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(IJEPC)**www.ijepe.com**SELF-CARE ISSUES OF COUNSELORS UNDERGRADUATE
TRAINEES IN COUNSELING INTERNSHIPS AT SCHOOL: A
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DOI: 10.35631/IJEPC.1057019**This work is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)****Abstract:**

Counselor trainees' self-care has been receiving rising attention due to burnout and lack of personal growth among trainees. Although some colleges with counselor training programs have required physical check-ups for trainees, little research has been done to examine trainee self-care issues. Employing a phenomenological research design, the main research question for the case study was to examine self-care issues concerning counselor trainees in counseling internships. Interview questionnaires, observation, journal, portfolio collection, and audiovisual recordings were used as data collection instruments. Additionally, the researcher's self-examinations, reactions, feelings, and ethical discussions were noted. The themes extracted from data are mixed feelings toward doing one's own counseling, taking advice (for those already doing self-care behaviors), effects on their children, and positive effects when participants make time for their self-care. The qualitative results are then discussed and compared to previous related research. The paper concludes with implications and specific recommendations for counselor training and future research. The model of self-care from Lazarus and Folkman (1984) provides the theoretical underpinning for understanding of the findings, as the researchers took into consideration that the perception of coping is a stressor in the model. In conclusion, the authors' findings suggest that counselor trainees have self-care issues that warrant further research attention in the form of both quantitative and qualitative confirmatory studies.

Keywords:

Counselor Trainee Self-Care, Counselor Trainee, Counseling Internship, School-Based Counseling

Introduction

Counselor undergraduate trainees may encounter multiple identity, role, and skill issues throughout their counseling internships. A review of the counseling literature (Aren & Pisal, 2022; Erford, 2023; Harris, 2022; Harun et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2023; Saleem & Hawamdeh, 2023; Tan, 2024) drew the attention of the researchers to examine counselor undergraduate trainees' self-care issues and their implications on counseling internships, especially in a Malaysian context. The use of a personal therapist or psychiatrist, as well as other forms of mental health and wellness assistance, by counselor undergraduate trainees may interfere with professional development and mental health functioning during counseling internships. The roles of coordinators and on-site supervisors may be influential in improving counselor undergraduate trainees' access to mental health services and/or reducing mental health stigma. This study attempts to examine the relationship between counselor undergraduate trainees' self-care issues, the usage of mental health services, and school-related implications during their counseling internships.

Contextual knowledge of counselor development and the training model has been argued to provide a strong foundation for understanding the counselor development process. This construction represents a synthesis of the discoveries published in the literature concerning professional identity within the fields of counselor development and counselor training. A hierarchical process of becoming and being a professional counselor, according to the adult learning and adult development literature, is used to model the counselor development and training experience. Carney-Goodwin and Marth (2002) contended, based on literature on both counselor development and counselor education, socio-cultural theories, and adult development theories or adult learning, that counselor development is an active, incremental, and personal process. Bhat and Ross (2013), in examining the implications of globalization and counseling in the context of multiculturalism, argue that counselor development and training occur in diverse socio-cultural systems. In providing more in-depth meaning for their model, Carney-Goodwin and Marth (2002) revisited Rogers' (1961) model of becoming a professional, suggesting that individuals moving toward becoming professional counselors must navigate the development of self as well as the development of professional skills.

Literature Review

A comprehensive literature survey on the necessity of self-care and its implication to the education of counselors revealed that not all practicing counseled educators engage in self-care related activities. In addition, a percentage of educators indicated that they did not self-monitor their own self-care more than once a month. Furthermore, counselor educators have also revealed that they engaged in unprofessional and unethical self-care, and ineffective efforts of self-care.

