support mental health, which are human centered and aim to offer service to people (Ergin, 1992; Farber, 1984; Gündüz, 2000, 2005; Koustelios, 2001; Maslach & Jackson, 1986; Pines, 2002; Poulin & Walter, 1993; Seidman & Zager, 1991; Sucuoğlu & Kuloğlu, 1996; Tümkaya, 1996).

According to Freudenberger (1974), people who suffer burnout are idealists who exert efforts to reach their goals and do more than pulling their weights. From a similar point of view, school counselors are professionals who are highly motivated, willing, talented and creative to help students. However, these characteristics trigger school counselors' suffering burnout as they are to meet demands at emotional, physical and mental levels (Cummings & Nall, 1983 cited in Kesler, 1990). As a result, counselors may have decreased confidence in their skills and self-efficacies thus eroding their talents and competencies (Crutchfield & Borders, 1997). As stated by Bandura in his self-efficacy theory and suggested by the present study's findings, though there is a reciprocal relationship between one's self-efficacy belief and burn-out, it seems more realistic that self-efficacy beliefs may influence the state of burnout rather than vice-versa (Çelikkaleli, 2011). The model of burn-out based on Bandura's self-efficacy theory and developed by Meier is one of its most significant proofs. According to Meier, burnout is a state in which individuals expect little reward and considerable punishment from work because of a lack of valued reinforcement, controllable outcomes, or personal competence (Şanlı, 2006).

Self-efficacy and burnout have generally been addressed separately among school counselors. The burnout concept in school counselors has received considerable attention since 1990s and been subject to investigations with different demographical and psychological variables. These studies suggest that school counselors' experience burn-out at varying levels according to different variables such as sex (Atken, 2007; Gökçakan & Özer, 1999; Kruger et al., 1991;), social support (Russel, Altmaier, & Van Van velzen, 1987), workload and job satisfaction (Çoban & Demir, 2004), professional lifetime (İkiz, 2010). On the other hand, Ross, Altmaier and Russel (1989) state that the more stress they are exposed to at work, the higher level of burnout they

suffer, furthermore Butler and Constantine (2005) note that there exists a negative relationship between high self-esteem and burnout.

Studies on self-efficacy beliefs have also addressed teachers in general (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Coladarci, 1992; Çapri & Çelikkaleli, 2008; Çelikkaleli & Akbaş, 2007; Enochs, Scharmann, & Riggs, 1995; Rich, Lev, & Fisher, 1996; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy, & Hoy, 1998; Yüksel, Kaner , & Güzeller, 2011). Though there are numerous studies on self-efficacy among psychological counselors abroad (Al-Darmaki, 2003; Benshoff & Paisley, 1996; Daniels & Larson, 2001; Heppner, Fuller, & Multon, 1998; Johnson, Baker, Kopala, Kiselica, & Thompson, 1989; Larson & Daniels, 1998), there are few in Turkey. In one these studies, Yiğit (2001) argues that school counselors' self-efficacy beliefs vary according to their professional lifetimes and number of students they address. In another study, Özgün (2007) suggests low-level positive and significant relationships between school counselors' personal traits and expectations of professional efficacy.

Although the relationship between burnout of school counselors was examined with social support, stress, care for self and organizational factors, the studies concerning on the relationship between burnout and personality, flexibility and self-efficacy may contribute to the theoretical exploration of burnout (Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006). Since there is no study concerning the relationship between school counselors' self-efficacy beliefs and burnout, this study aimed to contribute theoretical base of burnout.

Purpose of the Study

On the bases of the literature given above, the main purpose of the present study was to examine the relationships between burnout and self-efficacy in a sample of the school counselors. A secondary purpose of the investigation was to determine whether burnout and self-efficacy vary in terms of social support, perception of profession and the number of students counselors serve.

Method

Participants

The participants of the study consisted of 194 school counselors (116 male; 78 female) working in public elementary schools (N=94) and secondary schools (N=100) in Mersin, Turkey. The working experience of the participant ranged from 1 year to 30 years.

