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## The Anxiety in Supervision Process among Trainee Counselors in Malaysian Public Universities: A Descriptive Study

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### Abstract

This study aims to identify the extent of the anxiety faced by trainee counselors in the supervision process when undergoing their internship training. In counselor education and training, the supervision process is integral so that trainee counselors are able to improve their competency through supervisor's examination on the level of knowledge and professional skills applied in the real-life settings. Nevertheless, the literature review finds that the majority of trainee counselors will experience the feeling of anxiety when it is linked with supervision. Extremely high anxiety can disturb the attention of the trainee counselors to display the skills mastered, obstructing the development of the trainee counselors and also impede the advantage of trainee counselors learning in supervision. Thus, the aspect of anxiety on trainee counselors has to be given due attention. The study design comprises of the descriptive studies involving 204 trainee counselors at the first degree level, who are undergoing internship training and having an experience of being supervised by the counseling lecturer. All the respondents are from nine public universities all over Malaysia selected through stratified random sampling technique. The study data is gathered using the *Anticipatory Supervisee Anxiety Scale (ASAS)* to measure the level of anxiety of trainee counselors in the supervision. Next, the data obtained is analysed using the descriptive statistics. Based on the study outcome, several implications and suggestions are put forth at the end of the discussion.

**Keywords:** Trainee Counselors, Anxiety, Supervision Process, Malaysian Public Universities

### Introduction

Practicum, internship and supervision are the compulsory requirements that need to be complied by counseling students prior to their graduation. This guideline is clearly contained in Standard of Training of the Counselor Education (Malaysian Counselor Board, 2015), that trainee counselors have to complete their practicum and internship and obtain supervision based on the criteria stipulated. Practicum training needs to be done on campus from 200 to 250 hours, whereas internship is the post-practicum training at any organisation or institution

providing the counseling service between 480 and 800 hours. Both forms of training have to undergo a supervision process. Through the practical training, it is hoped that the students are able to improve their competency through a supervisor examination on the level of knowledge and professional skills applied in real-life settings. In the supervision process, there are several specific components that can be achieved by the trainee counselors as detailed in the Table below:

**Table 1: The fraction of component that needs to be achieved in supervision**

No	The fraction of component that needs to be achieved in supervision	
1	Number of supervision	A minimum of twice the supervision done by main supervisor and four times supervision by site supervisor.
2	Method of supervision	Supervision needs to be done face-to-face by both supervisors, with a recording of the counseling session and case studies.
3	The fields supervised	Management and administration, file system, individual counseling, group counseling, psychological evaluation, prevention and development programs

#### **Standard of Training of the Counselor Education (Malaysian Counselor Board, 2015)**

The supervision process refers to the responsibility that comes with the supervision that needs to be done by the supervisor on any trainee counselors activity and that helps facilitate the learning and development of the trainee counselors through the implementation of evaluation and monitoring on all of the activities related to counseling (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, (CACREP) 2016). Although the main aim and the objective of supervision are to produce professional and competent trainee counselors, past studies have shown that the supervision process also creates anxiety among trainee counselors (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019; Norwati & Mazwati, 2013; Ellis et al., 2008; Daniel & Larsons, 2001).

#### **Problem Statement**

The importance of competency in the professional field is increasing when most authoritative bodies like the licensing board and professional associations make stringent the requirements of competency and accreditation towards the trainees before they are certified (Gonsalvez & Crowe, 2014). The same thing happens in the field of counseling as a professional field in Malaysia. Thus, the components of the supervision process in the training and education of trainee counselors (Malaysian Counselor Board, 2015) offered in every public university in Malaysia are duly emphasized. The supervision process is inextricably linked with the quality and process of counseling on the clients. However, the feeling of anxiety is typically the main challenge to trainee counselors as they face the supervision process (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019; Kabir, 2017; Falke et al., 2015; Daniel & Larsons, 2001; Tsai, 2015; Kurtyilmaz, 2015). For trainee counselors who experience extreme anxiety this will give an adverse impact to their learning process especially in their internship phase. There are even empirical studies that have shown a negative relationship between the anxiety factors and the effectiveness of the trainee counselors sessions with the clients (Daniel & Larsons, 2001). The study finding establishes that the higher the level of anxiety, the lower the level of effectiveness of the counseling session carried out. Even so, up until today, most of the studies done to see the

level of anxiety of trainee counselors are very scarce, particularly in the context of Malaysia. Thus, the objective of this study is to see the extent of the level of anxiety in the supervision process as faced by trainee counselors undergoing internship all across Malaysian public universities.