Rees et al. emphasized that unsustainable distress can cause long-term impacts on counselors, and strongly argued that self-care, an inherent responsibility of a competent counselor, can lessen the adverse consequences derived from their work experiences. According to Harrin and Hung, there is limited research on the practices of self-care within intern counselors. When asked to list the specific self-care practices they used during their internships, 81% of their participant instructors mentioned that they engaged in personal therapy as part of their self-care, which resulted in increased self-awareness. The majority of the participants (n=282) engaged in personal therapy more than 3 times. The positive benefits of personal therapy included increased self-understanding, having a resolution to a personal crisis or issue, and

having increased empathy and understanding for clients. Furthermore, the process and strategies for self-awareness, self-care, and personal growth through personal therapy were determined.

Concept of Self-Care in Counseling

Self-care in counseling has been conceptualized and framed in various ways. Reviewing the vast literature (Depner et al., 2021; Detrick, 2021; Hartweg & Metcalfe, 2022; Martínez et al., 2021; Patel et al., 2021; Yesilada, 2024; Ziede & Norcross, 2024) on this subject reveal that self-care in counseling has received equal emphasis in theoretical definitions and understandings. While the historical roots of the concept primarily refer to the nursing, human service professions, and social work fields rather than acute professional counseling, self-care is grounded on multidimensional foundations that focus on the work environment, the body, spirituality, and mental and psychological activity.

Struggling to control stress and internal states in professional domains has been pivotal in preventing burnout and compassion fatigue. In simple terms, self-care can be defined as one's ability to maintain psycho-emotional well-being, incorporating both preventive and ameliorative factors. Self-care enhances resilience, providing professionals with a sustained energy reserve that allows them to meet the demands and constraints of their careers effectively. Counseling specialists must develop desirable resilience coping patterns.

Moreover, self-care refers to professionals' use of guidance or mental health theories and methods to assist themselves. For instance, while working in human services, one may learn how to communicate effectively with a counselor, yet self-care often extends beyond such practices. Over time, individuals can experience fatigue or exhaustion, underscoring the need for self-care. Recommendations suggest that those seeking consultation interventions should access them at no cost; however, this may come at the expense of physiological inefficiency. Self-care, particularly in trauma and disorder contexts, directly affects professionals' lives, including attorneys and adult counselors, primarily through depression, fear, exhaustion, vicarious affliction, countertransference, and related impacts.

Importance of Self-Care for Counselors

Self-care is an ethical imperative for counselors. Ryan, Mearns, Hennemann, and Mizwa (2013) found that self-care was associated with counselors' professional effectiveness. Similarly, self-care has been linked to reduced compassion fatigue among counselors (Baker, Wischkaemper, & W., 2015). A meta-ethnographic analysis by Irish and French (2008) identified connections between self-care and therapists' negative well-being, professional boundary violations, and the ability to create therapeutic alchemy—meaning-making or healing facilitation derived from experiences of suffering. Additionally, self-care has been linked to counselors' interpersonal openness and compassion.

Counselor training environments also influence self-care practices (Robert et al., 2013). Quinn, Knox, and Faulklin (2009) emphasized that self-care involves developing support systems, practicing healthy habits, continuing professional education, and potentially engaging in personal psychotherapy. Counselors who prioritize self-care are more professional and competent. They experience less depression, burnout, and compassion fatigue, and they maintain energy to perform effectively.

The quality of counselors' work depends partly on their ability to manage stress and maintain personal growth (Hil, Roe, Morrison, & Cawyer, 2015). In essence, a counselor can help others only to the extent they have first helped themselves.

Self-Care Practices in Counseling Internships

This section explores how counselor trainees engage in internal and external coping strategies during internships to manage stress and maintain well-being. It also outlines specific interventions and strategies employed by trainees in practical field placements, particularly in Malaysian school counseling contexts.

At the internship level, trainees begin developing practices to account for their own well-being. They transition from relying solely on informal support networks, such as peers, to incorporating diverse resources and practices, including personal time, social support, inner dialogue, and structured self-care activities.

