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SUPERVISORY FACTORS AND COUNSELLOR-IN-TRAINING COMPETENCIES IN THE SUPERVISION PROCESS

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Abstract:

Supervision process is a mandatory component in counsellor education and training to produce competent counsellor-in-training. Referring to the Board of Counsellors Malaysia, counsellors' competency is emphasised as a crucial ethic that needs to be complied with, to preserve the clients' wellbeing. In the meantime, in every supervision relationship between the supervisor and the counsellor-in-training, there is no mistaking the fact that there are factors that can influence the increasing or decreasing level of competency among the counsellors-in-training. That said, studies about these variables in the supervision process are still scarce, particularly in the local contexts. Thus, this paper aims to propose the significant factors in the supervision process, then to develop the hypotheses of how far these factors can be linked with the competency of the counsellors-in-training. This paper also seeks to propose a conceptual framework based on the hypotheses formulated. The study respondents are the counsellors-in-training from public universities undergoing an internship training in the settings that offer counselling service nationwide. The study finding is expected to offer some contributions to some improvements in the counsellors' education and training system in Malaysia, in years to come.

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Keywords:

Anxiety Factors, Shame Factors, Competencies, Counsellor-In-Training, Supervision Process

Introduction

Supervision is a form of examination on counsellor's activities by the supervisor, involving some interactive processes aiming to empower and leverage the skills and expertise of the counsellor to the professional level (Gottschalk & Hopwood, 2023; Bernard & Goodyear, 2019; Kabir, 2017). In the counselling profession, supervision is seen as a basic component of the development of professional identity of the counsellor-in-training that will be of service in this profession (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, 2021), by means of enhancing the skills, conceptualisation and delivering the service effectively to the client (Bornsheuer-Boswell et al., 2013). Meanwhile Ronnestad et al., (2024) state that supervision is define as the distinction between supervision and other professional roles, such as consultation, lies in its long-term focus on professional development. There are three main functions in counselling supervision: (1) helping the counsellor attain professional development and personal characteristics; (2) enhancing counsellors' competency; and (3) increasing the sense of responsibility towards giving service and counselling program (Ladany & Bradley, 2010). Next, Loganbill et al., (1982) and Hart (1982) stated that supervision is an official process of the relationship between supervisor and counsellor-in-training to help them develop, obtain professional opinion and behaviour, therapeutic skills, and enhance competency.

A substantial body of research on supervision exists, much of which explores its potential value and ways to enhance its effectiveness, with the overarching goal of improving outcomes for those who seek care from healthcare practitioners (Gottschalk & Hopwood, 2023). Contemporary literature highlights essential themes such as required effectiveness, evidencebased practice, and professional accountability—core trends that shape modern professional practice (Watkins, 2012). However, based on the discussion, all the opinions and views are put forth by the scholars to elaborate on the important aspects embodied in the counselling supervision. Despite this, some of the aspects share similarities, one of which is the supervision goal, which is to generate counsellors-in-training equipped with competency. Research on the competence counsellors indicates that counselling is most effective when conducted by professionals who demonstrate high levels of confidence, strong communication skills, psychological resilience, and self-efficacy (Anderson et al., 2016; Pereira et al., 2017). In recent years, counselling literature has increasingly emphasized the importance of both academic and non-academic personal and professional attributes as essential components of counsellor competencies. It is now widely recognized that counsellors must not only acquire specific knowledge and skills, but also develop non-academic qualities as part of their professional training (Korkut-Owen, 2021). The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) refers to these non-academic attributes as professional dispositions (CACREP, 2015), which include traits such as responsibility, respect, honesty, and self-awareness (Korkut-Owen, 2021).

Without competency, the counselling service that should be beneficial to the client can turn to be a negative implication to the client's psychology (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, 2021; Bernard & Goodyear, 2019; Swank et al., 2012). This will surely tarnish the image and reputation of the counselling profession other than affecting the overall credibility of the serving counsellor. Thus, to avoid this from happening, all counsellors including counsellors-in-training are urged to uphold this profession by protecting and preserving the welfare of future or existing clients (Foster & McAdams, 2009). Thus, one of the main aims contained in the counsellors' Code of Ethics (Board of Counsellors Malaysia, 2016) is to ensure that a counsellor is competent before they attend to their duties as a counsellor, and that the tasks at hand are based on the scope of the competency they master only. There is a growing demand for counsellors to deliver research-based and structured counselling services with competence (Farozin, 2019). To meet this demand, the development of counsellor competence must begin early in their training and education (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). However, trainee counsellors do not develop in isolation; they must be prepared to take personal responsibility for their growth across multiple domains. As McLeod (2013) highlights, becoming a competent counsellor requires a comprehensive system of education, training, and support to ensure the delivery and sustainability of high-quality counselling services.