Instruments

Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI): The MBI developed by Maslach and Jackson (1986) is a Likert type scale consisted of 22 items in three subscales. The inventory has 9 items in emotional exhaustion subscale, 5 items in depersonalization subscale, and 8 items in personal accomplishment subscale. High scores on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization subscales and low scores on the personal accomplishment subscale reflect a high degree of burnout.

In the adaptation of MBI to Turkish, (Ergin, 1992), it was found that Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficients for the subscales of MBI were as follows: .83 for emotional exhaustion, .65 for depersonalization, and .72 for personal accomplishment. Ergin, examined the construct validity of inventory and identified three dimensions, consistent with the original form; emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1986).

The School Counselors Self-Efficacy Scale (SCSES): The School Counselors Self-Efficacy Scale (SCSES) developed by Yiyit (2001), is a 5-point Likert-type scale consisting of 88 items in three subscales. "Counseling Skills (CS)", Multidimensional Roles (MR)", and "Skills Hard to Apply (SHA)". The scores of the scale ranged from 88 to 440. The scale is aimed to measure endurance of the school counselors' perceived self-efficacy. The Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficients were calculated as .98 for scale total, and .97 for the CS subscale, .96 for the MR subscale, and .92 for SHA subscale. The test re-test reliability coefficient for the scale total was found to be .82, and for three subscales as .82, .74, and .70 respectively. For the construct validity of the SCSES, principal component analysis was used and the total variance explained by three factors was found to be 47.64%. The scale yields three different scores. The higher the scores obtained in the inventory, the greater the perceived self-efficacy.

Personal Information Sheet: It is prepared to describe the demographic and occupational variables related with the school counselors such as social support, task perception and the number of students served.

Procedure

To investigate the relationship between MBI and SCSES Pearson Product Moment Correlation was administered to the data. To examine whether or not self-efficacy predicts the burnout, multiple regression analysis was applied to the data. The diffe-

rence between the MBI scores according to social support, task perception and the number of students were investigated by t-test and ANOVA.

Findings

The results revealed that there is a negative relationship between the self-efficacy and emotional exhaustion and depersonalization whereas there is a high and positive relationship between personal accomplishment and self-efficacy. The results of multiple regression analysis showed that the dimensions of SCSES predict depersonalization and personal accomplishment. On the other hand it did not predict the emotional exhaustion.

According to the findings concerning the second purpose of the study, counselors who get social support suffer less from burnout rather than the depersonalization sub-dimension of MBI. Similarly, counselors who get social support have high self-efficacy beliefs.

The results showed that the perception of profession differ from each other for the emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment. Counselors who find their profession as an ordinary job have high level of burnout and low level of self-efficacy beliefs. The findings concerning the number of students served indicating that; counselors who have 1000-1500 students to provide service have more depersonalization score and low level of self-efficacy beliefs.

Discussion

This present study suggests a negative relationship between school counselors' professional self-efficacy beliefs and burnout scores, which supports findings of some studies which have investigated the relationship between teachers' burnout and self-efficacy (Bümen, 2010; Chan, 2007; Çelikkaleli, 2011; Çimen, 2007; Evers, Brouwers, & Tomic, 2002; Friedman, 2003; Schwarzer, Schmitz, & Tang, 1999; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Tang, Au, Schwarzer, & Schmitz, 2001).

The results of multiple regression analysis show that counselors' self-efficacy beliefs predict at a significant level their personal accomplishments (28%) and depersonalization (07%) as sub-dimensions of burnout, however they do not exercise predictive effects on burnout itself. On a conceptual basis, personal accomplishment represents self-efficacy dimension of burnout while emotional exhaustion represents stress dimension (Maslach et al., 2001).

In this context, it could be expected that school counselors' self-efficacy beliefs could predict the component underlying the state of burnout and representing its dimension of stress at a significant level at least. From this point of view, studies which will analyze together different models predicting different components and sub-dimensions of burnout can provide more concrete findings in explaining the concept and subsequent interventions.