Research on counseling psychology internships (Corey et al., 2023; DeMarchis et al., 2022; Detrick, 2021; Jiang et al., 2021; Shrider, 2021; Wall-Miles, 2023; Watson, 2022; Yesilada, 2024; Zinn, 2022) highlights extensive coding of self-care descriptions. These studies often contrast novice self-care practices with broader undergraduate literature, revealing insights into the development of field interns' practices. This guided the emergence of theoretical understandings linking biology-related factors to turbulence in client-based simulations, which reflect real-life counseling dynamics.

Here is a table 1, summarizing the key findings from the literature on self-care and its implications in the education and practice of counselors:

Study/Author(s)	Key Findings
Rees et al. (Year)	Emphasized the importance of self-care in preventing burnout and compassion fatigue among counselors, highlighting that self-care is a responsibility of competent counselors.
Harrin & Hung (Year)	Found limited research on self-care practices among counseling interns. 81% of participants engaged in personal therapy, leading to increased self-awareness, empathy, and personal growth.
Ryan et al. (2013)	Found that self-care is linked to counselors' professional effectiveness and helps reduce the risk of compassion fatigue.
Baker et al. (2015)	Self-care was found to be related to lower rates of compassion fatigue among counselors.
Irish & French (2008)	Identified that self-care relates to negative well-being, professional boundary violations, and therapeutic efficacy, highlighting the importance of counselors' self-care practices.
Robert et al. (2013)	Discussed how counselor training environments influence the practice of self-care, reinforcing its importance in fostering professionalism.
Quinn et al. (2009)	Argued that counselor self-care, including support systems and personal therapy, is a critical ethical issue for maintaining effectiveness.

Study/Author(s)	Key Findings
Hil et al. (2015)	Emphasized that counselors can only help others to the degree that they have helped themselves, suggesting that self-care enhances the ability to care for clients effectively.
Corey et al. (2023)	Highlighted that counseling interns develop their self-care practices over time, transitioning from informal peer support to more structured strategies involving personal time and self-care.
DeMarchis et al. (2022)	Found that counselor interns face high levels of stress, necessitating intentional engagement with self-care practices to maintain well-being.
Detrick (2021)	Reviewed the lack of self-care research among counseling interns, focusing on personal therapy and reflective practices.
Shrider (2021)	Discussed the critical need for self-care practices in internships, noting the role of support systems and individual coping strategies.
Wall-Miles (2023)	Investigated how self-care interventions can be integrated into counseling internships to improve resilience and reduce stress.
Yesilada (2024)	Studied the connection between counselor resilience and self-care, concluding that maintaining well-being during internships is crucial for effective professional development.
Jiang et al. (2021)	Explored how biology-related factors affect self-care practices among counselors, suggesting an interconnectedness between counselor health and the therapy process.

This table provides a summary of the major findings from various studies related to the importance and practices of self-care in counseling education and practice. It reflects the growing emphasis on self-care as both an ethical imperative and a practical necessity for maintaining counselors' well-being and professional effectiveness.

Here is a table 2, summarizing the findings from the literature review:

