

The Effect of Mindfulness and Self-Compassion Towards Counselor Self-Efficacy of University Students

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Abstract

This study aims to measure the effect of mindfulness and self-compassion on counselor self-efficacy among university students. Information was obtained from a questionnaire involving 89 students who participated in counseling internships. The questionnaire used to measure students' mindfulness was the Five-Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) by Baer et al. (2006). Self-compassion was measured using the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) by Neff (2003), while counselor self-efficacy was measured using the Counseling Self-Estimate Inventory (COSE) by Larson et al. (1992). The results show that mindfulness and self-compassion are significant predictors that have a strong correlation and contribution to counselor self-efficacy. In conclusion, mindfulness and self-compassion can enhance the abilities and efficiency of counselor-in-training during counseling internship sessions. This study implies that universities have a responsibility to develop methods for increasing counselor self-efficacy throughout counseling training programs. Implementing mindfulness and self-compassion interventions for counselors-in-training could be a valuable tool in developing competency for beginner counselor trainees.

Keywords: Mindfulness, Self-Compassion, Counselor Self-Efficacy

Introduction

Counselors-in-training often encounter personal, professional, and academic challenges as they work towards developing and enhancing their counseling skills within counselor training programs. They must acquire and refine skills such as building rapport with clients, increasing self-awareness, enhancing cognitive complexity, and fostering empathy. Additionally, concrete skills like attending, active listening, effective questioning, and summarization must

be mastered. Therefore, the cultivation of mindfulness skills is essential for counselors-in-training, as they can significantly aid in effectively managing counseling sessions.

This write-up will discuss the factors that influence the process of a counselor's in-training development. Counseling self-efficacy was identified as the significant contributing aspect of a counselor's-in-training success. Counselor mindfulness self-compassion has also been identified as a state of being that could assist in counselor-in-training development, improve counselor-in-training performance, and ultimately help produce positive client outcomes. Researchers have suggested that mindfulness is related to increased self-compassion, reductions in anxiety, and consequently, improvements in self-efficacy. Given the established independent relationships between mindfulness and self-compassion, the present study explores how these constructs are related to self-assessed counselor self-efficacy in a sample of students who participated in counseling internships. It will enable elementary school counselors to truly facilitate and nurture students' social and emotional development by clearly defining roles and responsibilities aligned with the needs of the campus but driven by the implementation of a balanced, rigorous, and comprehensive counseling program.

Mindfulness is the fundamental human ability to be fully present, aware of our current surroundings and activities, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by external stimuli. According to Baer (2003), mindfulness is a construct that has garnered a surge of recent interest in psychological treatment, wellness approaches and brain research. Baer particularly emphasizes the non-judgmental aspect, describing it as "the non-judgmental observation of the ongoing stream of internal and external stimuli as they arise. Numerous studies have explored the role of mindfulness in enhancing an individual's self-efficacy. Mindfulness can serve as an effective approach to help all students address high levels of stress and anxiety (Clarke, 2022). Moreover, it offers a pathway to reduce stress among Counselors-in-training and enhance their self-efficacy by fostering the development of essential counseling qualities and skills (Felton et al., 2015). Furthermore, mindfulness serves as a method for emotional self-regulation, enabling Counselors-in-training to better manage stress and potentially prevent counselor burnout (Donald & Atkins, 2016; Testa & Sangganjanavanich, 2016).

Counselor mindfulness has also been recognized as a state of being that can assist in the development of counselors-in-training, improve their performance, and ultimately contribute to positive client outcomes (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Mindfulness may be an underappreciated resource for cultivating essential counseling skills while enhancing counselor self-efficacy and reducing anxiety among counselors-in-training. According to Banker & Goldenson (2020), mindfulness techniques have been shown to help counselors-in-training report improved focus during counseling sessions, increased comfort and confidence in client interactions, and greater self-assurance in their clinical training.

A study by Aiguier (2023) has shown significant correlations, including individual relationships between elevated trait mindfulness levels and self-compassion levels. The skill-building processes of trainees can be encouraged by using mindfulness and self-compassion as the foundation of their approach, such as promoting role-playing practices with a focus on non-judgmental observation (Lattore Chalsea, 2020). Neff (2003), defined self-compassion as: being open to and moved by one's own suffering, experiencing feelings of caring and kindness towards oneself, taking an understanding, non-judgmental attitude toward one's inadequacies and failures, and recognizing that one's common experience is part of the common human experience.