### Literature Review

Barlow (2000) defines that generally anxiety is an unconscious characteristic caused by the inability of the assumption to predict, control or obtain the results or outcome desired on significant personal situations. In the context of supervision, Bernard & Goodyear (2019) see anxiety as one of the fundamental factors that can affect the ability of the trainee counselors to illustrate the skills mastered, that it can disturb the supervision process, also restrict the learning of the trainee counselors in the supervision.

A qualitative study is carried out by Norwati & Mazwati (2013) to look into the feelings and experiences of trainee counselors at Bachelor Degree level, who are undergoing practicum and internship from *Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia* (UIAM). The trainee counselors have to go through two phases, (1) a 7-week practicum, and (2) a 14-week internship. Both these phases have to undergo the supervision process. The study analysis produces five main themes. One of the themes obtained is anxiety.

Meanwhile, in the study by Kurtyilmaz (2015), among the experiences faced by trainee counselors in the supervision include confusion, anxiety, and fear. The trainee counselors' anxiety in supervision is linked with the desire to demonstrate good performance and give effective services to the clients (Daniels & Larson, 1998). This is the time when trainee counselors are really desperate to show that they are good counselors (Kurtyilmaz, 2015). The majority of the trainee counselors experience anxiety and fear with regard to the issues of professional practice, handling the counseling process and specifically when being involved in the evaluation process (Kurtyilmaz, 2015).

This is supported by Falke et al (2015) who stated that the high level of anxiety among trainee counselors in supervision is normally caused by the feeling of insecurity and fear towards the evaluation (Falke et al., 2015) because as a trainee counselor they would be very concerned about the negative evaluation from the supervisor or the client (Tsai, 2015). This situation can influence the performance of the trainee counselors as it does not represent their actual ability during supervision (Falke et al (2015). Indirectly, this will make them miss the opportunity to obtain the supposed guidance.

### Methodology

This study is the quantitative study using the descriptive design method. A total of n=204 respondents involved in this study comes from nine public universities in Malaysia offering a counseling program at Master degree level acknowledged by the *Malaysian Qualification Accreditation* and Malaysian Counselor Board. The information of the respondents is based on Table 2 below:

Table 2: Information on the trainee counselors sample from Malaysian public universities

No	Public universities	Bachelor Degree Level	Trainee counselors
1.	UPSI	Degree in Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology	23
2	UMT	Bachelor Degree in Counseling	44
3	UPM	Bachelor of Education in Guidance and Counseling	11
4	UM	Bachelor Degree in Counseling	12
5	UUM	Bachelor Degree of Education (counseling)	18
6	UMS	Bachelor Degree in Psychology Counseling	30
7	USIM	Bachelor Degree in Counseling with Honours	30
8	UNIMAS	Bachelor Degree in Counseling with Honours	24
9	UIAM	Bachelor of Education in Guidance and Counseling	12
			n=204

This study uses the instrument *Anticipatory Supervisee Anxiety Scale (ASAS)* (Ellis et al., 2008) to measure the anxiety of trainee counselors. The rationale of the researcher in using the instrument in this study is because it is developed in the field of counseling especially in the context of supervision. Thus, automatically this is in line with the context of the study which is on the trainee counselors. Other than that, the instrument is also used as it has high reliability during its construction which is a  $\alpha = .97$  and also in the real study  $\alpha = .96$ . The total number of ASAS items is 28 items comprising of 26 negative items and 2 positive items. The ASAS instrument uses the five-point Likert Scale which is: 1 = strongly untrue, 3= untrue, 5= moderately true, 7= true, 9 = strongly true. Every positive item (item 16 and 23) needs to have its value reversed before the total scores are calculated. To obtain the overall score of ASAS, all the scores of the item need to be added. The lowest score for ASAS is 28 and the highest score is 252. There are three levels of anxiety for trainee counselors categorised in the ASAS instrument. The range of scores between 28 and 102 represents low level of anxiety, the range of scores between 103 and 177 represents moderate level of anxiety, and the range of scores between 178 and 252 represents high level of anxiety. Based on table 4, 5, and 6 the items, calculation method and the ASAS score interpretation are summarised.

Table 3: ASAS Instrument Items

Item		
Negative	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28	26 items
Positive	16, 23 (score that needs to be reversed)	2 items
Total number of items		28 items

Table 4: ASAS Scoring Method

Scoring	Minimum score	Maximum score
All the items must be added to get the overall score	28	252

Table 5: ASAS Score Interpretation

Anxiety level	Score
Low	28 until 102
Moderate	103 until 177
High	178 until 252

## Results and Discussions

This chapter presents the findings that have been analysed with the descriptive statistical test like frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, level and score total. The distribution of respondents is based on the university. In Table 7 below, there is a distribution of trainee counselors based on the nine public universities involved:

Table 6: The distribution of the respondents (trainee counselors) by university

University	Frequency of trainee counselors	Percentage (%)
UMT	44	21.6
USIM	30	14.7
UMS	30	14.7
UNIMAS	24	11.8
UPSI	23	11.3
UUM	18	8.8
UM	12	5.9
UIAM	12	5.9
UPM	11	5.4
Total	n=204	100%

Next, we have the distribution of respondents based on the level of anxiety. Table 8 represents the distribution of the level of anxiety experienced by trainee counselors with the mean = 110.75 and standard deviation = 44.74. The majority of the level of anxiety of the trainee counselors is at low and moderate levels. There are 99 respondents (48.5%) for the low level score, 83 respondents (40.7%) for moderate level score and followed by 22 respondents for high level score 10.8%.