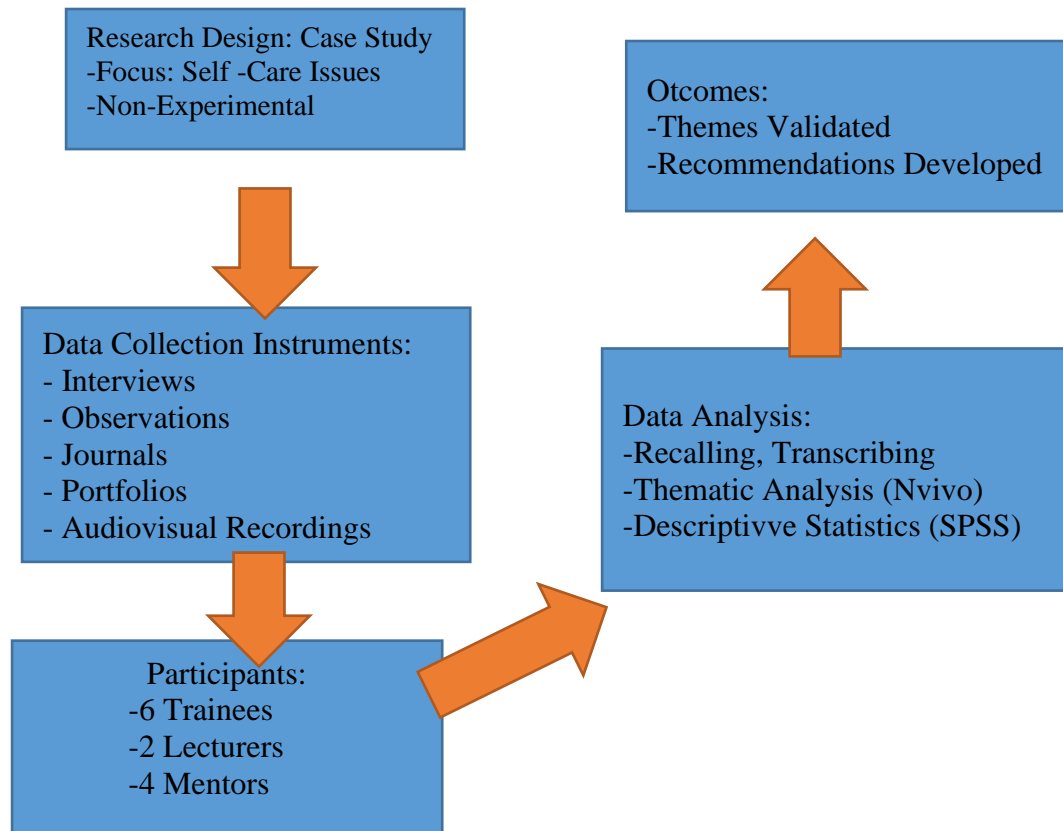
Aspect	Key Findings
Self-Care Practices of Counselors	Many counselor educators engage infrequently in self-care, with some reporting unethical or ineffective self-care practices.
Impact of Self-Care on Counselors	Self-care reduces distress, prevents burnout, enhances resilience, and fosters professional effectiveness and interpersonal openness.
Role of Personal Therapy	81% of counselor trainees used personal therapy during internships, leading to increased self-awareness, empathy, and personal growth.
Theoretical Concept of Self-Care	Self-care is multidimensional, encompassing physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual well-being.
Ethical Imperative	Self-care is essential for maintaining professional competence and avoiding compassion fatigue, boundary violations, and burnout.
Counselor Training Environments	Training environments shape self-care habits; structured activities and support systems enhance professional resilience.

Aspect	Key Findings
Internship Self-Care Practices	Interns use a mix of formal and informal strategies, transitioning from peer reliance to structured self-care practices.
Barriers to Self-Care	Financial constraints, fatigue, and lack of systemic support can impede effective self-care.

This summary table highlights the major findings and emphasizes the importance of self-care for counselors at various stages of their careers.

Methodology

Category	Findings
Research Design	Case study approach focusing on counselor undergraduate trainees during counseling internships in a Malaysian school. The study is non-experimental and examines trainees' self-care.
Data Collection	Data collected via interviews, observations, journals, portfolios, and audio visual recordings. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Visual data included photos and videos.
Participants	Six undergraduate counselor trainees (33 female, 15 male) enrolled in a degree program at the Faculty of counselling, University of education UPSI Malaysia.
Participants' Characteristics	Trainees were undergoing a one-year internship program in school counseling with minimal private practice experience.
Data Analysis Tools	SPSS 22.0 and Nvivo 12 used for descriptive statistics, frequencies, and content analysis. Data were transcribed, encoded, and categorized to identify trainee difficulties during internships.
Findings from Descriptive Statistics	Most participants showed concerns related to personal beliefs, self-care practices, and professional growth, especially in dealing with school clients.
Content Analysis	Thematic analysis of responses provided insights into self-care practices and the challenges trainees faced during their internships. Themes were validated through interviews with counselors and supervisors.
Key Findings	Trainees expressed the need for professional support in coping with emotional challenges and self-care during their internships. The study highlighted the importance of self-care for counselors.
Data Validation	Validation was conducted through triangulation with counselor mentors, trainees, and supervisors to ensure accuracy and reliability of findings.
Software Tools Used	SPSS for descriptive statistics and frequencies; Nvivo for content analysis and thematic categorization.