Indirectly, this has become a big challenge and responsibility to the educator and the supervisor, as the supervision process itself is very complex and comprises of the supervision relationship involving certain factors that that can affect the counsellor-in-training competency (Gottschalk & Hopwood, 2023; Bernard & Goodyear, 2019; Ladany & Malouf 2010). The supervision relationship has become fundamental or the starting point for the clinical supervision process to take place (Yerushalmi, 2019; Falender, 2014), and it is also the main source for the effectiveness of the supervision process (Provtinak & Davis, 2008). According to Falender (2014), there is a dynamic interaction in the supervision relationship between the supervisor and the counsellor-in-training, aiming to foster the professional development that is therapeutic and competent within the counsellor-in-training. This association in the supervision is based on the reciprocal effect which indicates that if the counsellor-in-training receives quality supervision from the supervisor, the benefit is not only received by the counsellor-in-training but also by the client (Norazani, 2016).

Several studies have provided evidence on a good supervision relationship that can help the counsellor-in-training build a positive perspective on the supervision process (Provtinak & Davis, 2008), and further increase the confidence of the counsellors-in-training to hold the session while being supervised (Norazani et al., 2014). It cannot be denied, however, that the supervision relationship also refers to the link between the supervisor and the counsellor-in-training based on the power and involvement of both parties in the supervision (Bradley & Ladany, 2001). In this engagement, the power of the supervisor is regarded as greater, leading to the anxiety and shame felt by the counsellor-in-training (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). According to Daniels & Larson (1998), one of the reasons for the anxiety felt by the counsellor-in-training in a supervision relationship relates with the desire to show a good performance and deliver an effective service to the client.

This is because, as a counsellor who is still in training, they dread the negative evaluation that a supervisor or a client can give (Koçyiğit, 2024; Tsai, 2015), and they tend to feel that they are not good enough when being in the session (Corey, 2008). Such anxiety can affect the

capability of the counsellor-in-training to demonstrate the skills they have, disrupt the supervision process that happens, and obstruct the learning benefits a counsellor-in-training can gain in the supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). The factor of shame can come into the picture because in a supervision relationship, the counsellor-in-training needs to expose their personal scope as well as their professionalism to the supervisor (Blundell & Hughes, 2024; Buechler, 2008; Hahn, 2001). A key aspect of clinical supervision is the extent to which counsellor-in-training disclose information to their supervisors (Apostol et al., 2025). As they are threatened by the experience of shame, the counsellor-in-training will either avoid or oppose, which can both disrupt the supervision process (Blundell & Hughes, 2024; Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). Someone with high level of shame will find it difficult to form both interpersonal and supervision relationships, or either one of them, further causing them to struggle and remain problematic throughout the supervision (Graff, 2008).

Problem Statement

The focus on the importance of competency in professional fields is becoming more and more intense when there are efforts to renew the accreditation standard towards the competency as the core that has to be mastered before trainees are certified by authoritative bodies (Gonsalvez & Crowe, 2014). This does not disregard the counselling field which is also one of the professional fields. Competency is a significant aspect focused by counsellors-in-training in the counselling supervision process to determine the effectiveness of the counselling process and the therapeutic outcome on the client (American Counseling Association, 2005; CACREP, 2009; Ridley et al., 2011). However, in the supervision process there are factors in the supervision relationship that can influence the competency level development of the counsellors-in-training.

Based on the literature review, the factors underlying supervision relationship that often attract previous scholars include the development of counsellor-in-training (Ward, 2001; Drew, 2013, Wan Jaafar, 2007); working alliance (Welsh, 1998; Ward, 2001; Humeidan, 2002; McCarthy, 2012; Renfro-Michel, 2006; Tsong, 2004; Ladany, Mori & Mehr, 2013); self-efficacy (Welsh, 1998; Ward, 2001; Humeidan, 2002; McCarthy, 2012; Fernando, 2003; Tsong, 2004; Terranova-Nirenberg, 2013), and social influence (Humeidan, 2002; Preslar, 2001). However, there are other factors in the supervision relationship that have yet to be given attention especially concerning the competency of counsellors-in-training.