There are studies that link mindfulness and counselor self-efficacy. Unsworth's study (2015) examined the predictive relationship between mindfulness and counselor self-efficacy and the potential mediating effects of self-compassion. Another study on mindfulness and psychological flexibility towards counseling self-efficacy was conducted by Wei et al. (2015). The results of the study indicated that both mindfulness and psychological flexibility significantly influenced counseling self-efficacy of counselor trainees. Underriner's study (2023) showed a relationship between isolation, certain factors of self-compassion, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress.

Self-efficacy has been defined by Bandura as the degree to which one believes they are capable of performing a particular task (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy directly impacts one's motivation and how capable one believes they are to complete an activity. It can also be a predictor of how much stress one experiences when completing a particular task (Bandura, 1986, 1989). Self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura (1977), is the degree to which individuals consider themselves capable of performing a particular task or activity.

Counselor self-efficacy (CSE) is defined by Larson and Daniels (1998) "as one's beliefs or judgments about one's capabilities to effectively counsel a client in the near future". This definition refers to a counselor's beliefs about their capability in providing effective counseling. Drawing proponents from Bandura's social cognitive theory, Larson and Daniels highlighted that counselor self-efficacy involves the integration and application of learned cognitive, social, and behavioral counseling skills as well as one's perceived ability to use these skills purposely and effectively with clients. According to Daniels & Larson (2001), counselor self-efficacy is defined as a counselor's belief in their ability to successfully perform counseling skills in the future.

When counselors feel confident in their ability to execute the helping skills, their performance in the counseling chair is enhanced and, as a result, the therapeutic working alliance may be strengthened. For these reasons, counselor self-efficacy is both a measure of development as well as an outcome consideration of counselor education (Mullen et al., 2015). As Mullen et al. (2015) noted, assessing counselor self-efficacy at various points of training may allow programs to track counselor progress; however, these benchmarks, nor the experience alone, may pinpoint the specific variables leading to trainee efficacious beliefs. Counselors-in-training who continue to develop counselor self-efficacy increase in professional competencies toward becoming an effective counselor (Larson et al., 1992; McCarthy, 2014).

According to Koth (2019), a significant negative correlation was found between counselors-in-training's anxiety and counselor self-efficacy, with counselor-in-training's anxiety negatively correlating with mindfulness, while counselor self-efficacy showed a positive correlation with mindfulness. Clarke's study (2022) demonstrated that higher levels of mindfulness were significantly related to and predictive of lower stress and anxiety. Additionally, higher levels of mindfulness were significantly associated with higher counselor self-efficacy among counseling students. Latorre's study (2019) revealed that higher levels of mindfulness were linked to greater levels of self-compassion, and higher levels of self-compassion were associated with increased levels of counselor self-efficacy and self-assessed professional competence.

Sanderlin (2020) demonstrated that mindfulness and relationship status were predictive factors for counselor self-efficacy in managing client distress. Mindfulness also exhibited a correlation with counselor self-efficacy in managing relationship conflicts with clients. Differentiation of self was found to correlate with trainee self-efficacy in managing

client distress and relationship conflict. Additionally, Latorre's study (2019) revealed that higher levels of mindfulness were associated with greater levels of self-compassion, and higher levels of self-compassion were associated with increased levels of counselor self-efficacy and self-assessed professional competency. Based on the literature review, it is evident that mindfulness and self-compassion, as well as self-efficacy, have a significant impact on the effectiveness of counselors-in-training during counseling sessions. Therefore, this study aims to explore further the effects of mindfulness and self-compassion on counselor self-efficacy.

Problem Statement

Counselor self-efficacy is of paramount importance for counselors-in-training during their internship. The self-confidence exhibited by counselors can significantly enhance their ability to conduct counseling sessions. Trainee counselors often encounter numerous challenging situations that encompass developmental hurdles, but these experiences serve to improve their emotional and cognitive skills. A study conducted by Skovholt & Ronnestad (2003) revealed that counselors-in-training frequently have low clinical self-efficacy when they initially attempt to internalize the complex skills and conceptual knowledge necessary for ethical and effective clinical practice. Furthermore, Manker's study (2022) identified a significant relationship between school counselor self-efficacy and burnout.

Counselor trainees have the capability to practice their roles and apply counseling skills. When trainees are given the opportunity to practice counseling at any institution, they can assess their strengths and skills, which can impact self-efficacy and enhance mindfulness and self-compassion. Therefore, a study is needed to measure the effect of mindfulness and self-compassion on the counselor self-efficacy of university students. According to Latorre (2019), higher levels of mindfulness were associated with greater levels of self-compassion, and higher levels of self-compassion were associated with increased levels of counselor self-efficacy and self-assessed professional competency. Findings also indicated potential mediating effects of self-compassion on the relationship between mindfulness and outcome variables, such as counselor self-efficacy and self-assessed professional competency.