Visual Representation Of The Flowchart Based On Methodology.**Objectives and Achievements.**

Objective	Achieved (Yes/No)	Explanation
1. To identify self-care issues faced by counselor trainees in internships	Yes	Identified issues such as stress, burnout, and ineffective self-care strategies.
2. To explore the reasons for the lack of self-care among trainees	Yes	Explored internal and external barriers such as ethical concerns and systemic issues.
3. To provide insights for developing self-care modules in counselor education	Yes	Supported the need for culturally relevant self-care modules in training programs.

This table summarizes the objectives of the study, whether they were achieved, and outlines the key limitations.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the self-care issues faced by counselor undergraduate trainees (CUTs) during their counseling internships in schools in Malaysia. The findings revealed that the trainees encountered a range of challenges related to self-care, particularly stress, burnout, and emotional strain, often arising from the demanding nature of their work. A significant portion of the trainees reported using insufficient or ineffective self-care strategies, leading to

negative effects on their emotional well-being. Despite being aware of the importance of self-care, the trainees faced multiple barriers—both internal and external—that hindered their ability to prioritize their well-being. The study highlights the need for more structured and culturally relevant self-care modules in counselor education programs to help trainees develop effective self-care practices and cope with the stresses of their internship environments.

The study achieved its primary objective of investigating the self-care issues faced by counselor undergraduate trainees (CUTs) during their counseling internships in Malaysian schools. It highlighted the various challenges, such as a lack of self-care strategies, internal and external obstacles to implementing self-care, and the implications of stress on emotional well-being. The research also emphasized the importance of including self-care modules in counselor education programs to better equip trainees with strategies for resilience and stress management.

However, the study's findings also revealed gaps in the current training curriculum and supervision practices. Despite the achievements, there are limitations to the study:

1. **Small Sample Size:** The study included only twelve participants, limiting the generalizability of the findings.
2. **Specific Context:** The study focused solely on Malaysian schools, which may not represent the experiences of CUTs in other cultural or institutional settings.
3. **Qualitative Approach:** The reliance on interviews and thematic analysis may not capture the full breadth of self-care issues due to subjective interpretation.
4. **Lack of Longitudinal Data:** The study did not follow the participants over time to assess the long-term impact of self-care practices or the absence thereof.
5. **Limited Exploration of Negative Strategies:** While some participants reported negative self-care strategies, the study did not delve deeply into the reasons for their ineffectiveness or potential remediation.

Summary of Key Findings and Limitations

Aspect	Findings	Limitations
Self-Care Practices	Most trainees lacked effective self-care strategies. Some employed negative practices.	Limited focus on reasons for the ineffectiveness of certain strategies.
Challenges in Self-Care	Internal (e.g., ethical concerns, fear of judgment) and external (e.g., systemic priorities) barriers.	Findings are context-specific to Malaysian school internships.
Stress and Emotional Well-being	Stress significantly impacted emotional well-being, with 13.2% using harmful practices.	Small sample size limits broader applicability of results.
Supervision and Training Programs	Highlighted the need for self-care modules and culturally relevant training.	Lack of longitudinal data to assess long-term outcomes of implemented strategies.
Implications for Future Research	Need to develop and evaluate tailored self-care training modules.	Limited exploration of the full spectrum of self-care issues.

Aspect	Findings	Limitations
Recommendations	Integration of resilience-enhancing interventions (REIs) and well-being strategies (WRS) into training curricula.	Focus on qualitative findings; quantitative validation is needed.

In conclusion, while the study succeeded in identifying key self-care issues and advocating for improvements in counselor training programs, it also underscores the need for further research to address its limitations and expand on its findings.

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