Table 7: Distribution for the level of anxiety of the trainee counselors

Anxiety level	Score	Frequency	Percentage
Low	28 until 102	99	48.5
Moderate	103 until 177	83	40.7
High	178 until 252	22	10.8
Total		204	100%

Mean= 110.75 Standard Deviation= 44.74

Based on the study finding obtained, this study proves that there are trainee counselors who experience anxiety when undergoing the supervision process. This study outcome is in line with the study by Kurtylmaz (2015); Falke et al., (2015); Tsai (2015); Norwati & Wan Mazwati (2013) showing that every trainee counselor will be overwhelmed by worry when undergoing practicum training or internship and supervised by their respective supervisors. Other than that, this study finding also proves that the anxiety of the trainee counselors at the Malaysian public universities is at low and moderate levels. This study is consistent with the finding by Norwati & Wan Mazwati (2013) establishing that the majority of the trainee counselors will

experience high level of anxiety during the internship training and furthermore, the level of anxiety will be reduced in the following week. As it is in this study, data are gathered at the end of the internship training and after they have undergone the supervision process.

Normally at the end of the training, trainee counselors will be clearer about their role and what they have to do. Thus, automatically the feeling and experience of anxiety are reduced when trainee counselors begin to get the skills and are able to master their counseling competency level better. Following Norwati & Mazwati (2013) the level of anxiety of the trainee counselors will be reduced when the trainee counselors spend longer time in the training process and start to be able to adapt themselves. Although the majority have low and moderate levels of anxiety, the finding of this study still shows that there are few trainee counselors who experience high level of anxiety. In line with the study by Falke et al (2015), high level of anxiety can influence the supervision session where trainee counselors are not able to display their actual ability and finally miss the chance to be guided by a supervisor.

This is supported by Tsai (2015) who sees anxiety as having the potential to give a negative implication to the trainee counselors. By contrast, Larson (1998) stated that anxiety is seen as something ideal which is the motivation of the trainee counselors to repeat or try new counseling actions. The weakness and the anxiety of trainee counselors are not an issue to be resolved but also a theme in the supervision that requires continuous attention (Falke et al., 2015).

Other than that, the relationship between the supervisor and the trainee counselors also plays an important role during the supervision on the anxiety of the trainee counselors. Supervisors have the responsibility to upgrade the competency of the trainee counselors by playing several roles such as mentor, teacher, consultant and advisor in a given time (Kabir, 2017), especially in the supervision process. Every role will be presented by different methods and intervention approaches. These different degrees of power found in supervision have caused anxiety within the trainee counselors.

However, if they have the support from the supervisor on what they have done throughout the supervision, the trainee counselors' anxiety will be reduced and they will be slightly relieved (Kurtyilmaz, 2015). This is proven in Tsai (2015) showing that when trainee counselors have low cooperation score, the relationship between anxiety in supervision and the produced efficacy has a significant negative correlation. Based on the finding and discussion of the study, anxiety is one of the important factors and is seen to leave an impact also influence to the learning quality and the professional development of the trainee counselors in the supervision process.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

All in all, it can be concluded that the majority of the trainee counselors experience low and moderate levels of anxiety in the supervision process, but there are still few trainee counselors who still face high level of anxiety. It is undeniable that every counselor still in training will surely feel concerned especially when he or she is being supervised. Some scholars opined that with feelings like anxiety, it can motivate trainee counselors towards a more positive and professional development. However, it has to be controlled and handled well by trainee counselors so that the learning process in the supervision will be going smoothly. Thus, the topic of anxiety in the supervision process among trainee counselors requires a more specific attention in future studies. Thus, it is suggested that future researchers can gather the data twice before and after the supervision to see a more accurate level of anxiety. This is because in the study, data collection is only done once which is at the

end of the internship training and after the trainee counselors are supervised a few times. Other than that, researcher also suggests that future studies involve private universities that offer counseling programs acknowledged by the Malaysian Counselor Board. Finally, it is suggested that future studies carry out correlation study to see the relationship or the influence of the anxiety level of the trainee counselors with other important variables in the supervision process.

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