Thus, this study will lend focus to the factors that have been under-looked, although they are frequently discussed by scholars as important in influencing the competency of the counsellors-in-training in the supervision process: (1) the factor of anxiety (Koçyiğit; 2024; Falke et al., 2015; Bernard & Goodyear, 2019; Larson, 1998); and (2) the factor of shame (Blundell & Hughes, 2024; Bilodeau et al., 2010; Bilodeau et al., 2012; Bernard & Goodyear, 2019; Doherty, 2005). By accounting for all the issues that have been identified above, this study needs to be conducted to identify the existing associations between the variables discussed earlier. Therefore, the objectives of this study as below:

Objectives

- 1. To identify whether there is a relationship between the factor of anxiety and the counsellor-in-training competency in the supervision process
- 2. To identify whether there is a relationship between the factor of shame and the counsellor-in-training competency in the supervision process

3. To identify whether there is a factor of anxiety and the factor of shame on the counsellor-in-training competency in the supervision process

Literature Review

Counselling Competencies

Counselling competencies is an intervention aimed at enhancing creative thinking skills, fostering self-awareness, promoting student autonomy and effectiveness, and developing problem-solving abilities for both present and future challenges (Hidayat et al., 2024). In the early stage, the majority of the counselling scholars like Egan (1990); Hill (1990); and Ivey & Authier (1978) shed light on competency in counselling, and the fact that it depends on the counsellor's mastery on counselling skills. The idea, nonetheless, conflicted with that of Mc Leod (1992) who opined that counselling competency relies on any quality, capability or factor that can influence the effectiveness of a counsellor in carrying out their duties or playing their role. Meanwhile, Swank et al., (2012) defined counselling competency as the knowledge, skills, professional disposition and professional behaviour in bearing the responsibilities and tasks as a professional and ethical counsellor.

Competencies in Supervision Process

Competency is a significant aspect for the counsellor-in-training in the counselling supervision process (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, 2021; ACA, 2014). Literature review shows that the supervision process is able to enhance the counsellor-in-training competency in carrying out the session, raising their awareness and self-efficacy (Watkins, 2020). This is because the supervision process comprises of supervisor's evaluation and feedback where all these aspects really assist the counsellors-in-training who still need guidance before they reach the competency level intended (Gottschalk & Hopwood, 2023; Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). Two studies have examined the impact of supervision on counsellor competencies. These studies reported that supervision effectively enhances specific competencies among counsellors-in-training, particularly in terms of self-efficacy (Bakalım et al., 2018) and counselling skills (Saki & Şahin, 2021). The consistent findings across these studies support the results of the current research. Therefore, it can be concluded that the supervision received by counsellors-in-training has a positive effect on the development of their counselling competencies.

Supervisory Relationship Factors

In the supervision, there are various interaction processes such as the supervisor challenging, giving encouragement and motivation to the counsellor-in-training (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, 2021; Bradley & Ladany, 2001). This interaction is the supervision relationship. That said, this supervision relationship has a reciprocal effect where every interaction that happens, good or bad, leaves an impact on the development of the counsellor-in-training competency (Norazani, 2016). it is essential for candidates to develop both practical skills and theoretical knowledge to provide effective support. To become qualified practitioners, aspiring counsellors must not only understand counselling theories but also gain hands-on experience through real or simulated counselling sessions Past studies have pointed to the fact that supervision relationship is an important factor that gives an association and influence towards the counsellor-in-training competency in the counselling supervision (Larson, 1998; Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Mutchler & Anderson, 2010; Ladany & Malouf, 2010). Some of the important factors in the characteristics of counsellor-in-training are anxiety

(Koçyiğit; 2024; Bell et al, 2016; Norazani et al., 2014) and shame (Blundell & Hughes, 2024; Bernard & Goodyear, 2019; Bilodeau et al., 2012).

Anxiety Factors and Counselling Competencies

In the supervision relationship, Bernard & Goodyear (2019) saw anxiety as one of the important factors that can affect the capability of the counsellor-in-training to showcase their competency. The anxiety among the counsellors-in-training in the supervision is related to their desire to show a good performance and deliver an effective service to their clients (Koçviğit; 2024; Kuo et al., 2016; Daniels & Larson, 1998). As a counsellor-in-training, they are really concerned about the negative evaluation that their supervisor or client may give (Tsai, 2015). This reliance can heighten their self-focus and lead to increased anxiety about their competencies (Arifin et al., 2022). Anxiety arises from a mix of typical psychophysiological responses—such as apprehension, tension, and nervousness—triggered by stressful or uncertain situations (Fitch & Marshall, 2002). Such anxiety, along with feelings of inadequacy, is common and often unavoidable during training, yet these experiences can hinder the trainee's professional growth and development (Fulton & Cashwell, 2015). Nevertheless, Larson (1998) stated that anxiety is seen an something ideal which is a motivation to the counsellor-in-training to repeat or try a new counselling approach or action, until they become competent. Previous studies have consistently found that the supervision process can generate significant anxiety among trainee counsellors (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019; Ellis et al., 2015; Norwati & Wan Mazwati, 2013; Daniel & Larson, 2001; Larson, 1998). Therefore, the factor of anxiety in the supervisory relationship should be given attention, as it influences the development of competencies among trainee counsellors.