Research Objectives

This study measures the effect of mindfulness and self-compassion towards counselor self-efficacy of university students.

Methodology

A survey study was conducted using a questionnaire. The study included a total of 89 respondents who were university students undergoing counseling internships in Malaysia. To measure students' mindfulness, the Five-Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) by Baer et al. (2006) was employed. Self-compassion was assessed using the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) developed by Neff (2003), while counselor self-efficacy was measured using the Counseling Self-Estimate Inventory (COSE) by Larson et al. (1992)

Findings

A total of 89 respondents had answered the distributed questionnaire. The majority of the respondents in this study were divided into female students, 75 people (84.3%) and 14 male students (15.7%).

Table 1

The effect of mindfulness and self-compassion towards counselor self-efficacy

Variable	Beta			R ²	F	p
	B	β	t			
Mindfulness	.384	.329	2.515	.297	36.682	0.000
Self-compassion	.481	.291	2.222	.319	21.639	0.000

The multiple regression results showed that mindfulness and self-compassion are the predictors with significant correlation and contribution of 33.5% on the scores of counselor self-efficacy. The main and the highest predictor for counselor self-efficacy is mindfulness ($\beta = .329$, $t=2.515$ and $p=0.000$) and the contribution of 29.7%. This is proven when mindfulness score is added by one unit, counselor self-efficacy increases by 0.329. This means that when mindfulness is high, counselor self-efficacy is also high.

The second predictor which is self-compassion has an impact and contributes to 3.8% on the psychological well-being ($\beta = .291$, $t=2.222$ and $p=0.000$). This shows that when the score of self-compassion is added by one unit, counselor self-efficacy score is increased by 0.291 unit. This means that when self-compassion is high, counselor self-efficacy is also high.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Past research has indicated an existing relationship between mindfulness, self-compassion, and counselor self-efficacy. In this study, mindfulness and self-compassion were found to be significant predictors of counselor self-efficacy. This relationship indicates that those who are more mindful are also more likely to feel competent when working with clients and believe that they have the appropriate judgment to know when to utilize various counseling skills with their clients.

It is possible that those who practice mindfulness in their personal life are able to apply the mindful practice to clinical use. Mindfulness facets such as the ability to be 'non-reactive' and 'non-judgmental' can be useful skills that can assist in maintaining focus when working with clients. Additionally, other mindfulness facets such as the ability to 'act with awareness' and to be 'observant' are applicable clinical skills that may help clinicians-in-training feel more competent, versus feeling distracted and having difficulty concentrating in client sessions.

Research has shown that mindfulness can enhance the ability of trainee counselors to conduct counseling sessions. Mindfulness has been found to enhance elements essential to counselor development, including empathy and attention (Fulton, 2016; Fulton & Cashwell, 2015). Azizli, Atkinson, Baughman, and Giammarco (2015) studied the links between self-efficacy for college students, long-term planning, and life satisfaction. They found a significant link between self-efficacy and life satisfaction leading them to suggest that curricula should be implemented that target student's self-efficacy. Not only can this enhance students' decision-making abilities, but it can also increase their overall life satisfaction.

Mindfulness can play a vital role in strengthening the counselor-client relationship by enhancing focus and presence during counseling sessions. This improvement extends to core therapeutic relational skills, including the ability to offer unconditional positive regard, congruence, attunement with both themselves and clients, empathy, and self-efficacy. Additionally, mindfulness has been associated with improved coping skills, enhanced self-efficacy, and better emotional regulation. Moreover, self-compassion is believed to contribute to the maintenance of psychological well-being and resilience, serving as a protective factor against stress, depression, and anxiety. Zessin et al. (2015) demonstrated that self-compassion is linked to various aspects of well-being and helps shield individuals

from negative emotions associated with failure, unmet expectations, or feelings of inadequacy. Practicing self-compassion enables individuals to embrace themselves as they are, including their imperfections."

Therefore, in university counselor training programs, it is advisable to implement programs or interventions aimed at enhancing the mindfulness and self-compassion of counselors-in-training. These interventions can help boost self-efficacy and reduce stress levels. Implementing mindfulness and self-compassion interventions for counselor trainees can serve as valuable tools in developing their competence and effectively managing the developmentally normal anxiety experienced by beginner counselor trainees.

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