According to results of this study, counselors who cannot receive any social support suffer higher level of burnout, in parallel with numerous findings of other studies revealing the importance of social support in burnout (Abel & Sewell, 1999; Baysal, 1995; Cheuk & Sai, 1995; Çam, 1991; Girgin, 1995; Gözüm, 1996; Ok, 2002; Russel, Altmaier, & Van Velzen, 1987). Another result of the study shows that counselors benefiting from social support have high levels of self-efficacy beliefs. Aksoy and Diken (2009) states that school counselors who receive support from experts score higher in self-efficacy, while Daniels and Larson (2001) suggest that feedbacks provided to counselors on their performances lead to increased self-efficacy and reduced anxiety. Considering that the concept of self-efficacy belief has originated from the Social Learning Theory, increased self-efficacy beliefs among school counselors with more social support can be regarded as an expected outcome on a conceptual basis. Bandura (1986; 1997) expresses in verbal-persuasion he considers as one of the four main sources of self-efficacy belief that people's self-efficacy beliefs are influenced by feedbacks provided by other people. Positive and supportive messages people receive from family members or friends or at work-place may help them exert more effort and feel themselves more self-efficient.

According to the job perception variable, counselors who perceive their jobs positively and are satisfied consider themselves more self-efficient and are less burned out. Çoban and Demir (2004) report a negative relationship between school counselors' job satisfactions and levels of burn-out as Gençer (2002) does on teachers and Özyurt (2004) on physicians. Teltik (2009) suggests that pre-school teachers who are satisfied with their jobs are less burned out and demonstrate a positive relationship between their job satisfaction levels and perceptions of professional self-efficacy. Based on conceptual information, it can be concluded that self-efficacy beliefs at work affect the stat of burnout and thus performance and job perception. From this point of view, it will be possible to attain more

qualitative results in terms of cause and effect relationships in future studies which will address job perception, self-efficacy and burnout variables by means of explanatory models.

According the number of studies, counselors who offer service to 1000 and 1500 students experience more depersonalization, in parallel with the finding of *Kendrick, Chandler, and Hatcher* (1994) and Stickel (1991 cited in Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006) showing a positive and significant relationship between the ratio of students to counselors and emotional exhaustion. High number of students whom counselors are in charge of offering service to increases the workload, thus suggesting positive and significant relationships between work-load and burnout (Çoban & Demir, 2004). Regarding the relationship between the number of students and counselors' self-efficacy beliefs, counselors with lower number of students have higher level of self-efficacy beliefs. Unlike consultation or guidance services provided, psychological counseling services may lead to increased workload and stress at workplace due to high number of students, which may in turn influence the perception of self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1986), people show poorer performance under stressful and constrained circumstances and tension and unrest prevent their effective use of their capabilities. As noted by the American School Counselor Association- ASCA (2004), professional school counseling services play vital role in enhancing students' academic achievements. Thus, it recommends that a school counselor offer services to 250 students to reap the maximum benefits of the program. In Turkey where most primary and secondary schools do not employ school counselors, this ratio goes up to 1000 students per counselor (MEB, 2010).

The results revealed that efficient school counselors on counseling skills have high personal accomplishment and low depersonalization. Today, school counselors should display not only certain skills that will help them meet the needs of the students, but also improve those skills. As Kendric et al. (1994) stated that the increasing demands and expectations of the educational system may contribute the school counselors' stress and burnout due to the work load. Therefore, it can be suggested that besides the experimental studies in order to decrease school counselors' burnout and increase self-efficacy beliefs, in-service training and workshops on educational, professional and personal problems, consulting skills, etc. for school counselors should also be organized periodically.

It is no doubt that there are many other variables and factors that affect or predict school counselors' burnout. However, the present study concerns only self-efficacy beliefs. Other variables that will predict school counselors' burnout should be examined in further studies. Besides self-efficacy beliefs, concepts such as work satisfaction, role conflict, role uncertainty, and social support can be included in independent variables. This shows that since self-efficacy beliefs in this study mostly predict personal accomplishment, more conceptional and structural studies are needed to be done in the future.

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