Shame Factors and Counselling Competencies

Guilt and shame are self-conscious emotions, and supervision can often trigger feelings of shame due to its evaluative nature, the requirement for counsellor-in-training to reveal their personal work, and the emotional investment they place in their performance (Harkins, 2020). Shame, in particular, has two attributes that are especially relevant in the context of supervision: (a) it involves a sense of exposure or vulnerability, and (b) it requires some degree of connection or bond between the individual and the "observing other" (Retzinger, 1998). Given its potentially harmful impact on both the supervisee and the supervisory relationship, the role of counsellor-in-training shame deserves greater attention than it has traditionally received. Shame happens when an individual feels that they are not appreciated, and when they try to control things related to their personal lives, cover their weaknesses or take it as their self-defence mechanism in their communication with others (Blundell & Hughes, 2024; Wurmser, 1981). This factor of shame needs to be given attention as it has the potential to destroy the relationship between the counsellor-in-training and supervisor (Blundell & Hughes, 2024; Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). Not only that, in the supervision, shame can easily lead the counsellor-in-training to feel threatened, and ignite an avoidance behaviour that can disturb the counsellors' development process (Doherty, 2004; Bilodeau et al., 2012).

Based on the above literature reviews, the anxiety and shame factors may contribute to the competencies of counsellor-in-training in supervision process. Therefore, three hypotheses and the research conceptual framework are proposed to be testing:

Hypothesis

Ha1 There is a significant relationship between the factor of anxiety and the counsellor-intraining competencies in the supervision process

Ha2 There is a significant relationship between the factor of shame and the counsellor-intraining competencies in the supervision process

Ha3 There is a significant influence between the factor of anxiety and the factor of shame toward counsellor-in-training competencies in the supervision process

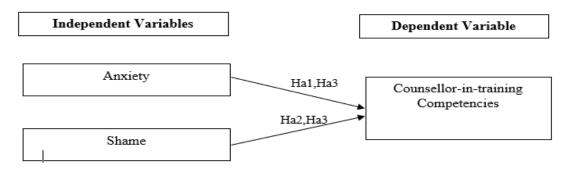


Figure 1: Research Conceptual Framework

Methodologies

Research Design

The study design is the overall process selected by the researcher through the integration of various methods such as the data collection, measurement, and the use of an accurate and appropriate statistical analysis to meet the study objectives. The primary objective of this study is to determine the relationship and influence of the supervision relationship and the counsellor-in-training competency in the supervision process. Thus, the suitable study design is correlation. Correlation study would be deemed practical as it concerns with the association of two or more variables to determine the direction, magnitude and form of relationship that exists (Bordens & Abbott, 2014).

Study Population and Sample

Population is a group of individuals who share several similarities to be examined, and it can be a large or small group (Creswell, 2012). The population of this study comprises of counsellors-in-training, at the level of first degree in the counselling programme from public universities all over Malaysia and undergoing internship in their final year. Nine public universities have been selected that offer counselling programme (first degree level) through the endorsement of the Board of Counsellors Malaysia. The names of the universities are given in Table 1 below. For the study samples, the selection is made on the counsellors-in-training in their final year who will be undergoing their internship training and obtaining supervision from the field supervisor and counselling lecturer. This study employed stratified random sampling to determine the sample size. The use of stratified random sampling was necessary due to the varying population sizes of trainee counsellors across different universities.

Table 1: The Population of This Study

No.	Public Universities	Location	Population of	Sample size of
			counsellors-in-	counsellors-in-
			training	training
1.	University Putra Malaysia (UPM)	Selangor	27	11
2.	Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM)	Kuala Lumpur	29	12
3.	Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM)	Kedah	44	18
4.	Universiti Malaya (UM)	Kuala Lumpur	29	12
5.	Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT)	Kuala Terengganu	113	46
6.	Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS)	Sabah	90	36
7.	Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM)	Negeri Sembilan	86	34
8.	Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS)	Sarawak	61	25
9	Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI)	Perak	56	23
			N=535	N=217

Instrumentation

The study instrument is the measurement tool used to obtain data from the respondents, on the variables set to be examined. A good instrument will ensure that the researcher can obtain accurate data and further produce a more quality study. In this study, the study instruments comprise of four sections namely the demographic information, the surveys to measure anxiety and shame, as well as the counselling competency survey in the supervision process. Information regarding the study instrumentation is as follows:

Part I: Demographic Survey

The survey for part A concerns with the demographic information items for the study samples, which is gender, age race, year of study, study field, current study level, CGPA, current number of clients, the total number of hours achieved, internship / practicum, meeting frequency with supervisor's gender, and supervisor's race.

Part II: Anticipatory Supervisee Anxiety Scale (ASAS)

The Anticipatory Supervisee Anxiety Scale (ASAS) survey was developed by Singh and Ellis in the year 2000 specifically to measure anxiety among counsellors-in-training in the context of clinical supervision (Tasado, 2004). However, Tasado (2004) employed several procedures to enhance the validity value of ASAS. ASAS measuring tool contains 36 items and there are two positive statements which is 33 and 36 with a nine-point Likert measurement scale from 1=not at all, 3=little, 5=moderate, 7=very accurate, 9=all true. Both the positive statements need to be re-coded before the total score is counted. To get the whole score, all the item's

scores need to be added. The higher the score obtained, the higher the level of anxiety experienced by the respondent.

Part III: The Internalized Shame Scale (ISS)

Part III is the Internalized Shame Scale (ISS) survey constructed by Cook (1989) to measure the feeling and experience of shame faced by an individual. This measurement tool is mostly used to measure the feeling and experience of shame among the counsellors-in-training in the supervision as mentioned in the works of Doherty (2005) and Bilodeau et al., (2012). The ISS survey contains 28 items using the five-point Likert Scale (0=Never 1=Seldom, 2=Sometimes, 3=Often, 4=Almost always). The items are divided into four sub-scales as established in Table 2 below. The score of every sub-scale can be obtained by adding all the scores of the items measuring the sub-scales and it is further divided to get the average value. The higher the score obtained, the higher the shame felt by the counsellor-in-training.

Table 2: Subscales and items of Internalized Shame Scale (ISS)

Subscale	Item	Total items
Inadequate and deficient	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 14	10
Embrased and exposed	10, 24, 25, 26, 31, 32, 35	7
Fragile and out of control	17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23	6
Empty and lonely	11, 13, 15, 16, 18	5

Part IV: Counselling Competency Scale (CCS)

This is the final instrument in the Counseling Competencies Scale (CCS) survey (Swank, Lambie, & Witta, 2012). CCS is developed to measure the counsellor-in-training competency in supervision. There are 32 items in the CCS divided into 3 sub scales. The CCS measurement is the five-point Likert scale which is 8= high-level competency, 6= caters to the competency level, 4= approaching the competency level, 2= below the competency level, 0= detrimental. The higher the score given, the higher the competency level mastered by the counsellor-in-training. The summary of the sub-scales and the number of items is established in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Subscales And Items of Counselling Competencies Scale (CCS)

Subscale	Item	Total items			
Counselling skills	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12	12			
Professional disposition	13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22	10			
Professional Behaviour	23,24,25,26,27,28,29,30,31,32	10			

Reliability

Reliability means that the scores obtained from a measuring tool are consistent and stable (Creswell, 2012). The reliability's coefficient value for the original survey that will be used in this study is shown in the table 4 below:

Table 4: Reliability Value of Instruments

Instrument	Study	Cronbach's Alpha			
Anticipatory Supervisee Anxiety Scale (ASAS)	Tosado (2004)	.97			
Internalized Shame Scale (ISS)	Cook (1988)	.95			
Counselling Competencies Scale (CCS)	Swank et al., (2012)	.94			

Data Analysis

There are two types of the statistical tools that will be used by the researcher to answer the objectives and hypothesis constructed. Leaning on the study objectives which is to look into the relationship and the influence, also to take into account the type of scale involved, thus the statistical tool used is the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation test, and the Multiple Linear Regression test.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the supervision process is the core component that helps to solidify the development of the professional identity of each counsellor-in-training through their increased competency. Being a competent counsellor is not only about mastering skills, but also mastering the right components. Thus, studies like the supervision relationship factor that can influence the counsellor-in-training competency in the supervision are worthy of implementation to ensure that every counsellor of service has the supposed competency level.

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